

HACKETT STRAIGHT
A Play by John Fisher

Description

During World War II a young man comes of age in the waters off a small island in the South Pacific. This character is based loosely on John F. Kennedy.

Characters

(All characters are played by eight actors: seven men and one woman. The doubling is as follows.)

JERE, male, mid-twenties

DENISE/BENSON, female, mid-twenties

JIM SR./CAPTAIN JEPHETSON/MP, male, fifties

CHIEF, male, thirty

AYRES, male, twenties

ENRIGHT/MANN, male, twenty

HOLIDAY/MCGUIRE/AIRMAN, male, thirty

COMMANDER DEMARTINI, male, mid-forties

Setting and Time

The setting is Martha's Vineyard, the Great Lakes and the South Pacific

The time is 1942-1944

Hackett Straight is performed without intermission. The scenes flow one into the next without any break in the action.

Production Notes

A Note on the Stage: Many things are described in the play – boats, islands, beaches. They should all be indicated, enacted by the actors. Lighting and sound will of course help a lot, but the physical entities should be created by the director and performers through movement. A very few significant props are actual – a carton of chocolate milk, a can of red paint, a flare gun – otherwise, it is all an opportunity for creativity.

An Additional Note: There are a couple of small elevations needed – a place for AYRES to be on watch, a cot now and then. It would be nice to have a small, elevated area at center, about the length, height and width of a bench, which can come and go. It would also help to have a trap up center of the elevation for MANN's use when he goes below deck.

A Note on Inspiration: This play is inspired by Jack Kennedy's experiences during World War II. That said, it is absolutely a work of fiction, thus the names are made up and the historical actions freely reconceived and reinterpreted. I was concerned here with the psychology of a young man at war – his motives and reactions. I've always been fascinated by conflict as a test of moral character – that fascination has been my greatest inspiration, not the biography of young Kennedy. In this case the outlines of Kennedy's experiences have been employed to explore the psychology of someone going through a similar experience. We cannot know what Kennedy and his father Joe thought through all of this, so the play does not purport to say. It tells the story of Jere and Jim. The language is neither historical nor contemporary, but a mash-up. Thus it is a deliberate attempt to sound both period and pleasing to the modern ear. The confusion of terms and cadences is therefore deliberate.

(Yacht Club. Swank Party. We hear cocktail party sounds, dance music, very nice. No one visible but we hear it all. GIRL emerges from the darkness. Very pretty. She is dressed for a costume party, she is some kind of fish. GUY enters, also dressed as some kind of fish – big fin on his back, teeth drawn on his face with make-up, fangs. They both hold drinks. He crosses to her.)

Looking to get laid? GUY

Excuse me? GIRL

You're looking around. GUY

Yes. GIRL

Looking to get laid? GUY

You're a shark, aren't you? GIRL

No, actually I'm a whale. GUY

Whales don't have teeth. GIRL

You're avoiding the subject. GUY

So are you. Your costume's stupid. GIRL

You want to go sailing? GUY

You have a yacht? GIRL

I have a sailboat. GUY

GIRL
How big?

GUY
Ten feet. It's just me and a sail.

GIRL
No room to lay down.

GUY
I gave up on that. Forget I said it. It was rude. (He smiles.) Come on.

(She smiles. Lights change. They walk downstage. We hear the sound of wind and waves, gentle, against a dock. He wipes off his shark teeth. She removes her hat and looks at him.)

GIRL
I like you better without teeth.

GUY
It was a stupid idea. My brother put me up to it.

GIRL
The shark outfit?

GUY
No, the getting laid line. That shit works for him.

GIRL
Well, you can help me into the boat.

(He steps downstage into the boat – all of this is indicated, no props. He has to balance himself before he offers her his hand. She joins him in the boat, and sits on the floor of it, making rocking motions. He busies himself with rigging the mainsheet - from the stern block to the boom, to the mast, then down to the hull, through floor block and into his hand. He sits beside her facing off stage left and reaches across her to stage right to grab the tiller. He has the mainsheet in one hand and the tiller in the other. It is awkward working across her.)

GUY
You want to take the tiller?

GIRL
The tiller?

GUY

The helm. Take the helm.

