

PROLOGUE - Night - Aboard the Arabian

[With curtains closed, sounds of THUNDER, WIND, and surging WAVES, which continue throughout the scene. Curtains open, as LIGHTNING flashes. Stage lights are dim, and the backdrop upstage is black. The set is a ship's deck, broadside, with a railing running across the back of the stage (representing the ship's starboard side). Ropes hang from the ceiling and connect to the railing at Stage Right and Stage Left. As curtains open, THOMAS, barefoot but wearing a storm coat, enters Stage Right, hurrying across the stage, but just before he exits Stage Left, ELIZABETH enters Right and shouts to him above the noise of wind and waves.]

**Elizabeth:** Thomas! Did the crew reef the sails? [shielding her eyes from the rain and sea spray]

**Thomas:** Aye, ma'am, all but the jib! I'm taking the helm watch now. The mate told us to keep her driving into the wind.

**Elizabeth:** Right, good man. [as GEORGE quickly enters Stage Right] We can't let the sea board our stern. [THOMAS exits Stage Left as GEORGE speaks to ELIZABETH.]

**George:** What are you doing?! You should be in your cabin! [LIGHTNING flashes again, and a great boom of THUNDER follows.]

**Elizabeth:** I've been below decks, and I fear we're taking on too much water! Did you batten down all the hatches?

**George:** Aye, as soon as we saw the storm coming!

**Elizabeth:** Well, we're leaking bad and the crew can't keep up! We need more men at the pumps!

**George:** I just sent three men to the fo'c'sle—I'll put them on the pumps instead.

**Elizabeth:** I hope that's enough! [FRANK enters Stage Left and hurries across the stage behind ELIZABETH and GEORGE.]

**George:** I'll oversee it myself—don't worry. [stops FRANK with a hand on his shoulder] Frank, I need you on the pumps.

**Frank:** Yes, sir. [quickly exits Stage Right]

**George:** That's four men—we'll be fine. Let's just thank our lucky stars we took on that cargo at Lisbon, or we might be in real danger!

**Elizabeth:** We should thank more than stars for that! We might have broached by now without enough cargo to stabilize us!

**George:** Well, thank whatever you want, just go back to your cabin and stay there! We don't want you washed overboard!

**Elizabeth:** [moving Stage Left] Fine, just get that water out of the hull!

**George:** Right, don't worry! The Arabian has seen many a squall worse than this, and she weathers every one! [LIGHTNING flashes again and the sound of THUNDER follows, as ELIZABETH exits Stage Left and GEORGE turns to exit Stage Right.]

[Curtain. The noise of WIND and WAVES slowly dwindles.]

SCENE ONE - Next morning - Aboard the Arabian

[With curtains closed, sound effects settle into a faint noise of WAVES gently lapping the ship's sides. Curtains open on the same set, except that the backdrop is now a light blue sky instead of black. A wooden bench, on which THOMAS sits, is now situated Upstage Center. When curtains open, ELIZABETH is standing Center Stage, tying a bandage around THOMAS's arm, and REBECCA stands nearby holding a bottle of ointment.]

**Elizabeth:** Is that tight enough? [GEORGE and JOSEPH, holding a map, enter Stage Left.]

**Thomas:** Yes'm, thanks.

**Elizabeth:** Good. Now get some rest. [THOMAS nods gratefully and exits Stage Right.]

**Joseph:** Mrs. Doran?

**Elizabeth:** Ah, there you are. What's our position?

**Joseph:** [opening the map to show her] Well, the storm blew us a few degrees north, but we're really not far off course.

**George:** And we're making good speed at the moment.

**Joseph:** I figure we'll be one day—maybe a day and a half—behind schedule. [FRANK enters Stage Right and approaches them.]

