

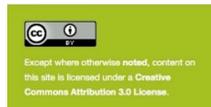
Three Stephen Cranes on Stage

**dramatic adaptation by John Freed
(Dramatists Guild Member)**

Part One -- THE RELUCTANT VOYAGERS

Part Two -- THE BLUE HOTEL

Part Three -- THE OPEN BOAT



**freely used for educational purposes
under Creative Commons Copyright**

**for paid public performances
contact the playwright in advance
© John Freed 2019**

(freed@brandman.edu)

Three Stephen Cranes on Stage

dramatic adaptation by John Freed

*[props for all three parts – two oars,
wooden dining table and many chairs,
counter height table, two blankets, one large
beach towel, a whiskey bottle and shot and
water glasses]*

Part One -- THE RELUCTANT VOYAGERS

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR

STEPHEN

TOM

CONCESSION STAND MAN

THE FIRST-MATE

THE CAPTAIN

THE CAB DRIVER

THE SFX of WAVES AND SEABIRDS



*(SFX the volume gradually increases
on fairly constant wave sounds
punctuated by random sea bird
shrieks.)*

NARRATOR

Imagine that you are walking along the Jersey Shore in the late summer of 1900 and you come across two young men dressed in suits -- Stephen's is much shabbier than Tom's very stylish one. Tom has also brought his bathing outfit wrapped in a large bright towel sitting between them on the beach.

STEPHEN (*reading to Tom from a copy of "Frank Merriwell at Yale"*)

At the end of the eighth inning the score remained one to nothing in Harvard's favor with no outs and men on first and third. Sport Harris had been disappointed when Merriwell continued to remain on the mound, "He's rattled, Here's where they'll kill him."

But Frank proved that he was not rattled. He tricked the man on third into getting off the bag and then threw him out in a way that brought a yell of delight from the Yale men. That fixed it so the next batter could not sacrifice with the object of letting the man on third home. Then he got down to business, and a ground-ball double play ended Harvard's half of the inning.

I think we'd better stop there if you want to spend some time in the water before dark.

TOM

No way. We're playing Yale twice next Spring.

STEPHEN

I guess, since you'll probably be the starting pitcher, you need to find out what happens to Frank. (*flipping pages to the end of the book*).

"Oh, if Yale can only score now!" seemed to mutter hundreds in the stands.

The first man up, however, flied out to center, and the next man was thrown out at first. That seemed to settle it. The spectators were making

preparations to leave. Even the Yale bat-tender, with his face long and doleful, was gathering up the sticks.

What's that? The next man up got a safe hit, that placed him on first. Then Frank Merriwell was seen carefully selecting a bat.

"Oh, if only he were a heavy hitter!" uttered Sport Harris aloud.

Harvard's Yedding laughed in Frank's face from the mound. He did not even think it necessary to watch the man on first closely, and so that man found an opportunity to steal second.

Two strikes and two balls had been called. Then Yedding sent in a swift one to cut the inside corner. Merriwell swung at it.

Crack! Bat and ball met fairly, and away sailed the sphere rising rapidly over the head of the shortstop.

"Run!"

That word roared from the crowd. No need to tell Frank to run. In a moment he was scudding down to first. While the left fielder was going back for the ball passing beyond his reach, Frank kept on for second. There was so much noise he could not hear the coachers, but looking straight ahead he saw the fielder had not yet secured the ball. He made for third, and the excited coacher with a furious arm swinging gesture sent him on.

The left fielder drove the ball to the shortstop, and the shortstop whirled and sent it whistling home. The catcher was standing ready to stop Merriwell in his tracks before reaching home plate.

"Slide!"

That word Frank heard above all the commotion. He did slide. Forward he scooted in a cloud of dust. The catcher caught the ball and smacked it on Frank—an instant too late!

A sudden silence struck the crowd.

"Safe home!" rang the voice of the umpire.

Then another roar, louder, wilder, full of unbounded joy! Even the band playing the Yale Bulldog Fight Song was drowned out by all the uproar! The sight of sturdy lads in blue, delirious with delight, hugging a dust-covered youth, lifting him to their shoulders, and bearing him away in triumph. Merriwell had won his own game. It was a glorious finish!

The End.

TOM

I know how to strike Merriwell out.

STEPHEN

How?

TOM

I'll throw him my double curve.

STEPHEN

But you know this story is a fiction, right?

TOM

Rest assured there will be plenty at Yale, who'll believe they're the incarnation of Frank Merriwell, who will duck when they see my ball coming at their heads and strike out when they swish at it as it dives to the outside corner of the plate.

STEPHEN: *(mockingly)*

Hurrah, Tom!

TOM

You know you oughta go out for the team. Maybe catcher or first base since you throw like a girl. You can roll the ball back to me on the mound. No, it better be first base since they'd steal on you like crazy.

STEPHEN *(poking holes in the sand with a stick).*

Well, I know I'm not handsome.

TOM

To be sure you are not. I do not desire to be unpleasant, but I must assure you that your pocked skin continually reminds spectators of white wall paper with bright red roses on it. The top of your head looks like a little wooden plate. And your figure—good lord -- flag polls have more shape.

STEPHEN

Well, what of it?

TOM

What of it? Why, it means that you'll look like hell in a bathing-outfit.

STEPHEN *(petulantly)*

I don't care. I've decided to rent one. I'm going in the water with you.

TOM

I'm wondering if they have children's sizes.

(They walk over to the bathing suit rental concession stand.)

CONCESSION STAND MAN

How might I help you?

STEPHEN

I'd like to rent an outfit for the day.

CONCESSION STAND MAN

What size, sir?

STEPHEN

You've an experienced eye. You decide.

CONCESSION STAND MAN

(coming forward and twirling him around to give him a closer inspection)

One moment, sir.

(He goes off stage and returns with a bright red towel wrapped around the

bathing suit bundle that he hands over to Stephen.)

You're in luck; we have one left. That will be two bits. *(addressing the other man)*. And you, sir?

TOM

(showing his bundle wrapped in a towel)

All set.

CONCESSION STAND MAN

Right, sir. The dressing houses are just over there. *(pointing off stage)*

STEPHEN

Tom, produce your proud clothing and we'll go in.

(The two head off stage to get into their bathing suits. Stephen re-enters the stage first. His suit is ridiculously large hanging off of him in large folds and his towel is absurdly small.)

STEPHEN

Tom. Tom!

TOM *(muffled from off-stage)*

Stop your noise.

STEPHEN

Could you come out here as soon as you can?

TOM

I'll be out in a minute.

(Tom re-enters in a fabulously well fitting suit and laughs uproariously at Stephen's enormously ill-fitting one.)

STEPHEN *(whining)*

What should I do?

TOM

You rented the damn thing without checking, didn't you? Then--

STEPHEN

It's an auditorium, a ballroom, or anything other than a bathing-outfit.

TOM

What difference does it make? I never saw such a vain ol' idiot or such an ill-fitting garment.

STEPHEN

You're an ass. Do you see that pretty girl just entering the water? Can you shield me until we get in?

(Stephen walks absurdly close behind Tom like a Laurel and Hardy skit as they begin to exit the stage.)

TOM

Well done. She's laughing at both of us now.

(Stephen, observing this, panics and runs ahead of him off stage. Tom looking back toward the girl smiles and struts off stage slowly like a peacock.)

NARRATOR

The swirling waters cooled his temper. Tom floundered in after him, and the two frolicked in the waves. Soon a raft made of old spars roped together drifted nearby.

Stephen laid his face to the water and swam towards it with a practiced stroke. Tom followed, his bended arm appearing and disappearing with the precision of a machine. The craft, however, crept away, slowly and wearily, as if teasing them. The little wooden plate on Stephen's head

looked back at the shore like a round, brown eye which Tom used as his beacon.

Stephen reached the raft and climbed aboard. He lay down on his back puffing. His bathing-dress spread about him like an enormous deflated balloon. Tom arrived, snorting and shaking his tangled locks to lay down by his companion's side.

TOM *(after a short pause)*

This is terrific.

STEPHEN *(after a short pause)*

Tom.

TOM

What?

STEPHEN *(drowsily)*

This IS terrific.

(They appear to be falling asleep.)

NARRATOR

A fish-hawk, soaring, suddenly, turned and darted at the waves. Tom indolently twisted his head and watched the bird plunge its claws into the water. It heavily arose with a silver gleaming fish. After a few more moments it returned for another catch.

TOM

That poor bird has gotten his feet wet again. It's a shame. He must suffer endlessly from colds. If I were him, . . .

(He had partly arisen and was looking back at the shore.)

Great Scott! Stephen, Stephen, Stephen! Wake up!

!

STEPHEN

What's the matter? Stop yelling. You remind me of that time when I put the bird-shot in your leg.

TOM (*pointing to the shore*)

Lord! Look!

NARRATOR

The land was now a long, brown streak with a rim of green, in which sparkled the tiny tin roofs of hotels. The hands from the sea had pushed them far away from that shore. Three ships fell off the horizon in the other direction. Landward, the hues were blending. The whistle of a locomotive sounded as if from quite a distance.

STEPHEN

What should we do?

TOM (*after a long pause and staring back at the shore*)

So. So. This all comes from your accursed vanity and your idiocy; you have murdered your best friend.

STEPHEN

Don't be so melodramatic. If you're still talking, you obviously haven't been murdered. . . Yet.

TOM

Did you suppose that I would accept all of this calmly? Not make the slightest objection? Make no protest at all, hey?

STEPHEN

Well.

TOM (*bordering on hysteria*)

Face it. You've abducted me! That's the whole truth of it! You've abducted me!

STEPHEN

I haven't done any such thing.

TOM

You must think I'm a fool.

NARRTOR

Tom sat on the edge of the raft furiously kicking if he alone could propel them to safety. Their animosity compelled his companion to occupy the other end. Over the waters little shoals of fish spluttered, raising tiny tempests. Languid jelly-fish floated near, waving a thousand legs at them derisively.

STEPHEN

Why did you follow me then?

TOM

If your figure hadn't been so like a beckoning bobbing bottle, I wouldn't have.