(She smiles and takes the tiller. He leans behind her and unfastens the painter from the dock cleat and casts off, pushing away from the dock. The rocking increases, the two of them in sync. He pushes out the boom to catch the wind and holds it out until we hear the wind increase and he makes the motion of the boom pulling away from him towards stage left. He lets the boom go as his right hand pulls in on the mainsheet. With his tightening of the mainsheet the wind gets louder and they take off – they show they are shooting forward by leaning back. She laughs with excitement. The boat is really moving. As it heels over with the wind they have to lean back away from the audience, to keep the boat trim. They are really moving now. The wind is louder and she laughs more and more.)

GUY

Hold her fast.

GIRL

It's hard to hold.

GUY

The harder to hold the faster we'll go.

(She really pulls on the tiller, he tightens the mainsheet and they have to lean way back to hold her steady. They make slight wave motions but mostly the tension is in their bodies pulling and leaning out to hold her on the wind with their strength and their weight. They must shout to be heard.)

GIRL

This is great!

GUY

What?

GIRL

I said, "This is great!"

GUY

You ready to come about?

GIRL

What?

Come about. Turn around. GUY

Why? GIRL

We're about to crash into Nantucket. GUY

Oh, my God GIRL

Ready to come about? GUY

What do I do? GIRL

When I say "Hard a lee!" you shove that away from you and as the boat turns you shift sides. GUY

Oh, my God. GIRL

Here we go. Ready to come about? Say it back. GUY

Ready to come about. GIRL

Hard a lee. GUY

(And she shoves the tiller away from her, downstage. He draws in the mainsheet quickly and then shoves her head down to avoid the boom quickly passing over them, he then takes her about the waist and seats her with her back to the audience facing the opposite direction, stage right. He sits beside her. During this motion we hear the sail luffing and the wind fade, then, when they have switched sides the wind gushes again and the luffing ends in a load snap! She screams with delight. He laughs. They are now speeding the opposite direction from before.)

That was wonderful! GIRL

Hey, hey!
GUY

In-fucking-credible!
GIRL

You're sailing, girl!
GUY

Denise.
GIRL

You're sailing, Denise!
GUY

What's your name?
DENISE

Jere!
GUY

You're gorgeous, Jere!
DENISE

(She throws her arms around him, releasing the tiller in the process. The boat is thrown into turmoil, as it loses direction with the loss of her steering on the rudder. They both lose their balance, we hear the luffing again and the wind dies down. They seem about to capsize but he grabs her about the waist and they huddle in the middle of the boat and face the audience. The boat has stopped. Only the sound of lapping water is heard.)

What happened?
DENISE

You let go.
JERE

Scary. We almost sank.
DENISE

We almost capsized. We can't really sink. Never let go of the tiller.
JERE

Ok.
DENISE

Set a course for the lighthouse. JERE

Set a course? DENISE

Head toward the light. JERE

Ok. DENISE

All set? JERE

Yeah. DENISE

(He draws in the mainsheet as she takes the helm and they once again sit with their backs to audience as if the boat were racing towards stage right. The wind is tremendous. She is laughing again. She stops.)

That lighthouse! DENISE

Yeah? What about it? JERE

It's moving. DENISE

Can't be. It's a lighthouse. JERE

It's moving. DENISE

(He looks.)

It's moving towards us. DENISE

Jesus! Give me that. JERE

(He grabs the tiller and changes the direction of the boat, directly towards us. Just as they complete this maneuver we hear a tremendous horn. Deafening. This is followed by a different sound, a churning sound, mechanical. A light passes through the darkness from right to left way above their heads. Another deafening horn and they pitch downstage, as if the boat had been lifted by a huge force passing downstage, a wave. She screams. They are in the water. He is face down on the stage, she is on her back. We hear a louder churning sound, and then it grows faint. After it passes we hear only the waves. He thrashes about on the stage. There is nothing dancery to these movements, they are desperate, percussive, not stylized – let the stage and its flatness be the challenge of this capsizing. The actors should move on the stage as they would move in the water. The motion should be determined by the limitations of the stage itself. They are both thrashing about, gasping for air. The water sound is oppressive.)

Help me. DENISE

Can you swim? JERE

Yes. DENISE

Just keep your head up. JERE

Where's... Where's the boat? DENISE

Put your arms around my neck. JERE

Ok. DENISE

(She places her arms around his neck. She is beside him on the stage holding him around the neck. He is paddling and looking about.)