**Elizabeth:** [hopefully] Well, that's not bad.

**Frank:** [quickly, with a respectful nod] Sirs, Ma'am—there's a piece of wreckage drifting to starboard.

**George:** How large?

**Frank:** [eagerly] Not large at all, but there's a man on it.

**Elizabeth:** [All look shocked.] What?!

**Joseph:** Alive?

**Frank:** Aye. We maneuvered closer as soon as the lookout spotted him.

**George:** Have you dropped ropes down?

**Frank:** Yes, sir, we did. [to ELIZABETH] Permission to bring him onboard?

**Elizabeth:** Oh, yes, by all means! [FRANK instantly nods and exits Stage Right.]

**Joseph:** [quickly moving Stage Right with GEORGE] Poor fellow, adrift all the way out here!

**Rebecca:** [as JOSEPH and GEORGE hastily exit Stage Right] Who could he be?

**Elizabeth:** [as she and REBECCA move Upstage to the ship's railing and peer Stage Right] And how long has he been stranded, I wonder?

**Rebecca:** [pointing offstage Right] Oh, yes, there he is!

**Elizabeth:** Poor soul! [Some grunts and cheerful exclamations begin to be audible offstage Right, from JOSEPH, FRANK, GEORGE, and OWEN.]

**Rebecca:** [looks seriously at Elizabeth] I guess another ship got caught in the storm.

**Elizabeth:** [soberly] You're probably right. And it may not have been as fortunate as we were.

**Rebecca:** Exactly.

**Elizabeth:** If that's the case, this poor man's probably been drifting quite a few hours.

**Rebecca:** What a miracle he survived!

**Elizabeth:** [after a moment of thought] We'll need to keep our eyes open for other survivors.

**Rebecca:** [grimly] If there are any others. [The noises offstage Right increase, and JOSEPH and GEORGE enter Stage Right, followed by FRANK and OWEN who between them are supporting BEN, who looks cold, wet, and weary.]

**George:** Here, to the quarterdeck—let him sit.

**Rebecca:** [quickly, seeing BEN shivering] I'll get a blanket. [exits Stage Left.]

**Frank:** [The men help BEN sit down on the bench.] There you are, sir. [ELIZABETH sits down on the bench beside BEN, GEORGE kneels next to him, somewhat supporting him, and JOSEPH, OWEN, and FRANK stand nearby, ready to help if needed.]

**Ben:** [with some difficulty speaking] Thank you.

**Elizabeth:** He's parched—Frank, bring some water.

**Frank:** Yes, ma'am. [FRANK quickly exits Stage Right.]

**Joseph:** [kindly] It's alright, sir. We'll get you a drink and something to eat.

**Elizabeth:** And someone get dry clothes for him—he must be chilled to his bones.

**George:** Of course—Owen, get a clean set of clothes and lay them out in my cabin.

**Owen:** Yes, sir. [quickly exits Stage Left]

**Joseph:** We'll have you warm and dry before you know it.

**Elizabeth:** That's right. [kindly] You're safe here.

**Ben:** [fatigued and still shivering] Have you found any other castaways? [About now, a strange, concerned look suddenly enters GEORGE's face, and he begins watching BEN closely and uncomfortably.]

**Elizabeth:** No, you're the first. Are there likely to be more?

**Ben:** [grimly] No. [REBECCA enters Stage Left, carrying a blanket, and she and ELIZABETH drape it over BEN's shoulders.]

**Rebecca:** That should warm you a bit. [He nods gratefully.]

**Joseph:** Are you able to tell us what happened?

**Ben:** [heavily, with a weary nod] A storm.

**Joseph:** [nods] We were in it too—the outskirts.

**Ben:** We must've been in the heart of it. [FRANK quickly enters Stage Right with a cup of water and gives it to BEN.] Thank you. [FRANK exits Stage Right, and BEN takes a long drink, then sighs deeply.]

**Rebecca:** [aside, to ELIZABETH] I'll have cook fix him a warm meal.

**Elizabeth:** Oh thank you, Rebecca. [REBECCA exits Stage Left, and after giving BEN a few moments, ELIZABETH gently continues] Now. What can you tell us?