NARRATOR

The fires in the west blazed even more brilliantly over the land for a few minutes then a greying solemnity spread over both land and sea. Tiny dots of electric lights began to blink like eyes as the dangerous darkness took over the scene. The young men now huddled more fraternally in the middle of the raft.

STEPHEN

I feel like a molecule.

TOM

I'd give two dollars for a cigarette.

STEPHEN

Shhh. I think I hear voices.

(Stephen found he could by a peculiar movement of his legs and arms encase himself in his enormous bathing-suit.)

TOM

That Dollie Ramsdell was an awfully nice girl. *(speaking while shivering)*
I wish I hadn't ordered that new dress-suit for the dance tomorrow night.

STEPHEN

Providence will not forsake us.

TOM

I wish I had an almanac.

STEPHEN *(whispering)*

I feel like somebody's watching us.

TOM

Oh, we'll be picked up soon enough. I'll bet good money on it. *(beginning to strum on an imaginary banjo and half singing the next line)* Then we'll be tiptoeing through the tulips.

I have heard, that captains with healthy ships beneath their feet will never turn back to shore after having once started on a voyage. In that case we will be rescued by some ship bound for the golden South Seas. Then, you'll be up to some of your confounded devilment and we'll get put off. They'll maroon us! That's what they'll do! They'll maroon us on an island with palm trees and sun-kissed maidens and all that. Sun-kissed maidens, eh? Great! They'd--"

(There is heard a ship's warning horn . Off stage a searchlight shines and appears to grow larger as the ship approaches..)

TOM

Ha! Here come our rescuers. Those brave fellows! How I long to take the manly captain by the hand! You will soon see a white boat with a blue star on its bow drop from the side of yon ship. Kind sailors in matching blue and white will help us into the boat and conduct our wasted frames to the quarter-deck, where the handsome, bearded captain, with gold bands all around, will welcome us. Then in the hard-oak cabin, while the wine gurgles and the Havanas glow, we'll tell our tale of peril, privation and woe.

STEPHEN (*waving his arms and flapping his over-large bathing suit.*)
Help. We're over here.

THE FIRST-MATE (*from off stage*)
We sees ya. Catch this here line, stand back.

(A line is tossed onto the raft.)

Tie er up. Who are ["er"] you and wot do yeh want? Got any chewin' tewbacca?

STEPHEN
No, we haven't.

TOM
My friend here is the idiot who I followed to this ridiculous excuse for a raft, and we need to be rescued are the answers to your other questions.

(The raft is pulled off stage right.)

THE FIRST-MATE (*off stage*)
Climb up on this rope ladder and I'll cut your raft free.

(The three walk out unto the main stage which is the deck of the ship.)

THE FIRST-MATE
Wot became of me manners? Ezekiel P. Sanford, first mate of the schooner 'Mary Jones,' of N'yack, N. Y., genelmen, be me name and rank.

TOM
Ah! delighted, I'm sure.

THE FIRST-MATE (*noticing Stephen's suit*)
Wot th' devil---- Wot th' devil yeh got on?

STEPHEN
Bathing-outfits.

THE FIRST MATE

You'd a been dead by mornin if'n I hadn't spotted you. Let me introduce you to our captain.

(The three men exit stage left.)

BLACKOUT

NARRATOR

The first-mate led the two young men to the captain's cabin. A lamp shed an orange light. A wooden table, immovable, as if the whole craft had been built around it, occupied the middle of the room with two chairs drawn up to it. In a sort of recess were two single beds with blankets on them forming an expanded "V."

LIGHTS UP

THE CAPTAIN

I'll be dog-hanged. You two are a sight.

TOM *(whispering to Stephen)*

There's something about this rescue that isn't right.

THE CAPTAIN

Sit down. Let me get you something to eat and drink. *(moving some seabiscuits and a half eaten ham from a sideboard onto the table)* Sorry, I ain't got no extra clothes but you can wrap yourselves with these blankets. *(producing them from under each bed.)* I'll be back in a minute.

(Stephen sits quite contentedly at the table like an Indian in his blanket. Tom gets up and paces anxiously about the cabin and sniffing.)

TOM

I won't stand for this, I tell you! Heavens and earth, look at the— *(gesturing toward the ham)* say, what in the blazes did you want to get me

into this mess for, anyhow? You're a fine old duffer, you are! How old do you think this ham is?

(Stephen slices off two pieces and begins eating his piece while offering Tom the other.)

STEPHEN

Aren't you just starving?

TOM *(refusing it)*

Are you trying to poison me now?

STEPHEN

We're alive and warm.

TOM

This is an outrage! I'm about ready to give that captain person a piece of my mind --

(The captain returns bringing a pot and two mugs with him which he sets on the table. Stephen pours the coffee into the mugs and drinks. Tom starts to but then thinking better of it puts the mug back on the table)

THE CAPTAIN

Well, after yeh eat, maybe ye'd like t'sleep some! If you do, yeh can use them beds.

STEPHEN

We wouldn't dream of depriving you of your beds. No, indeed. Just a couple more blankets if you have them, and we'll sleep on your floor or is it deck?

THE CAPTAIN

I'm the captain of this here vessel, and I order you to sleep on them beds. We should arrive in New York harbor in a couple of hours. I've gotta see to the crew.

(The captain exits.)

STEPHEN: Aye, aye, captain.

(The two men make up their beds and lie on them.)

TOM

You're enjoying this, aren't you? But I'm telling you there's something very wrong with this rescue. It's going to break! It'll break any minute!

STEPHEN

Go to sleep. It can break in the morning.

NARRATOR

Our voyagers slept. In the quiet could be heard the groanings of timbers as the sea seemed to crunch them together. The lapping of water along the vessel's side sounded like a person gasping for air. A hundred spirits of the wind had got their wings entangled in the rigging, and, in soft voices, pleaded to be loosened.

(Tom throws the ham on the floor to awaken Stephen and stands over him.)

STEPHEN

Good Lord, Tom, what's th' matter?

TOM

To New York! The middle of New York in our bathing-outfits. What in damnation are we going to do?

STEPHEN

I'm sure I don't know.

TOM

Think of something. You don't want to make a bigger fool out of yourself or me, do you?

STEPHEN

I haven't made a fool out of you. I'm the one who keeps getting laughed at.

TOM

Well, think, man. Know anybody in the city?

STEPHEN

I know a fellow up in Harlem near where I used to live.

TOM

You know a fellow up in Harlem. Up in Harlem! How the dickens are we going to get way up there?

STEPHEN

We can take a cab.

TOM

There are no cabs that will go to Harlem. Do you know any one else?

STEPHEN

I know another fellow closer to the docks. He lives somewhere on Park Avenue.

TOM

Somewhere on Park Avenue. Do you expect us to knock on every door along Park Avenue in our bathing outfits? At least, what's your friend's name?

STEPHEN

Jim something or other. It will come to me.

TOM (*in a mockingly semi-serious tone*)

Excuse, me stranger, but do you know a Jim something or other who lives somewhere on Park Avenue? You see we've been shanghaied by rude sailors and been cast ashore nearly naked on your concrete island.

(The captain enters the cabin.)

THE CAPTAIN

Good news. We'll be anchoring in the harbor in about half an hour. An' I s'pose you fellers oughta get ready. *(laughing)* You can keep them blankets.

TOM *(grabbing him by the lapels)*

If you laugh again I'll kill you. You rescued us in a deucedly shabby manner. Now, will you or will you not turn this ship around and take us where our clothes are near Philadelphia where we belong?

THE CAPTAIN

I can't. This vessel don't belong to me. I've got to--

TOM

Well, then, can you find us some clothes?

THE CAPTAIN

I told you I haven't got any to spare and neither do my crew. As I said you can have the blankets.

TOM *(pulling harder on the captain's collars)*

Can you at least lend us a few dollars for a cab?

THE CAPTAIN

If you take your hands off of me and will get off of my ship as soon as we're in the harbor, I will.

TOM *(releasing him)*

It's a deal.

THE CAPTAIN *(yelling and handing them a few dollars)*

Ben, get in here and row these men to the dock as soon as you're able to launch the shuttle boat.

STEPHEN

I guess we'll have to go.

TOM

I won't! I don't care what you do, but I won't!

STEPHEN

I'm getting into the boat, and then you can find out what the captain will do about you on your own.

THE CAPTAIN

Get them out of my sight.

(The three men exit with the first-mate pulling Tom along and Stephen following.)

Good riddance to bad rubbish.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS UP

(All three of the men are in the boat with the first-mate rowing.)

STEPHEN

Great heavens! Look at all of those people on the dock. What a predicament we're in, Tommy!

TOM

Do you think so? Has it just dawned on you? *(laughing)* Lord, what a figure you'll cut on the streets of New York City in broad daylight. But now you see why we can't land here. Damn, turn this boat around! Turn 'er round, quick!

THE FIRST-MATE

The captain'd never let me. I can't--turn 'er round, d'ye hear!

STEPHEN

Certainly not. We're going to put an end to this adventure right now.

TOM *(frantic)*

Just look at us. *(standing up and rocking the boat)* We've got to turn back!

STEPHEN

Sit down. You'll tip the boat over.

THE FIRST-MATE

Sit down or I'll toss you both overboard right now. I'm just doin' what the cap'n sed.

TOM *(jumping up again making the boat rock wildly)*

Well, what in blazes do I care what the *(mockingly)* "cap'n sed"?

NARRATOR

The small boat reeled. Over one side water came rushing in. Stephen cried out and gave a jump to the other side. *(in pantomime)* Tom tried his best to counter balance Stephen's movements. The boat acted for a moment like a bear on a swing and then it capsized throwing the three men into the

waters about a hundred yards from the pier. Their blankets sinking like stones.

Two or three tug boats let off whistles of astonishment, but continued on their paths. A man dozing on a dock was aroused and pointed at the dark bottom of the life-boat that now appeared like the back of a whale calf. The passengers on a ferry-boat all ran to the near railing. A small boat that was bobbing on the waves near the piers sculled hastily toward the scene.

(Two heads suddenly pop up from under the water.)