Did it sink? DENISE

No. JERE

How do you know? DENISE

Can't sink. It has air pockets. JERE

Where is it? DENISE

It's probably upside down. We'll find it. Hold on. JERE

I don't see anything. DENISE

We're still in the wake of it. JERE

Of what? DENISE

That ship. JERE

What the fuck happened? DENISE

Hold on. JERE

I have a stupid question? DENISE

What's that? JERE

Are their sharks around here? DENISE

No. JERE

Ok. DENISE

JERE

Hold on.

(He is making breaststrokes on the stage, moving towards the audience.
The water is quieter, less churning, calm. It is dark.)

DENISE

You trying to swim in?

JERE

No.

DENISE

Why not?

JERE

Too far. Quiet please.

DENISE

What?

JERE

Please be quiet. I'm listening.

(She gets quiet. Calm water. We hear a gentle lapping from stage left. He
cocks his ear left. He gently paddles with his left hand with his ear cocked
left.)

DENISE

Can I talk?

JERE

Yes.

DENISE

I have a stupid question.

JERE

Yes.

DENISE

Are we going to drown?

JERE

Here's the boat.

(He is holding something to the left of him.)

You're kidding. DENISE

Yes, here it is. JERE

I can't see it. DENISE

It's turtled. Here, hold on. JERE

Ok. DENISE

(He works his way around the boat to the other side until he is facing her, holding onto the boat from the stage left side as she holds it from the stage right side. He reaches over and holds her hand. They catch their breath.)

How you doing? JERE

Freaked out. DENISE

Yeah. JERE

What happened? DENISE

Got run down by a freighter. JERE

Why didn't they stop? DENISE

Probably never saw us. JERE

Can I ask you a question? DENISE

JERE

I'm going to let go of you so I can right the boat. You'll have to swim away, maybe ten feet. Don't worry, I can see you. I won't lose site of you. Trust me.

DENISE

No.

JERE

Ok, I'm letting go.

(He lets go and she screams. She grabs the boat. He stares at her.)

DENISE

You want me to let go and swim away, don't you?

JERE

Ten feet. I can see you.

DENISE

No way.

JERE

The mast is under you. You have to get out of the way so I can right it.

DENISE

Would you stop saying that like I know what you mean. I don't understand what the fuck you're talking about.

JERE

The mast, with the sail on it, is under the water. I pull on the keel, this thing, and put my weight on it from this side, the boat slowly falls my direction and the mast comes up on your side. Then we have the boat again, upright, righted. Then we get in the boat, then we go home.

DENISE

All right, I got it. I'm just going to swim over here, get out of the way a little bit, but not ten feet.

JERE

That's fine.

DENISE

Here I go.

(He puts his weight on the keel, which draws him up on his knees. He holds the keel in his hands and stands on the gunwale of the over turned

boat. He rocks it back and forth and then he smiles as he feels it righting itself. The righting forces his butt towards the stage as he draws the keel towards him. Soon he falls away towards stage left and we hear the sound of the mast and sail rising from the water and flapping once again in the breeze over their heads. As it rises slowly she cries out in excitement and relief. Soon she is looking over her head at the righted mast. She is ecstatic, not just relieved but truly excited by what has just happened. She's been rescued!)

DENISE

That's great!

JERE

We've righted the boat.

DENISE

Great.

(She starts to climb in. He grabs the other side of the boat, quickly.)

JERE

Wait. We have to get in together or it will capsize on top of you.

DENISE

Ok.

JERE

One, two, three.

(She struggles into her side of the boat. He much more carefully climbs in his side to balance her weight. Finally they tumble into the boat. She is panting on the floor. He immediately begins resetting the rigging, tiller and keel.)

DENISE

That was a-fucking-mazing!

JERE

Yeah.

DENISE

My hero.

JERE

Give me a break.

DENISE

That was incredible. That was the scariest thing that ever happened to me.

JERE

Cool.

DENISE

My nipples are hard.

JERE

Ok.

(She throws her arms around him.)

DENISE

You looking to get laid?

(He squirms out of her arms.)

JERE

Look, uh, we should get back.

DENISE

You rescued me.

JERE

Yeah, well, I should get you back.