**Ben:** I was a passenger on the ship Vesper.

**Joseph:** A trade vessel?

**Ben:** Yes. Last night the storm came down on us like a hammer, and lightning struck our mast. [GEORGE, JOSEPH, and ELIZABETH look grim, hearing this.] It fell into the water and then it

pierced the hull, and we had to abandon ship. I hardly knew what I was doing, but I found driftwood, and it kept me afloat.

**Joseph:** [surprised] Were there no lifeboats?

**Ben:** Only one. [drops his gaze] And I saw it capsize in the waves.

**Elizabeth:** So you've no idea if anyone else survived? [OWEN enters Stage Left and stands to the side, listening and ready to help if needed]

**Ben:** No. There were about fifty onboard, I think.

**Elizabeth:** [half to herself] What a tragedy.

**Ben:** Yes. [after a moment, looking around] And...what ship is this? [glances at JOSEPH, then at GEORGE] Are you the captain, sir?

**George:** [shaken out of his uncomfortable silence] Uh, no...no, in a manner of speaking... [looks at ELIZABETH]

**Elizabeth:** [after a slight hesitation] I am. [BEN looks confused.] At least, this is my ship—it's the Arabian. It was my husband's ship, until he died.

**Owen:** [respectfully, in earnest] He was a fine captain. Never served a better.

**Elizabeth:** [with a grateful smile] Owen here is ship's steward. [indicating GEORGE and JOSEPH in turn] George Sanders is my first mate, and Joseph Yates is second. They do half the captain's work as well as their own.

**Ben:** [trying to take in all this, though still feeling weak] I see. And where are you sailing?

**Elizabeth:** To Charleston, South Carolina. We've got cargo onboard from England and Portugal.

**Ben:** [looking amazed and happy for the first time] Charleston! Why that's where the Vesper was heading!

**Elizabeth:** Really? Is that your final destination?

**Ben:** It is, I have family there! [REBECCA enters Stage Left and stands quietly near OWEN.]

**Joseph:** Well, I guess your driftwood carried you to the right ship, that's what!

**Ben:** [overwhelmed] Yes—and the goodness of God might have had something to do with it. [looks at them] I'm indebted to you all. [with a painful sigh] I don't know how much longer I could've stayed afloat.

**Elizabeth:** [with compassion] That was probably the longest night you've ever known.

**Ben:** [hesitates, sadly] I've known longer.

**Elizabeth:** [after a moment] Well, you must be in need of rest. [about to stand up, but GEORGE speaks]

**George:** Oh—one question. Where were you sailing from, in the Vesper?

**Ben:** Germany, from the port at Bremen.

**George:** [looks slightly unsettled by this, but immediately hides it] Ah. Had you been abroad for long?

**Ben:** [pauses] Very long. [They give BEN time to say more, but he looks weary and is silent.]

**Elizabeth:** [hesitantly] But, your family is in Charleston?

**Ben:** [slowly, with a small smile] Yes. My son. I'm going home to my son. [closes his eyes, clearly exhausted, and the cup accidentally slips from his hand] Oh, forgive me—I'm weak.

**Elizabeth:** [quickly] Yes, of course, we'll let you rest. [picks up the cup]

**Ben:** Thank you. [weakly trying to stand, GEORGE helps him]

**George:** We'll show you to my cabin. [JOSEPH and GEORGE support BEN as they exit Stage Left, and ELIZABETH follows until OWEN respectfully stops her.]

**Owen:** Ma'am, are you sure...he's safe?

**Elizabeth:** Do you think he's not?

**Rebecca:** [anxiously, with a glance at OWEN] He's probably alright, but...you never know.

**Owen:** There's just something...odd about him.

**Rebecca:** He could be a pirate or a convict or any number of things.

**Elizabeth:** Well, what choice do we have? We have to help him. [OWEN and REBECCA look hesitant.] He seems safe to me.

**Owen:** [reluctantly] I hope so.

**Rebecca:** I suppose all we can do is wait and see. [ELIZABETH nods, and they all three exit Stage Left.]

[Curtain.]

[END OF SCRIPT SAMPLE.]