STEPHEN *(choking)*

839. That's it! 839!

TOM

What is?

STEPHEN

That's the number of that feller on Park Avenue. I just remembered.

TOM

You're the bloomingest--

STEPHEN

It wasn't my fault. If you hadn't— *(choking badly)*

NARRATOR

One of Stephen's hands held to the keel of the boat, and the other was pulling at the collar of the first-mate. The latter was fighting a losing battle with his immense rubber boots. The rescuer in the other boat rowed fiercely. As his craft glided up, he reached out and grasped Tom by the arm and dragged him into the boat. Stephen then climbed in under his own power. The first-mate was hauled carefully over that boat's gunwale and lay in the bottom of the boat.

As it turned toward the land, they saw that the nearest dock was gathering a very large crowd.

They disembarked as the men in the first row of the crowd lifted up the nearly drowned first-mate.

Now stripped of their blankets Tom and Stephen stood for a moment dripping wet, holding their breath to see the first finger of amazement levelled at them. But the crowd bended and surged in an absorbing anxiety to view the face of the rough man in rubber boots that so fascinated them. To the crowd, our reluctant sea-wanderers were as though they were not there.

STEPHEN

839

TOM

All right. Let's make off. I see an empty cab right over there. *(going up to it)* Driver. Driver are you for hire?

(The cab is made up of three chairs.)

STEPHEN

Driver, excuse us.

THE CABMAN

By Jimminy, I was sure he was a gonner. *(still distracted by the scene on the dock and not even looking over his shoulder at the two young men barefoot in their dripping wet bathing suits)* Get in. Where to?

TOM

839 Park Avenue--and make it quick. We're freezing.

THE CABMAN

How's that? It's almost 90 degrees. What was the address again? 839?

STEPHEN

Right. 839 Park Avenue.

THE CABMAN

Park Avenue? Yessir. *(lightly tapping his whip and chucking)* Trot along there, Bessie.

STEPHEN

Well, Tom, it will soon all be over. And quicker than I expected. It looked for a time that we were doomed. I'm thankful to find out that was not so.

And I hope and trust that you--well, I don't wish to—perhaps it is an inopportune time to intrude a moral into our story. But, my dear, dear fellow, I think the time is ripe to point out to you that your obstinacy, your selfish vanity, your villainous temper, and your various other faults can make whatever happens just as unpleasant for yourself as they frequently do for everyone else around you. You can see what all of that has brought us to.

I most sincerely hope, my dear friend, that I shall soon observe those signs in you which shall lead me to believe that you have become a kinder and wiser sort of fellow.

BLACKOUT

Part Two -- THE BLUE HOTEL

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR

SCULLY (*Irish accent*)

JOHNNIE

THE SWEDE (*Swedish/German accent*)

THE COWBOY

THE EASTERNER

THE OLD FARMER

THE BARTENDER

THE GAMBLER

THE SFX of ROARING STORM WINDS

(Props for the set are a counter height table and a regular dining table with four chairs around it plus two chairs functioning as a stove and another three chairs functioning like a bed. There is a rolled up blanket and whiskey bottle under the simulated bed. The wintry wind sound effect is also a main character.)

NARRATOR

Let me set the scene for our next story. The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper, Nebraska was strategically painted by its proprietor Patrick Scully, a blue, exactly the shade on the wings of the blue heron, causing that bird to declare its claim to any world where it landed. The Palace Hotel, then, was the first thing that one saw when he alighted from the train station even when the snow obliterated the rest of the town not two hundred yards further away like today.

On clear days, when the great trans-continental express, with its long lines of swaying Pullmans, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight, and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed a mixture of superior pity and an involuntary laugh.

As if the opulent delights of such a blue hotel were not sufficiently enticing, it was Scully's habit to go every morning and evening to meet the leisurely trains that stopped at Romper and work his seductions upon any man who alighted gripsack in hand.

On this morning Scully performed the marvel of netting three men. One was a quick-eyed Swede with a large valise; one was a tall bronzed cowboy, on his way North to a ranch near the Dakota line with his carpet bag lassoed together with his lariat; the last was a slight man from the East who announced it by means of his bowler that he held like a helmet against the merciless wind.



(SFX: Gradually turn up the volume of the Storm Winds until they blast through the hotel's front doors when Scully enters with the three men.)

Scully quickly made them his prisoners and marched them to his hotel blindly through the storm. He was so nimble and merry and kindly that each probably felt it would be the height of discourtesy to try to escape.

Beside the stove in the hotel Scully's son was playing High-Five with an old farmer. They were quarrelling. Frequently the old farmer turned his

face towards a box of sawdust—colored brown from tobacco juice—that was behind the stove, and spat to relieve his irritation.

(The four men burst in from the storm.)

SCULLY *(addressing his son with a fairly heavy Irish accent)*
Johnnie, you've got to help me with the bags right now.

JOHNNIE

Can't you see I'm right in the middle of a game?

SCULLY *(cuffing him on the back of the head)*
Now means now! *(taking the cards out of his son's hand and putting them face up on the table where the old farmer carefully checks on them and removes some money from the middle of the table back to in front of himself.)*

(Scully and Johnnie take their bags off stage left. The cowboy and Easterner cozy up to the stove while removing their coats and putting them on the back of their chairs.)

THE OLD FARMER

Afternoon, gents. Some weather, ain't it? Hope them cows don't freeze. C'ant get to em anyhow.

(The Swede refuses to part with his valise staring suspiciously toward everyone in the room. He packs his winter coat into the valise for safe keeping.)

THE SWEDE *(with a heavy foreign accent)*: Are needing any help? *(holding up his large hands)* Been milking from a boy in Sweden to when I got on that train last week.

THE OLD FARMER

C'ant afford myself as it is.

THE SWEDE

How much land go for round here?

THE OLD FARMER

Don't know. Got mine homesteading from the gov' ment years ago for fighting in the war.

(Scully and his son return.)

SCULLY *(to the Swede)*

Are you sure you don't want us to take your bag to your room?

THE SWEDE

Not sure I'm staying. I come from New Jersey.

SCULLY

Well good luck to you then. There ain't no rooms anywhere else for-let in Romper other than at the widow Quinn's and she's off visiting her sister. I guess if you're so desperate to leave my fine establishment you could go down to the church and get the reverend to open up his basement for you. No one at the saloon will let you stay the night.

New Jersey did you say? I didn't recognize the accent. I lived in the Bowery for a few years when I first came over. Ever get that way?

THE SWEDE *(looking distractedly out the window)*

Nay.

NARRATOR

The window now presented views of a tumultuous sea of snow. The huge arms of the wind were making attempts—mighty, circular, futile—to embrace the flakes as they sped past. A gate-post like a still man with a blanched face stood aghast amid this profligate fury. But no sheltering island of the south sea could be as exempt from a storm as this parlor room with its hummingly warm stove.

SCULLY *(checking the stove)*

I better go back to the shed and bring in some more firewood before it freezes up.

(Scully exits.)

JOHNNIE *(addressing the old farmer and shuffling the deck)*
Hey, old-timer, want to try to win some of your money back with High Five?

THE OLD FARMER

Why not? I sure ain't getting back to my farm tonight.

(They play cards in the background with Johnnie taking every hand. The play of Johnnie and the old farmer ended suddenly.)

You're too good for me. I'll see if my luck improves over at the saloon.

(He slowly buttons his coat, and then opens the door that blasts the room with its wind and snow and stalks out. In the discreet silence of the other men the Swede let out a nervous laugh.)

THE COWBOY

Heh, sonny. Can you deal me in? Ain't got nothin else to do. Who wants to join us?

THE EASTERNER

I'm up for it. *(addressing the Swede)* How about you, my friend?

THE SWEDE

Ain't nobody's friend in here, but I'll play a while to wait out the storm.

THE COWBOY

High Five you say?

JOHNNIE

Aces are highest and worth 14 points; kings 13, queens 12 and Jacks 11. Right down the line. You can only draw up to three of your dealt cards.

You bet twice and it moves pretty fast unless you have trouble counting up that far.

THE SWEDE

I played games like this before.

(The four men move their chairs to the table -- the Cowboy opposite Johnnie and the Easterner opposite the Swede.)

JOHNNIE *(dealing the cards)*

Let's have at it.

NARRATOR

The cowboy was a board-whacker. Each time that he held superior cards he whanged them down with exceeding force and swept the money from the center of the worn table with a pride that sent thrills of indignation into the hearts of his opponents. Except for Johnnie who impassively wins more of the hands.

(Johnnie deals another hand. They each bet, then go around for the draw.)

THE EASTERNER

I'll take two. *(throwing them in and receiving two back in return)*

THE SWEDE

Stink you deal me. All low numbers. Five new ones I want.

THE EASTERNER

You can only draw up to three.

THE SWEDE

Suppose there's been a good many men killed in this room.

JOHNNIE

What in hell are you talking about?

THE SWEDE (*nervously laughing again*)

Oh, you know what I mean all right. I've read all about how you do it. Playing nice then bang you're dead.

JOHNNIE (*halting his dealing*)

Now, what might you be drivin' at, mister?

THE SWEDE

Oh, maybe you think I have been to nowhere.

JOHNNIE

I don't know nothin' bout you, and I don't give a damn where you've been. All I got to say is that I don't know what you're driving at. There hain't never been nobody killed in this room.

THE COWBOY

What's wrong with you, mister?

THE SWEDE (*addressing the Easterner*)

They say they don't know what I mean.

THE EASTERNER (*impassively*)

I don't have a clue what's going on here.

THE SWEDE

Oh, I see you are all in on it. I see— (*springing up and frightened*)
I don't want to fight! I don't want to fight!

THE COWBOY (*stretching his long legs indolently*)

Well, who the hell thought you did?

THE SWEDE (*backing rapidly towards a corner of the room*)

Gentlemen, I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house! (*resignedly*) I am going to be killed before I can leave this house

SCULLY (*re-entering the room with an armful of firewood*)

What's the matter here?

THE SWEDE

These men are aiming to kill me.

(The Swede's arms open up in the gesture of a martyr.)