(She kisses him. He is reluctant at first, then he responds.)

DENISE

You're a good kisser.

JERE

Thanks.

(She kisses him again. He cries out and grabs his back.)

JERE

Shit!

DENISE

You ok?

JERE

Yeah.

You're not. DENISE

I... JERE

What's wrong? DENISE

It's my back. Shit! JERE

Um... DENISE

Look... Uh... Get the mainsheet. JERE

(She grabs the mainsheet.)

OK. We're going to go slow. Ok? My back hurts like shit. JERE

Why? DENISE

Football injury. Draw in the mainsheet and set a course for the dock. The little blue light. JERE

Ok. DENISE

Easy does it. JERE

(They are sailing again, she with the tiller and mainsheet, he with his hand on his back groaning. The wind increases. The only place for him to lie in the small boat is between her legs, with his head on her thigh.)

You're rescuing me. JERE

(She smiles.)

DENISE
Your father's Ambassador Brennan, isn't he?

JERE
Yeah.

DENISE
I know your brother.

JERE
Jim?

DENISE
Yeah.

JERE
He's going to be president one day. According to my father.

(Pause. They sail. She really has mastered the boat, working the tiller, confident in the moves.)

DENISE
I like you better.

JERE
Really?

DENISE
Yeah.

JERE
Everybody loves Jim.

DENISE
You're more real.

(They sail. Lights fade.)

(New location: the cyc shows an arc of shoreline with houses dotting it. JIM SENIOR saunters on stage smoking a cigar. He wears a dinner jacket, is in his mid-fifties, in the prime of life. He looks out to sea, off stage left. He puffs on his cigar. He sees something, looks perplexed and then retreats into the shadows. JERE and DENISE enter. She is supporting him on her shoulder, he can barely walk.)

DENISE

How's this?

JERE

Great. Great. (He collapses, catches his breath.) I'd invite you in but my mother doesn't believe young ladies should arrive from the surf.

DENISE

(Looking off right)

Nice place.

JERE

If this lawn could talk.

DENISE

What would it say?

JERE

Mostly shit about my brother. And every deb on the eastern seaboard.

DENISE

So I've heard. He's in Europe right?

JERE

England, yes. Air Corps.

DENISE

You going to join him?

JERE

No, I'm going to the South Pacific. Next week.

DENISE

That's exciting. (She sits beside him, close.) Wish I could come with you.

JERE

As my personal WAVE?

DENISE

Yeah.

(She kisses him. He responds. Suddenly he cries out, grabbing his back, annoyed)

DENISE

You keep doing that.

JERE

Yeah, it's fucked up.

DENISE

Jim's head could fall off, he'd keep kissing you.

JERE

Jim's dick could fall off he'd keep fucking you. Sorry. That was crude.

DENISE

I like that.

JERE

What?

DENISE

Jim's dick without Jim. Sounds nice. It's what comes out of his mouth not his dick that is so annoying. Here.

(She starts to move him. He resists.)

DENISE

No, wait, you should be on your back.

JERE

Yes.

DENISE

Then let me help you.

(She eases him onto his back. He lies there and finally stops groaning. She lies beside him.)

DENISE

Now turn your head this way.

(He turns his head towards her.)

DENISE

Now, without moving anything else, kiss me.

(They kiss, laying side by side, just the lips, no arms or bodies moving at all. They do this for a while. He moves his arm to touch her. He cries out before he can make contact.)

Just lay there. DENISE

My mother would love this. JERE

Arms at sides. DENISE

Yes. JERE

(They kiss again.)

I don't think tongues are connected to the back. DENISE

I agree. JERE

(They kiss deeply. He groans.)

What? DENISE

Nothing. JERE

You groaned. DENISE

I'm enjoying myself. Happy groan. JERE

Oh. DENISE

(They kiss some more. We hear coughing from the shadows. DENISE stands bolt upright. JIM SR. emerges from right.)

Sir DENISE

Young Lady. JIM

DENISE

Your son hurt his back.

JIM

Where did you come from, darlin'?

(She is nervous. She points vaguely towards the beach.)

JIM

You came from the sea? Good place. So you're mythological.

(She laughs, shakes her head.)

JIM

Semi-mythological.

(More laughter. He laughs.)

JERE

She came from the country club, Dad. (To DENISE) I'll take you back. Let's go.

(JERE stands.)

JIM

Wait a second, Jere.

JERE

Come on.

JIM

I'm Ambassador-

JERE

She knows who you are. (To DENISE) Please wait for me at the boat.

DENISE

Good night, sir.

JIM

Good night, princess. Give my regards to Atlantis.

(She exits smiling.)

JERE

Were you watching?

JIM

Don't be vain.

JERE

You're a fucking ambassador, not a spy.

JIM

And you're nailing a deb on my lawn is hardly a case of national security.

JERE

Forget it.

JIM

How old are you?

JERE

What?

JIM

I asked you-

JERE

Are you kidding?

JIM

You act like a twelve year old.

JERE

Do you even know my name?

JIM

I was twelve when I was making out with girls on my dad's lawn.

JERE

Do you even hear yourself?

JIM

I'm not the one who was caught with his hand up a girl's skirt.

JERE

I didn't have... Why don't you go inside?

JIM

Don't talk to me like that.

(Pause. JERE just stares at him and smirks.)

JIM

Are you laughing at me, young man?

JERE

When I was ten years old I caught you with another woman.

JIM

That's horseshit.

JERE

I was spying. It runs in the family, I guess. You were always so mean to Mom I wanted to know what the hell was going on. I had no idea. I just... intuited that you were stepping out on her with another woman.

JIM

Shut up-

JERE

So I hid in the back seat of your car one day when you went into the city. But you didn't go into the city. You went to Sag Harbor. To your partner's house, where we went one Christmas Eve for cocktails or something. You picked up his wife, his second wife, she's half his age and has long straight blond hair and she was dressed for Christmas that day, for Christmas. A woman I've only seen dressed for Christmas. Long skirt, little jacket, tiny hat with a veil, and all of it red, even the veil. Red. All of it. Except the fur, that was black, with a brooch, a silver jubilee brooch with a likeness of King George. I saw it up close because she threw it in the back seat. I looked at it the whole way into New York. All the way to the Pierre. Where you fucked her in a suite of rooms. Drove her to the Pierre and had sex with her. I listened outside the door. I heard you, through the door, in the distance. It was a huge suite, must have cost a lot, but I could hear you faintly groaning. She didn't make any sound. None that I could hear. Nothing.

JIM

Jere.

JERE

What?

JIM

Your name's Jere.

JERE

You just remembered it?

JIM

You try having nine kids.

JERE

Are you serious?

JIM

I was joking. It was time for a joke. I should ring your neck for that story.

JERE

Why don't you?

JIM

Because I liked it. I liked feeling the rush of blood to my face as you told it. I felt... I felt like you had a personality. Finally. I respect that story. When you're my age you appreciate any jolt to the system, even if it's humiliation.

JERE

I gotta go.

(He starts to leave, grabs his back in pain, sits on the lawn.)

JIM

Sit a minute. Let the spasm pass. That was your brother's game. Take 'em out on a boat and lay them on an island somewhere.

JERE

I'll see ya.

JIM

Not his mother's front lawn.

JERE

Jim did 'em here too, Pop.

JIM

Really? I never knew that.

JERE

There's a lot you don't know.

JIM

What does that mean, kid?

JERE

Exactly what I said. You don't know us.

JIM

Well... Here's what I know about your brother. Twinkle Toes I used to call him. He came to me one night and told me he wanted to be a dancer. A ballroom dancer. That's when I decided kids were stupid. I told your mother, I said, "Keep 'em away from me. Until they're old enough to screw the maid. When you catch them screwin' the maid bring them to me for a talking to, otherwise, keep them the hell away from me. Such a fuckin' waste of time."

JERE

Is that the way you feel about us now?

JIM

You're not screwin' the maid, are you?

JERE

You mean the one you're screwin'?

(JIM laughs.)

JIM

When did you turn into such a son-of-a-bitch?

JERE

My first term at Harvard. Friend of mine, Harvey Sallister. He actually cried the first night away from home. He'd never been away from home, he missed... He actually missed his parents. I didn't know such a thing was possible.

JIM

Ok. Will you miss me this time? When you go away?

JERE

Probably. I don't want to.

JIM

But you will.

(Pause. JIM sits.)

JIM

Jere. Look. About this navy thing.