SCULLY

What is this about, Johnnie?

JOHNNIE

Damned if I know. I can't make hide nor hair outta it. *(beginning to re-shuffle the cards)* He claims a good many men have been killed in this room, or something like that. And he says he's goin' to be killed here too. I don't know what ails him. He's crazy, I shouldn't wonder.

SCULLY *(looking to the cowboy)*

Bill, is it? What's goin' on?

THE COWBOY

Damned if I know.

SCULLY *(addressing the Swede)*

Kill you? Kill you? Man, we hardly even know you.

THE SWEDE

Oh, I know. I know what will happen. Yes, I'm crazy—yes. Yes, of course, I'm crazy—yes. But I know one thing—I know I won't get out of here alive.

THE COWBOY *(under his breath)*

Well, I'm dog-goned.

SCULLY

Johnnie, You been troublin' this man?

JOHNNIE

Why, good Gawd, I ain't done nothin' to 'im.

THE SWEDE

Gentlemen, do not disturb yourselves. I will this house just quietly leave. I do not want to die.

SCULLY *(to his son)*

Will you tell me what is the matter, you young divil? Speak out!

JOHNNIE

Blame it! don't I tell you I don't know. He—he says we want to kill him, and that's all I know. I can't tell what ails him."

THE SWEDE

Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away.

SCULLY

You will not go 'way, You will not go 'way until I hear the reason of this business. If anybody has troubled you, I will take care of him. This is my house. You are under my roof, and I will not allow any peaceable man to be troubled here

THE SWEDE

Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away. *(moving towards his baggage)*.

SCULLY

Now, *(severely)* what does this mean ["mane"]?

THE COWBOY

Why, we didn't do nothin' to 'im!

JOHNNIE

Why this is the wildest loon I ever see. We didn't do nothin' at all. We were jest sittin' here playin' cards, and he—

SCULLY *(speaking to the Easterner)*

Mr. Blanc, what has these boys been doin'?

THE EASTERNER *(slowly)*

I didn't see anything wrong at all.

SCULLY

What does it mean ["mane"]? I have a mind to lather you for this, me boy.

JOHNNIE

What have I done?

SCULLY

I think you all are hiding something.

(Scully goes over to the Swede who is getting his winter coat out of the bag.)

Man! Man! Have you gone daffy?

THE SWEDE

Oh, no! Oh, no! There are people in this world who know pretty nearly as much as you do—understand?

SCULLY

By my stars, I never heard of such a thing in my life. It's a complete muddle. I can't, for the soul of me, think how you ever got this idea into your head. And did you sure think they were going to kill you?

THE SWEDE

I did.

SCULLY

Why, man, don't leave. Give the town a chance. We're goin' to have a line of ilictric street-cars next spring.

THE SWEDE: A line of electric street-cars.

SCULLY

And . . . there's a new railroad goin' to be built up from Waco to here and on to Chicago. Not to mintion the four new churches and the smashin' red brick school-house. Then there's the grain silo they're building next to the tracks. Why, in two years Romper 'll be a regular *metropolis*.

THE SWEDE

Mr. Scully, how much do I owe you?

SCULLY *(angrily)*

You don't owe me nothin'.

THE SWEDE

Yes, I do.

(He takes seventy-five cents from his pocket and offers it to Scully.)

Here's almost a dollar. I pay my own way.

SCULLY

I'll not take your money. Not after what's been goin' on here, I'm sure of. Come with me a minute.

THE SWEDE *(in alarm)*

No.

SCULLY

Yes. Come on! I want to show you a picter—just across the hall—in my room.

(His bedroom is set up stage right.)

NARRATOR

The Swede must have concluded that his hour had come. His jaw dropped and his teeth showed like a dead man's. He ultimately followed Scully across the corridor, but he had the step of one walking in chains. Scully lit a candle and held it high up on his wall. There was revealed a photograph of a little girl and her brother.

SCULLY

Look, man! That's the picter of my little gal what died. Her name was Carrie, and she had the prettiest of hair. And then there's my oldest boy, Michael. He's a lawyer in Lincoln, an' doin' swell. I gave that boy a grand eddycation, and I'm glad for it. He's a fine boy. Look at 'im bein bold as brass, him there now in Lincoln, an honored an' respicted gintleman.

(He pats the Swede jovially on the back. The Swede faintly smiled.)

THE SWEDE

Where's the room where Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane had their honeymoon after killin all them injuns and outlaws?

SCULLY

I have no idea what you'r talkin' bout. But, there is one last thing I wants to show ya before you go off telling everyone what a bad time you had at my hotel.

(He drops suddenly to the floor and thrusts his head beneath the bed.)

I'd keep it under me piller if it wasn't for my hot-headed boy Johnnie. Then there's the old woman— Where is it now? I never put it twice in the same place. Ah, now come out with you!

(Presently he backed clumsily from under the bed, dragging with him an old blanket rolled into a bundle. The Swede was slowly backing out of the room at the same time in fear.)

I've fetched him.

(He unrolled the blanket and extracted from it a large yellow-brown whiskey bottle which he held up to the light and offered to the Swede.)

SCULLY

Now drink to my health and I'll drink to yours and we'll part the best of friends.

(The Swede was about to eagerly clutch the bottle, but he suddenly jerked his hand away and cast a look of horror upon Scully thrusting the bottle back at him.)

THE SWEDE

You first.

SCULLY

To your health! *(taking a long swig and handing the bottle back to the Swede)* Your turn. Drink!

(The Swede laughed wildly. He grabbed the bottle, put it to his mouth, and as his lips curled absurdly around the opening and his throat worked, he kept his glance, burning with defiance, upon Scully's face.)

(The scene switches back to the men around the card table.)

JOHNNIE

That's the dog-dangest Swede I ever seen.

THE COWBOY

I know one thing for sure. He ain't no Swede.

JOHNNIE

Well, what is he then?

THE COWBOY

It's my opinion he's some kind of Dutchman army deserter and bomb-throwing anarchist posing as a dumb Swede so's nobody would suspect him.

JOHNNIE

Well, he says he's a Swede, anyhow. What do you think, Mr. Blanc?

THE EASTERNER

Oh, I don't think that it makes much of a difference.

THE COWBOY

It will if he decides to blow us all up. Why do you think he acts so crazy?

THE EASTERNER

He seems very frightened to me. He's clearly frightened out of his boots.

THE COWBOY

What at?

(The Easterner reflected over his answer.)

THE EASTERNER

Oh, I don't know, but it seems to me this fellow might have been reading way too many dime-novels, and thinks he's landed right in the middle of one—the shootin' and stabbin' and all.

JOHNNIE

But, this ain't Wyoming, nor none of them places. This is Nebrasker. Why don't he wait to be scared till he really gits *out West*?

THE COWBOY

It's no more dangerous out there even than here—not these days. But he acts like a devil's about to grab him.

(Johnnie and the cowboy mused.)

JOHNNIE

It's awful strange.

THE COWBOY

This is a queer game. I hope we don't git snowed in, cause then we'd have to stand this here fella longer than we wants to. That wouldn't be no good.

JOHNNIE

I wish Da would throw him out.

(Scully and the Swede re-enter the parlor.)

SCULLY

Did have a hair-puller between two lovely ladies passing through, one night.

(The Swede laughing oddly.)

Come now *(addressing the men)* , move up and give us a chance at the stove.

(The cowboy and the Easterner obediently sidled their chairs to make room for the new-comers. Johnnie, however, simply arranged himself in a more indolent attitude.)

SCULLY *(in a slightly drunken voice)*

Come! Scoot over, there.

JOHNNIE

Plenty of room on the other side of the stove.

SCULLY

Do you think we want to sit in the draught?

THE SWEDE *(in a bullying and slightly drunken voice)*

No, no. Let the boy sit where he likes.

SCULLY

All right! All right!

THE SWEDE

I'm mighty parched.

SCULLY

I'll git ya some water.

THE SWEDE

No, just tell me where it is and I'll get it myself.

SCULLY

It's the pitcher next to the washing up bowl in my room.

(The Swede exits toward Scully's room. The audience sees him drinking more of Scully's whiskey.)

SCULLY

I'm sure he thought I was tryin' to poison 'im in there. Why, he's all right now. It was only that he's from New Jersey and thought this was the wild west. That's all. He's all right now.

THE COWBOY *(addressing the Easterner)*

You were straight on to him, that damn Dutchman.

JOHNNIE

Well, he may be all right now, but I don't see it. T'other time he was too scared, but now he's too fresh. Why don't you throw 'im out in the snow?

SCULLY *(demanding in a drunken voice)*

What do I keep? What do I keep? What do I keep? *(slapping his knee)* I keep a hotel. A hotel, do you mind? A guest under my roof has sacred privileges. He is to be intimidated by none. Not one word shall he hear that would prejudice him in favor of goin' away. I'll not have it. There's no place in this here town where they can say that a guest of mine ever left because he was too afraid to stay here. *(addressing the cowboy and the Easterner)* Am I right?

THE COWBOY

Yes, Mr. Scully. Of course, you're right.

THE EASTERNER

Right.

BLACKOUT

NARRATOR

At the six-o'clock supper, the Swede fizzed like a fire-wheel. He seemed on the point of bursting into riotous song at any moment. The Easterner was incased in his own reserve; the cowboy sat in wide-mouthed amazement at the Swede, forgetting to eat, while Johnnie demolished great plates of food.

The Swede seemed to have grown suddenly taller; he gazed, directly, into every face. His voice rang through the room. Once when he jabbed out harpoon-fashion with his fork to pinion a biscuit, the weapon nearly impaled Scully's hand.

LIGHTS UP

THE SWEDE (*slapping Scully painfully on the shoulder*)

Well, old boy, that was a good, square meal. Let's have another try at High Five or whatever you call it.

JOHNNIE

Yeah, sure I'll play.

SCULLY

I've got to meet the 6:58, so I'll read the paper until then.

JOHNNIE

Why don't we keep the same pairs? Bill, you with me?

THE SWEDE

I'm happy with my little friend over there.

NARRATOR

As the play went on, it was noticeable that the cowboy was not board-whacking as usual. Meanwhile, Scully, near the lamp, had put on his spectacles and, with an appearance curiously like an old priest, was reading a newspaper. The Swede had now adopted the fashion of board-whacking. Then suddenly -- --

THE SWEDE

You cheatin' are! (*throwing down all of his cards*).

(The Swede held a huge fist in front of Johnnie's face, while the latter looked menacingly into his eyes for about two seconds.)

NARRATOR

Then in slow motion the five men projected themselves headlong towards this common intersection. It happened that Johnnie, in rising to hurl himself upon the Swede, had stumbled slightly because of his curiously instinctive care for the cards on the table. The loss of the moment allowed the cowboy time to give the Swede a great push which sent him staggering back. Hoarse shouts of rage, appeal, or fear burst from every throat. The cowboy pushed and jostled feverishly at the Swede, and the Easterner and Scully clung wildly to Johnnie; but, above the swaying bodies of the peace-makers, the eyes of the two warriors sought each other in glances of challenge that were hot and steely. Of course, the table had been overturned, and the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor.

SCULLY

Stop now? Stop, I say! Stop, now—

JOHNNIE

Well, he says I cheated! He says I cheated! I won't allow no man to say I cheated. If he says I cheated, I say hell no.

THE COWBOY (*to the Swede*)

Quit, now! Quit, d'ye hear—

THE SWEDE

He did cheat! I saw him!

THE EASTERNER

Wait a moment, can't you? Oh, wait a moment. What's the good of someone getting hurt over a friendly game of cards? Wait a —

NARRATOR

"Cheat"—"Quit"—"Wait"— "Hell no" pierced the uproar and rang out sharply. Then suddenly there was a great cessation. It was as if each man had paused for breath at the same moment; and although the room was still lit by anger, it could be seen that there was no danger of imminent physical conflict.

JOHNNIE (*breaking the silence but now half-heartedly*)

What did you say I cheated for? I don't cheat.

THE SWEDE

A cheat and now a liar too. I saw you! I saw you!

JOHNNIE

I'll fight any man what says I cheated or lied!

SCULLY

Be still, can't you?

JOHNNIE (*hailing the Swede over the cowboy who is separating them*)

Do you still believe that I cheated?

THE SWEDE

I don't need to believe it since I seen it.

JOHNNIE

Then, we must fight.

THE SWEDE (*roaring like a demon*)

Yes, fight! I'll show you what kind of a man I am! I'll show you who you want to fight! Maybe you think I can't fight! Maybe you think I can't! I'll show you, you piece of skin, you card-stealer! You lyin' cheater!

JOHNNIE (*cooly*)

Well, let's go at it, then, mister crazy man.

THE COWBOY (*addressing Scully*)

What are you goin' to do?

SCULLY

Let them fight. I can't put up with this damn Swede much longer. We'll let them fight it out to see who's tellin the truth. God defends the right.

NARRATOR

The men prepared to go out-of-doors. The Easterner was so nervous that he had great difficulty in getting his arms into the sleeves of his new leather coat. As the cowboy drew his fur cap down over his ears, his hands trembled with a growing agitation. The red-faced Swede was ready to go out without a coat. In fact, Johnnie and old Scully were the only ones who displayed no outward agitation. Scully threw open the door. (*rush of wind*)

SCULLY

Well, come on. Let's do this thing.

NARRATOR

Instantly a terrific wind caused the flame of the lamp to struggle at its wick, while a puff of black smoke sprang from the chimney-top. The stove was in mid-current of the blast, and its voice swelled to equal the roar of the storm. Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall. The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a squall at sea.

The snow was no longer falling, but great whirls and clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic winds, were streaming southward with the speed of bullets. The covered land was almost as blue as the hotel with the sheen of an unearthly satin, and there was no other hue save where, at the low, black railway station—which seemed incredibly distant—one light gleamed like a tiny yellow jewel. As the men floundered into a thigh deep drift, the Swede was bawling out something. Scully went to him, put a hand on his shoulder and projected an ear.

SCULLY (*shouting*)

What's that you say?

THE SWEDE

I say, I won't stand much show against this gang of yours. I know you'll all pitch on me.

SCULLY

Tut, man! No one . . .

THE SWEDE

Just my luck. I fell into a pit full of snakes.

NARRATOR

Immediately turning their backs upon the wind, the men had swung around a corner to the sheltered side of the hotel. It was the function of the little house to preserve here, amid this great devastation of snow, an irregular V-shape of heavily incrustated grass, which crackled beneath the feet. One could imagine the great drifts piled against the windward side. When the party reached the comparative peace of this spot it was found that the Swede was still bellowing.

THE SWEDE

I know you'll all pitch on me. I can't lick you all!

SCULLY

No. You'll only have to whip my son Johnnie. An' the man what troubles you durin' that time will have me to deal ["dale"] with.

NARRATOR

The arrangements were swiftly made. The two men faced each other, obedient to the harsh commands of Scully, whose face, in the subtly luminous gloom, could be seen set in the austere impersonal lines that are pictured on the countenance of Roman statues. The Easterner's teeth were chattering, and he was hopping up and down like a mechanical toy. The cowboy stood rock-like. The fighters' fists were up, and they eyed each other in a calm that had the elements of leonine cruelty about to be unleashed.

SCULLY

Now!

(The fight in low-motion pantomime with stop action strobe lighting while the narrator is speaking.)

NARRATOR

The two combatants leaped forward and crashed together like bullocks. There was heard the cushioned sound of blows, and of curses squeezing out from between the tight teeth of one.

For a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly revolving wheel. Occasionally a face, as if illumined by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with reddening patches.

THE COWBOY

Go to it, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him!

SCULLY (*blocking the cowboy's advance*)

Keep ["Kape"] back.

THE COWBOY

Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!

SCULLY

Keep ["Kape"] still and stay out the way.

NARRATOR

Then there was a sudden loud grunt, incomplete, cut short, and Johnnie's body swung away from the Swede and fell with sickening heaviness to the snowy grass. The cowboy was barely in time to prevent the enraged Swede from flinging himself upon his prone adversary.

THE COWBOY

No, you don't. Hold on a second.

SCULLY

Johnnie! Johnnie, me boy! Johnnie! Can you go on with it?

JOHNNIE

Yes, I—it—yes.

SCULLY

Wait a bit now. Git your wind.

THE COWBOY (*holding the Swede back*)

No, you don't! Wait a second until he gets back up.

THE EASTENER (*plucking at Scully's sleeve*)

Oh, this is enough. Let it go as it stands. Stop it. This is enough!

SCULLY

Bill, git out of Johnnie's way. . . .

(The cowboy stepped aside. Scully acting like a referee resumes the fight.)

Now.

NARRATOR

The combatants once again advanced towards collision. They glared at each other, and then the Swede aimed a lightning blow that carried with it his entire weight. Johnnie half stupid from weakness miraculously dodged, and the back of his hand sent the over-balanced Swede sprawling.

THE COWBOY

Atta boy!

NARRATOR

But before the conclusion of those few words, the Swede had scuffled agilely to his feet and came in berserk abandon at his foe. He hurled another lightning blow and Johnnie's body fell, even as a large branch might fall on a roof. The Swede instantly staggered to lean against the hotel wall, breathing like a steam engine, while his savage and flame-lit eyes roamed from face to face as the men bent over Johnnie.

SCULLY

Are you any good yet, Johnnie?

JOHNNIE

I ain't—any good—any—more. (*beginning to weep*) He was too—too—too heavy for me.

SCULLY (*addressing the Swede*)

Stranger, it's all up with our side. Johnnie is whipped.

THE SWEDE (*panting but still getting the words out*)
I see. You're a cheater, . . . and a liar . . . **and** . . . a quitter.

(Scully has to restrain the cowboy as the Swede heads quickly back to the hotel.)

SCULLY
Johnnie, can you walk?

JOHNNIE
Did I hurt—hurt him any?

SCULLY
Can you walk, boy? Can you walk?

JOHNNIE (*with a robust impatience*)
I asked you whether I hurt him any!

THE COWBOY: Yes, yes, Johnnie; he's hurt a good deal.

NARRATOR
They raised Johnnie from the ground, and as soon as he was on his feet he went tottering off, rebuffing further attempts at assistance. When the party rounded the corner, however, they were fairly blinded by the pelting of the snow. It burned their faces like fire. The cowboy then assisted Johnnie to plow themselves through the drifted snow to the hotel's door.

(As they entered without any greeting they passed the Swede now with his coat on and dragging his valise back out into what was left of the storm. The Easterner rushed to the glowing iron stove. The cowboy pulled a chair over to put Johnnie in it placed where he folded his arms on his knees and buried his face in them. The cowboy removed his fur cap, and with a dazed and rueful air

he ran one hand through his tousled locks.)

THE COWBOY

I'd like to go back out there after him and fight that phony Swede myself.

SCULLY

No, that wouldn't do. It wouldn't be right.

THE COWBOY

Well, why wouldn't it? I don't see the harm in it.

SCULLY

It was Johnnie's fight, and now we mustn't whip the man just because he whipped Johnnie.

THE COWBOY

Yes, that's true enough but—

(The hotel door opens with a blast of blown snow and the Swede swaggers back into the middle of the room. There is a momentary silence.)

THE SWEDE *(addressing Scully)*

Well, I s'pose you'll now tell me how much I owes you?

SCULLY

You don't owe me nothin'.

THE SWEDE *(addressing the room)*

Huh?! Don't owe 'im nothin'.

THE COWBOY

Stranger, I don't see how you come to be so arrogant around here.

SCULLY

Stop! Bill, you shut up!

THE SWEDE

Mr. Scully, how much do I owe you?

SCULLY

I said, you don't owe me nothin'.

THE SWEDE

I guess you're right. I guess if it was any way at all, you'd owe me somethin'. That's what I guess. (*mocking the cowboy*) Kill him! Kill him! Kill him! (*then guffawing victoriously*) Kill him! (*pointing to Johnnie*).

(The men were silent, staring with glassy eyes at the stove. The Swede opened the door and passed into the storm, giving one derisive glance backward at the still group.)