JERE

Yeah?

JIM

Don't screw it up. Jim's a big guy, he's been around, he'll come home a hero. I don't need... I don't expect that from you. Just come home, come home in one piece, and don't embarrass us. Like that Waverly boy. Of course nobody's supposed to know this but he dove off a pier first sight of a Jap plane. They sent him home. Asshole Kent Waverly says he's home to work for the State Department. Horse poop. Don't fuck up like that. Don't jump off a pier.

JERE

Jesus, Dad.

JIM

You understand?

JERE

I wouldn't do that.

JIM

I don't know what the hell you'd do.

JERE

What does that mean?

JIM

Exactly what I said, young man. I don't know anything about you.

JERE

Because you're never around.

JIM

I'm around.

JERE

For Jim. It's always been Jim. And we all knew it.

JIM

He's my firstborn, that means something.

JERE

Too much. You stroked his hair, when he went to sleep at night. You sat beside him and stroked his hair.

JIM

I did that with all you boys.

JERE

You didn't, Dad. At least, not with me.

JIM

You should get that young lady home.

JERE

Why do you hate me?

JIM

I don't hate you. Don't be ridiculous.

JERE

Then why didn't you get me a better commission?

JIM

You were working at the Pentagon, for Christ's sake.

JERE

I got that myself. And this. PT-Boats? I got that on my own. I could be on a battleship. Or with Halsey's carriers in the South Pacific. Why didn't you get me a better commission?

JIM

I don't know anyone.

JERE

You know everyone, Dad. Why couldn't you help me?

JIM

Remember what I said.

JERE

I'm going nowhere. Nowhere. To some sideshow, a backwater. And it's all because you're too lazy to pick up the phone, you're too frightened I'll embarrass you. What the hell have I ever done to make you think I would do that? Embarrass you.

JIM

I don't know you. I... I don't help people I don't know.

(JIM shrugs his shoulders and exits. DENISE enters.)

DENISE

God, I'm so embarrassed.

JERE

He doesn't care. He really doesn't. He likes you.

Yeah?
DENISE

Yeah. So do I.
JERE

How's your back?
DENISE

Fine. So long as I don't move.
JERE

Does this happen all the time?
DENISE

When I'm stressed. Or tired. Or sick.
JERE

That's rough.
DENISE

Yeah, but also not.
JERE

Oh, yeah? (Curious)
DENISE

I used to be lazy, mentally. I didn't think right. Everything was handed to me, my whole life, so I didn't think. I just took. Then I became something, I changed.
JERE

How's that?
DENISE

I fell during a game of football. In college. Essentially I broke my back. Effectively it was ruined for life. A useless back. But I refused to be a useless person. I refused to sit this one out. My life. I refused to sit this life out. You see, I'm Catholic. I get another life. I do. But this one was too important. My broken back gave me the message that I could have a free ride in this life. I would never have to prove myself because I was crippled. I could sit this one out and wait for the next one. But I refused. So that was my defining moment. When I broke my back. It gave me... It gave me something to fight against. It was the first time something was taken away from me. And I didn't like it.
JERE

DENISE

Wow. I guess I haven't thought that much about stuff. For me college was silly, just a lot of flirting and trying to find a husband. I remember... I remember sitting in the library on Saturday mornings, when everyone else had a hangover, and reading art books – Michelangelo and Van Gogh. It was my favorite time of life. My first favorite time. And impressing my art teacher. Telling him about Van Gogh's blood hot sun. He liked that: "blood hot."

JERE

Did you want to be painter?

DENISE

Yes, as a matter of fact. But my teacher said I should be a critic. An art critic. How about that for a crazy profession?

JERE

Better than a wife.

DENISE

Wow, you are a radical. I think you're wonderful. I do. That boat and your calm in the water. I loved it. It was... it was an adventure.

JERE

Happens all the time.

DENISE

Does it? That you're in deep water responsible for another person and you remain so calm? So focused. You were magnificent.

JERE

You were my responsibility.

DENISE

I felt that. I felt that anything could happen, and it would be ok. That you wouldn't leave me, you wouldn't get all selfish and worry only about yourself.

JERE

I should take you home.

DENISE

In the boat?

JERE

If you want.

DENISE

Is it dangerous?