SCULLY

Oh, but that was a hard minute! A hard minute! Him there leerin' and scoffin'! One bang at his nose was worth forty dollars to me that minute! How did you stand it, Bill?

THE COWBOY

How did I stand it? You were holding me back!

SCULLY (*bursting into a heavier brogue*)

I'd loike to take that Swade and hould 'im down on a shtone flure and bate 'im to a jelly wid a shtick! I'd like to git him by the neck and ha-ammer him (*bringing his hand down on a chair with a noise like a pistol-shot*)— Hammer that Swede until he couldn't tell himself from a dead coyote!

THE EASTERNER

I'd like to get to bed now.

BLACKOUT

(The actors take their places in the saloon waiting for the lights to come up.)

LIGHTS UP

NARRATOR

The Swede, tightly gripping his valise, tacked across the face of the storm as if he carried sails. He was following a line of little naked, gasping trees, which he knew must mark the way of the road. His face, fresh from the pounding of Johnnie's fists, felt more pleasure than pain in the wind and the driving snow. A number of square shapes loomed upon him finally, and he knew them as the houses of the main body of the town. He found a street and made travel along it, leaning heavily against the wind.

He might have been in a deserted village. But it wasn't and to his great relief, the Swede found a saloon. The Swede pushed open the door and entered. A sand and straw covered floor expanse was before him, and at the end of it a man and the old farmer from the hotel were playing cards. Down the other side of the room extended a radiant bar, and its guardian was leaning upon his elbows observing the men at the table.

THE SWEDE

Gimme some whiskey, will you?

(The bartender placed a full bottle, a shot-glass, and a glass of water upon the bar. The Swede poured out the water from the glass onto the saloon's floor and filled the glass with whiskey and drank it as if were water. He rings up the sale on the cash register on the bar.)

BARTENDER

Pretty bad night?

THE SWEDE

Oh, it's been good enough for me.

BARTENDER

How so in the middle of the storm?

THE SWEDE

Yes, I like this weather. I like it. It suits me just fine. I guess I'll take another drink. (*pouring himself another water glass full of whiskey and some in the shot glass which he offers to the bartender*) Have some yourself on me?

BARTENDER

No, thanks; I can't drink. How did you hurt your face?

THE SWEDE

Why, in a fight. I thumped the soul out of a man down there at Scully's hotel.

THE OLD FARMER (*overhearing*)

Who was it?

THE SWEDE

Johnnie Scully. Son of the man what runs it. He will be pretty near dead for some weeks, I can tell you. I made a nice thing of him, I did. He couldn't get up. They had to carry him back into the hotel. (*holding up the bottle*) Can I buy you two a drink?

THE OLD FARMER

Glad someone straightened that little skunk out. (*pushing all of his money into the middle of the table*) Call you.

THE GAMBLER (*to the farmer*)

Can you beat a ten high flush?

THE OLD FARMER (*throwing down his cards*)

Thought you was bluffin agin.

THE SWEDE

Come on, old timer, have a drink on me and ease your pain.

THE OLD FARMER

Not me. Looks like the storm's blown itself out. I'm heading back to my room at the hotel.

(The old farmer exits without the wind sound effect as he opens the door.)

THE SWEDE

By gawd, I've whipped a man to-night, and I want to celebrate. I whipped him good, too. *(addressing the man at the table)* You ain't playing now. Have a drink with me?

(The man at the table ignores him.)

Are you deaf or something?

BARTENDER

Ssh! Leave the man be.

THE SWEDE

Well, it seems I can't get nobody to drink with me in this town 'cepting Pat Scully, but I think he's not going to drink with me anymore. Seems so, don't it?

BARTENDER

Could you quiet down a bit.

THE SWEDE

Don't you try to shut me up. I won't have it. I'm a gentleman, and I want people to drink with me. And I want 'em to drink with me now. *Now—do you understand? (rapping the bar with his knuckles).*

BARTENDER

I hear you.

THE SWEDE

Well, listen hard then. See? *(pointing to the gambler)* That man over there is going to drink with me, and don't you forget it. Watch me.

BARTENDER

This won't do!

THE SWEDE

Why won't it? *(going over and laying his hand on the shoulder of the gambler)* Excuse me, I asked you nicely to drink with me.

THE GAMBLER

Sir, I don't know you.

THE SWEDE

Oh, hell come over and sit with me at the bar and have a drink.

THE GAMBLER

Now, my boy, take your hand off my shoulder and mind your own business.

THE SWEDE

What! You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'm as much of a gentleman as you are. I'll make you drink with me. I'll make you. *(grasping the man by his lapels and lifting him up from his chair to drag him toward the bar).*

BARTENDER *(dashing around the corner of the bar to intervene)*
Hold on there.

THE GAMBLER *(addressed to the Swede)*
No, you won't.

(In slow motion, the gambler producing a switch blade knife from his pocket, flicks it open and stabs the Swede in the chest. His fall is broken by the bartender who lays him on the ground.)

NARRATOR

The last thing that the Swede saw was the legend on the back of the bar's cash-machine in bold brass letters – “This registers the amount you owe for your purchase.”

Some months later when the Easterner returned to New York, he received the news that the man who stabbed the Swede had received a three year prison sentence. He wrote the following letter to the cowboy at his ranch in the Dakotas.

“It doesn’t seem right that he got three years. Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it. I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone.

And you were simply huffing and puffing around the place wanting to get excited by a fight. And then old Scully himself egged his own son on. His own son. We were all in it! This poor gambler, or whatever he was, isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration.

We, the five of us, and I guess you could add a stack of lurid and violent Dime Novels and Penny Dreadfuls , have collaborated in the murder of the Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women somehow involved in every murder. But in this case it is five men - you, I, Johnnie, old Scully, and that unlucky gambler. He, it seems to me, was dragged along behind as the culmination of a long human train of causality and got all the punishment. It doesn’t seem right. What do you think?”

The next day the Cowboy sent the Easterner this telegram, “You left out the Swede entirely in your list of conspirators in his own-demise. I really didn’t do nothing, did I?”

I know for a fact that their correspondence ended then and there and so does this story about that Nebraska blue hotel.

BLACKOUT

Part Three – THE OPEN BOAT

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR

THE CORRESPONDENT

THE CAPTAIN

THE COOK

THE OILER

THE RESCUER

THE SFX of the SEA

(Props: two oars and five chairs on wheels in the outline of a boat with two spread wider in the stern, two closer together midship and one centered at the bow. The chairs will be wheeled around as the attitude of the boat changes. A water jug.)

NARRATOR

Before we begin the third part of this trilogy of my stories, I'd like to finally introduce myself. My name is Stephen Crane. The three defining points of my life and career were playing baseball for Syracuse University, writing "The Red Badge of Courage," though I only reported on, but never was engaged in, armed conflicts myself, and being in love with Cora Taylor to the day I died of tuberculosis at the age of 28 in Badenweiler, Germany.

By the way, you've already seen me this evening wearing a couple of different masks. It was me in the absurdly large swimming costume and

I'm the one who wrote that letter to the cowboy in the Dakotas from my room in Harlem defending the gambler who stabbed the Swede.

I have a different role in "The Open Boat." I didn't have to imagine as much because I actually almost did drown in the Atlantic surf some 30 hours after the steam-tug Commodore capsized on New Year's day in 1897.

Here's the opening of the news article about the event that I filed for the New York Press four days after we were rescued.

"It was the afternoon of New Year's. The Commodore lay at her dock in Jacksonville, Florida and dozens of stevedores processioned steadily toward her with box after box of ammunition and bundle after bundle of rifles. Her hatch, like the mouth of a monster, engulfed them. It might have been the feeding time of some legendary creature of the sea. It was in broad daylight and the crowd of gleeful Cubans on the pier were singing the strange patriotic ballads of their island.

She loaded up as placidly as if she were going to carry oranges to New York, instead of Remingtons to Cuba.

As she turned her bow toward the distant sea, the Cubans ashore cheered and cheered. In response, the Commodore gave three long blasts of her whistle, which even to this time impressed me with their sadness. This is when I began to feel more like a filibuster than a reporter."

Does the word filibuster surprise you in this account? Let me interrupt myself -- Filibuster was first applied to pirates (also called free-booters) who pillaged the Spanish colonies in the West Indies. In the mid 19th century (via the Spanish word *filibustero*), the term more specifically denoted American adventurers who incited revolution in several Latin American states for adventure and profit. The verb form has more recently been used to describe tactics intended to sabotage US congressional proceedings.

I ended the news article dodging the experience on the dingy itself completely and only giving credit where credit was due to Captain Murphy, his cook and the oiler and especially to John Kitchell from Daytona Beach.

My editor of this short story version, I guess for various political reasons, wanted me to do a flip and cut out everything except what happened in that bathtub-sized dinghy.

He was right. We had already shamelessly celebrated when the American sugar plantation investors with the help of Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders finally managed to liberate Cuba from Spain to enrich their bank accounts. And, I might add, the story sold an extraordinary number of Scribners' Magazines.

What follows is what it was like to be in that Open Boat.



(SFX The sound of strong wind and waves. The loudest waves are heard about five seconds before the Narrator speaks then continue at various volume levels throughout the piece.)

NARRATOR

None of us remembered the color of the sky. Our eyes were fastened upon the waves sweeping towards us. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were foaming white. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed to me like points of a rock. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a precarious problem in small boat navigation.

THE COOK

Gawd! That was a narrow clip.

THE CAPTAIN

Keep'er a little more south, Billie.

THE OILER

A little more south it is, sir.

NARRATOR

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking bronco, and, by the same token, a bronco is not that much smaller. The craft pranced and reared like a horse making toward an outrageously high fence. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

THE COOK

There's a house of refuge just south of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll send their rescue boat and pick us up.

THE CORRESPONDENT

As soon as who sees us?

THE COOK

The emergency crew.

THE CAPTAIN

Houses of refuge don't have crews. They're places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked folks and swept away swimmers.

THE COOK

Oh, yes, they do.

THE CAPTAIN

No, they don't.

THE OILER (*smacking his oar on the water*)

Well, we're not there yet, anyhow.

THE COOK

Perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it's a life-saving station far beyond it that I was thinkin' of.

NARRATOR

As the boat bounced from the top of each wave, the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men, and as the craft plopped her stern down again the spray slashed them. From the crest of each wave the men surveyed a broad tumultuous expanse; shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid. It

was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

THE COOK

Bully good thing it's an on-shore wind. If not, where'd the hell would we be? Wouldn't have a show.

THE OILER

We'd be hell bound for sure.

THE CAPTAIN (*chuckling*)

Do you think we've got much of a show anyway, boys?

THE OILER

We do if we don't get caught up in the surf.

NARRATOR

Canton flannel gulls flew near and far occasionally sitting down on the near patches of brown sea-weed that rolled over the waves with the undulating movement like heavy carpets on a clothes line. The wrath of the sea was no more to them than it would be to a covey of prairie chickens in a summer breeze a thousand miles inland. One gull evidently decided to alight on the top of the captain's head. The bird flew parallel to the boat and did not circle, but made short sidelong jumps in the air. His black eyes transfixed upon the captain's hair as it attempted to land on his head.

(The cook and the captain waved it away in pantomime.)

THE COOK

Get out of here you, ugly brute. You look like you was made with a jack-knife.

NARRATOR

The oiler and I took turns rowing. The very ticklish part of the business was when the time came for the reclining one in the stern to take his turn at the oars. It was easier to steal eggs from under a hen than it was to change seats in the dinghy.

*(The oiler and the correspondent
start precariously changing places.)*

THE CAPTAIN

Look out now! Steady there! *(standing himself and pointing)* Isn't that the lighthouse at Mosquito Inlet? See it?

THE CORRESPONDENT *(having trouble standing)*

No, I don't see anything.

THE CAPTAIN

Look again. It's exactly straight ahead.

THE CORRESPONDENT

I see it now. It seems so far away. Think we'll make it there, captain?

THE CAPTAIN

If this wind holds and the boat don't swamp, we can't do much else.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Isn't a lighthouse supposed to warn ships to keep far away from it?

NARRATOR

The little boat aided by the wind rose-up more gently over the backs of the towering waves then coasted as the great spread of water pushing us swarmed into her with a whoosh.

THE CAPTAIN *(serenely)*

Bail her, Cooky.

THE COOK

All right, captain. What with?

THE CAPTAIN

Do what you can.

*(He locates the water jug in the rear
of the boat and hands it to the cook.)*

Here use the water jug. (*handing him the water-jug*) Let everyone drink his fill first, then use it.

(The cook passes it around. They all drink then he uses it to bail out the boat which he will do constantly through the rest of the story.)

NARRATOR

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood that was here established on this rough sea. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and it warmed each man. They were a sea-captain, an oiler, a cook, and a big city newspaper reporter, but to a curiously iron-bound degree we were the best of friends. The captain with his arm in a sling, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than we motley three.

It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that I, for instance, who had been taught to be skeptically cynical about all men, knew even at the time, would be the best experience of my life.

THE CAPTAIN

I wish we had a sail. We might try my overcoat on the end of the oars and give you two boys a chance to rest (*taking his overcoat off*).

(The oiler and the correspondent spread wide the overcoat on the oars and held the makeshift mast up.)

THE CAPTAIN

That's much better. I reckon we must be approaching New Smyrna pretty soon.

THE OILER

Captain, I believe they abandoned the life-saving station there about a year ago right after they built the lighthouse.

THE CAPTAIN

Did they? The wind is dying down. Strike the sail, hand me back my coat and resume rowing. I wish we could have trained more for this.

NARRATOR

Shipwrecks are apropos of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink conditioning, there surely would be less drowning at sea. Of us four in the dinghy, none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking on the dinghy, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a floundering ship we had also forgotten to eat. For these and many other reasons, neither the oiler nor I was fond of rowing any more.

I wondered how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat for recreation. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical torture.

THE CAPTAIN

Take her easy, now, boys. Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf, you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time. The keeper, if he's looking through a glass, ought to be able to make us out pretty clearly now

THE OILER (*addressing the correspondent*)

I can take over now. (*taking the oars from the correspondent who moves to sit in the stern next to the captain*) None of those other boats could have gotten to the shore ahead of us or else a boat would already be in the water searching for us.

NARRATOR

The land loomed closer. Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the growing thunder of the surf on the shore. The wind came up again; however, it was veering from the northeast to the southwest as if to block our passage.

(SFX: the volume of the waves becomes much louder and even thunderous right before they turn back.)

THE CAPTAIN

The wind's shifting. We'll never be able to make the shore now. Swing her head a little more north, Billie.

THE OILER

A little more north,' sir.

THE CAPTAIN

There don't seem to be any signs of life at the light house. Someone's got to be on duty.

THE COOK

Funny they don't see us!

THE CAPTAIN

Funny is not the right word. The sleeping, drunk bastard doesn't see us. The rocks will kill us for sure if he doesn't send a life-boat out here to pick us up.

THE OILER

Shall I go back, captain?

THE CAPTAIN

Agreed.

NARRATOR

This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf. There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water. The slim light-house grew smaller. Its light suddenly extinguished as the dawn began to break. The oiler won his fight against the tide, wind, and waves which were conspiring to smash our boat on the rocks encircling the lighthouse.

(SFX: Gradually lower the volume of the wind and sea as they get further from the shore.)

THE COOK

Well, anyhow, you'd think they must've seen us struggling by now.

THE CAPTAIN

More probably nobody saw us. If we survive this, I'll get that damn keeper fired.

NARRATOR

The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. We may have been spotted by the light house keeper and the alarm risen after all. In an hour, perhaps, we might be ashore. Also we had become so thoroughly used to balancing in the boat that we now rode it as gracefully as circus performers on their horses.

(The correspondent stands up to take off his coat when he finds in an inner pocket eight cigars. Four of them he throws overboard; the other four he displays proudly.)

THE CORRESPONDENT *(holding up the cigars like a trophy).*

Look what I found.

THE COOK *(holding up a small box of matches)*

And God be good. I saved these matches from the galley.

(They in turn, in a delicate choreography, lit the cigars and sat back to enjoy them with the correspondent holding the oiler's up to him to smoke while he continued rowing.)

NARRATOR

The indifferent gulls kept slanting their flights across our bow. A squall, marked by brick-red clouds, like smoke from a burning building, appeared in the southeast. It had been a long afternoon. A changed tide tried to pull us southward toward the squall, but wind and wave kept pushing northward.

*(The oiler tapped the correspondent
who took over the rowing.)*

THE CORRESPONDENT

Did you ever like to row, Billie?

THE OILER

Me? No. Never. I'd rather hug a burning hot engine any day. Are you ready for your break?

NARRATOR

At first when one exchanged the rowing-seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a strange bodily depression. There was cold sea-water swashing to and fro in the boat, and he lay in it. His head, pillowed by his elbow, was within an inch of the swirl of a wave crest, and sometimes a particularly obstreperous sea came on-board and reached his face.

But when it was my turn to be relieved, these matters did not occupy my exhausted mind. By then if the boat had capsized, I would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if it were a great soft mattress.

THE COOK

Look ahead there. I see houses. Is it St. Augustine?

THE CAPTAIN

We're still too near Mosquito Inlet, but let's head for 'em.

THE COOK

Look! There's a boy on the shore!

THE CAPTAIN

Where?

THE COOK

There! See 'im? See 'im?

THE CAPTAIN

Yes, sure! He's walking along.

THE COOK

Now he's stopped. Look! He's waving at us!

THE CORRESPONDENT (*getting up from the bottom of the boat*)
So he is! By thunder! (*waving toward shore*).

THE COOK

Ah, now, we're all right! Now we're all right!

THE CORRESPONDENT

He's running. He's going up to that house there.

THE CAPTAIN (*to the cook*)

Grab me that branch floating over there, and Cooky lend me your shirt.

(The Cook takes off his bright red plaid shirt [he's wearing a long john underwear top under it] and the captain puts the plaid shirt on the branch and waves it toward the shore.)

THE OILER

What's he doing now?"

THE CORRESPONDENT

The boy's standing still again. He's looking, I think. . . . There he goes toward the house. . . . Now he's stopped again.

THE OILER

Is he waving at us?

THE CORRESPONDENT

No, not now! he was, though.

THE COOK

Look! There comes a man outta tha house. He's running. Look at him go, would you. . .

THE CORRESPONDENT

Why, he's on a bicycle. Now he's met up with the boy. They're both waving. Look!

THE COOK

There's something else coming up the beach. It looks like a big boat on wheels.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Why, certainly it's a boat. That must be the lifeboat for sure on a wagon.

THE COOK

No, by -- -- , it's -- it's a bus of some sort.

THE CORRESPONDENT

It is a bus. I can plainly make it out now with bright letters on the side. One of those big hotel buses for the customers.

THE COOK

By thunder, you're right. It is a bus. Maybe they sent someone to notify the lifeboat-crew, what do you think?

THE OILER

That's it, most likely.

THE COOK

Look! There's a fellow standing on the steps of the bus waving a little white flag. There come those other two. Now they're all huddling together. Look at the fellow with the flag.

THE CORRESPONDENT

That isn't a flag, is it? That's some sort of pillow.

THE OILER

So it is. But would you look at him swinging it?

THE COOK

Oh, say, there ain't no life-saving station near here, is there? That's just a winter resort hotel bus that's brought the boarders to the beach for some entertainment to watch us drown. What's that idiot with the pillow trying to tell us?

THE CAPTAIN

It looks as if he were trying to tell us to keep goin' north.

THE COOK

No! I'll bet he's just giving us a merry hand.

THE OILER

Well, I wish I could make something out of them signals. What do you suppose he means?"

THE COOK

He don't mean nothin'. He's just playing.

THE OILER

Well, if he'd just signal us to try the surf, or to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go to hell -- there would be some sense in it. But look at him. He just stands there and keeps his pillow revolving in circles like a wheel. Whatta ass!

THE COOK

There come more people out of the bus. There's quite a mob. Look! Aren't boats wheeling down the beach off to the right?

THE CORRESPONDENT

Where? No, those aren't boats. They're the bath houses for swimmers.

THE COOK

That fellow is still waving his stupid pillow. Why don't he quit it. It don't mean nothin.

THE CAPTAIN

I don't know. I think he is trying to make us go north. It must be that's where the life-saving station is at.

THE COOK

Say, he ain't tired yet. Look at 'im go at it. Wonder how long he can keep that up. Why aren't they bringing a boat out. A fishing boat? One of those big luxury yawls could come out here easily. Why don't he do something?

NARRATOR

A faint yellow tone came into the sky over the low land. The shadows on the sea quickly darkened. The wind strengthened bearing coldness with it, and the men began to shiver as the wind and current took them further away from shore.

THE COOK

Holy smoke! Are they gonna make us flounder out here all night?

THE CAPTAIN

Oh, we'll never have to stay here all night! Don't you worry. They've seen us now, and it won't be long before they'll come chasing out after us.

NARRATOR

The shore grew dusky. The man waving the pillow blended gradually into this gloom which swallowed in the same manner the bus and the mob of people. The spray suddenly dashed uproariously over the side, slapping our faces and making us swear like men who were being branded.

THE COOK

I'd like to get a holda the chump that was waving at us. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck.

THE OILER

Why? What did he do?

THE COOK

Oh, nothing that helped us and that's my point.

NARRATOR

In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then I rowed, and then the oiler rowed preventing us from being blown further out to sea. Spray-faced and bowed forward, we mechanically, turn by turn, plied those leaden oars.

The form of the beach and hotel had vanished completely from the southern horizon now, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea. The streaked saffron in the west passed before the all-merging darkness, and the sea to the east was solid black. The land had vanished, and was expressed only by the low and distant quietly rolling thunder of the surf.

THE CORRESPONDENT (*lying on the floor of the dinghy murmuring*)
If I am going to be drowned -- if I am going to be drowned -- if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad sea gods?

THE CAPTAIN (*weary and low*)
Keep her head up. Keep her head up, Billie.

THE OILER
Keepin' her head up,' sir.

THE COOK
Billie, what kind of pie do you like best?

THE OILER
PIE, Don't talk about those things, blast you!

THE COOK: I was just thinking about a sausage sandwich, and what would go good with pie.

NARRATOR
A night on the sea in an open boat is a very long night. As darkness seemed to get no darker, the dull yellow glow lifted from the sea in the south. On the northern horizon a small bluish light grew. For us on the boat, these two lights were the entire furniture of the world. With two men huddled together in the stern, and distances were so minimal in the dinghy that the rower was able to keep his feet partly warmed by thrusting them under his companions' knees without waking them.

THE OILER (*meekly*)
Stephen, will you spell me for a little while?

THE CORRESPONDENT (*groggily*)
Sure, Billie.

(They changed positions sleepily almost tipping the boat this time.)

(SFX the wave and wind sound should be at its lowest sound level.)

NARRATOR

The waves came without snarling at them now. The obligation of the man at the oars was simply to keep the boat headed directly into them so that the tilt of the rollers would not capsize her or fill with any more water. The cook kept bailing as best he could.

THE CORRESPONDENT *(in a low voice)*

Captain, Are you awake?

THE CAPTAIN

Yep.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Shall I keep her headed for that glowing light in the north, sir?

THE CAPTAIN *(in the same steady voice)*

Keep it about two points off the port bow.

(The captain took off his jacket and put it around the cook who was sleeping next to him in the bow.)

NARRATOR

Presently it seemed that even the captain was dozing. I thought that I was the only man awake and afloat on all of the oceans of the world. The wind had its own voice as it rushed over the waves sweetly whispering for me to rest my eyes.

Which I did until I was rudely splashed awake.

There was a swish and a long gleaming knife of phosphorescence, like blue flame, following us over the black waters. Suddenly there was

another swish and another long flash of bluish light. This time it was alongside the boat and might have bumped my oar.

I looked up to see an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling crystalline spray and briefly stirring my slumbering companions. Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals long or short, the thing did not leave the vicinity of the boat.

THE CORRESPONDENT (*whispering to himself as a mantra*)

IF I am going to be drowned -- if I am going to be drowned -- if I am going to be drowned, **and** eaten, why, in the name of the seven mad gods, who rule the seas, was I allowed to come this far?

NARRATOR

Just then it occurred to me that nature did not regard me as important in the least. That my disappearance would not maim the universe one iota.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Yes, but I love myself.

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers;
There was lack of women's nursing, there was dearth of women's tears;
But a comrade stood beside him, while his life-blood ebbed away;
And bent, with pitying glances, to hear what he might say.
The dying soldier faltered, as he took that comrade's hand,
And he said: "I never more shall see my own, my native land:
Take this message to those distant lovers and friends of mine;
To where I was born at Bingen--at Bingen on the Rhine.

NARRATOR

I had never before considered it my affair in any way that a soldier of the French Foreign Legion lay dying in Algiers, certainly not as a matter for sorrow. It had been less to me than the breaking of a pencil point. Now, however, the poem became a human, living thing. Not the idle musings of a woman poet while sipping her tea and warming her feet at the stove's enameled grate.

I plainly saw instead the soldier's pale hand upon his chest in a futile attempt to thwart the flowing out of the red blood between his fingers, He lay on the sand with his feet out straight and still. In the far Algerian

distance, a city of low square forms outlined against a sky that was faint with the last of sunset's hues. I had a perfect comprehension of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier. I was deeply sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers far, far from home.

The thing which had followed the boat waiting for its capsizing had evidently grown bored at the delay. There was no longer to be heard the slash of the cut-water, and there was no longer the flame of the long trail. Northward, someone had evidently built a bon-fire on the beach. It made a shimmering, roseate reflection upon the bluff back of it. The wind came up stronger in his face to help speed the boat along to that destination.

THE CAPTAIN

Pretty long night.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Did you see that shark circling us?

THE CAPTAIN

He was a big fella, all right.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Wish I had known you were awake. Billie! Billie, will you spell me?

THE OILER

Sure thing.

THE CORRESPONDENT

If I ever get ashore and anybody shows me even a photograph of an oar, I'll poke him in the eye with a pen.

(They changed places.)

NARRATOR

As soon as I touched the cold, familiar sea-water in the bottom of the boat, I was deep in sleep. When I opened my eyes again, the sea and the sky were each the gray hue of the dawning. Later, carmine was painted upon the waters. The morning finally appeared, in its full splendor with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight mirrored on the golden tips of the waves. Better yet, on the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a

tall white wind-mill reared above them. No man, nor dog appeared on the beach. The cottages seemed to form a deserted village.

THE CAPTAIN

If no help appears in the next ten minutes, we might better try a run through the surf anyway. If we stay out here much longer, we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all. Now, listen up, boys. She is going to swamp for sure. All we can do is to work her in as far as possible, and then when she swamps, pile out and scramble for the beach. Don't jump until she swamps for sure.

THE OILER

Captain, I think I'd better bring her about, and keep her head-on to the seas and back her in.

THE CAPTAIN

All right, Billie. Back her in.

NARRATOR

The shore itself seemed indifferent to how we approached it face or rear forward. The monstrous rollers heaved the boat high until the men were again enabled to see the white sheets of water scudding down the slanted beach.

THE CAPTAIN

We won't get in very close. Now, remember to get well clear of the boat when you jump.

NARRATOR

Seaward a roller suddenly crested with a thunderous crash, and the long white comber came roaring down over the top of the boat. The boat filling with water still slid back up the incline leaped at the furious top, bounced over it, and swung down the long back of the waves.

The tumbling, boiling flood of white water of the next wave caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular. The little boat, drunken with this weight of water, started reeling in circles.

THE OILER

The next one will do us in, for sure.

NARRATOR

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. It fairly swallowed the dinghy whole, and almost simultaneously all of us tumbled into the sea. The coldness of the water was tragic. By itself it seemed a proper reason for tears. When I came to the surface it took me a minute or two to be conscious of my fellow companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the my left, the cook's great white back bulged out of the water, and in the rear the captain was hanging with his one good hand to the keel of the now inverted dinghy.

By contrast there was a sane, immovable quality to the shore itself. The shore with its white slope of sand and its green bluff, topped with little silent cottages was set like a bit of stage scenery ready for our entrances. However a countervailing current had caught hold of me and was pushing me back out to sea.

The oiler and the cook swept on ahead while I remained in the grip of this strange new enemy.

THE CORRESPONDENT

I am going to drown? I'm going to drown. Can it be possible? Can it be possible?

THE CAPTAIN

Come to the boat! Come to the boat!

NARRATOR

In my struggle to reach the captain and the boat just a few strokes beside me, I saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off.

THE CAPTAIN

Just hold on to the boat. It will wash us ashore.

THE CORRESPONDENT

All right, captain.

NARRATOR

Paddling toward the upturned boat, I performed the one little marvel of the voyage. A large wave caught me and flung me with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck me even then as a culminating event in gymnastics.

I now arrived in water that reached only to my waist, but this condition did not enable me to stand for more than a second or so. Each wave knocked me into a heap, and the under-tow insisted that I return to the deeper waters which had been my home for the last few days.

Then I saw the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water. He first dragged ashore the cook, and then waded toward the captain, but the captain waved him away, and sent him over to me. The man was nearly naked, naked as a tree in winter, and the surf's spray had created a halo about his head.

He reached out for my hand, gave a strong pull and released me from the waves' grip.

THE CORRESPONDENT

Thanks, old man.

THE RESCUER

What's that?

NARRATOR

Just ahead of us in the dreaded shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand between each wave bobbing clear of the sea. Almost instantly it seemed the beach was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffee-pots and all the remedies sacred to their minds. The welcome of the land to the surviving men washed up from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it would only be the hospitality of a dry grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice back to us who felt that we had earned the right to be its interpreters. Which I hope I have been for you this evening. Thank you for your attention.

THE END