JERE

Not any more. I wasn't paying attention before. This time I will.

DENISE

Ok.

JERE

It was my fault before. We shouldn't have been there, farting around in the shipping channel. I was negligent.

DENISE

But you fixed it. You made a mistake but you fixed it.

JERE

I got lucky.

DENISE

You made your own luck.

JERE

You are like a sibyl, you know that?

DENISE

What's a sibyl?

JERE

Someone who sees. Some who knows things.

DENISE

I only see when I believe. That's what my Mom says. When I believe in something I can see it, I can see everything about it.

JERE

Ok, get me back in the water. I do better in the water than on shore.

(She hoists him up and they exit. Blackout. We hear a boson's whistle, then a bugle calling reveille. CAPTAIN JEPHETSON enters looking at printed orders. JERE is behind him dressed as a Navy Ensign.)

JEPHETSON

Brennan? Aren't you Ambassador Brennan's son?

JERE

I'm very proud to be assigned here, sir.

JEPHETSON

Jesus, Brennan, boys with your connections-

JERE

I want command of my own vessel, sir. PT-Boats are my dream.

JEPHETSON

Your dream? This is a nightmare assignment, kid. We're called the suicide squad.
(Handing JERE back his orders) Write to your father, boy. This is not the place for you.

JERE

With all due respect, sir, I had to pull every string I could to get here.

JEPHETSON

Listen, Brennan. Officers in this outfit are the opposite of Harvard boys. They're hard scramblers who went to state schools and showed initiative. You don't belong here.

JERE

This is my dream, sir. The rough and tumble. I wanted to be here because of me, not my father.

(Pause.)

JEPHETSON

Ok, boy. I'll assign you to Commander Holiday.

JERE

Thank you, sir

JEPHETSON

Don't thank me, Brennan. You'll be writing the Ambassador in a week begging for reassignment.

(COMMANDER HOLIDAY enters and mounts a dais. He holds a carton of chocolate milk, from which he will swig freely, and a gallon of red paint, which he sets down.)

HOLIDAY

Welcome to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, gentlemen. Nursery School. That's why I like my chocolate milk. Because I'm teaching nursery school, you faggots. Now you college boys have been sent here to be made PT-Boat skippers and it's my prerogative to sign off on you or ship you off to admin jobs in some hellhole like San

Diego. Exactly one of you will be sent to the South Pacific to command, the rest will stay state side. And push paper. I wish you luck, children. Mr. Brennan.

JERE

(From audience)

Yes, sir.

HOLIDAY

You'll have the first crack at failure. Join me on stage.

(JERE hops onstage.)

HOLIDAY

Brennan.

JERE

Yessir.

HOLIDAY

You'll take the turtle boat. (To audience) Children don't get PT-Boats, you get turtle boats. PTs are for adults. (To JERE) Your objective is to get close enough to my PT-Boat to get some red paint on it. (Hands him the can.) Here's your weapon, Country Club. Do you understand?

JERE

Yessir.

HOLIDAY

This red paint on the deck of my PT-Boat. Does that make sense?

JERE

Yessir.

HOLIDAY

All right, shove off.

JERE

Yes, sir.

HOLIDAY

I have one bit of advise for you... for all of you. Don't trust your crews. They're lazy and stupid.

(HOLIDAY exits sipping chocolate milk. JERE picks up red paint and crosses to his crew, CHIEF and AYRES, both dressed in sailor's outfits, who meet him stage left.)

Hey, Ensign. CHIEF

Hey, sir. AYRES

You know how to start this thing? JERE

Yeah. CHIEF

All right. Let's get going. JERE

(CHIEF moves as if he was jumping into the cockpit of the turtle boat. AYRES gets in beside him. Once again the vessel, like all the vessels, is created through movement. They are facing the audience as if they were steering the boat towards us. JERE has gotten in beside them. CHIEF is at the wheel. We hear the put-put of the turtle boat motor.)

Where we headed, sir? CHIEF

What? JERE

Course, sir? CHIEF

Just keep her close in to shore. I don't want anyone to see us coming. (To AYRES) You, get up there and keep a lookout. JERE

(AYRES looks at CHIEF, they exchange a smirk, and AYRES goes "aloft," standing on the elevation just upstage of JERE and CHIEF such that he's a little bit higher than them.)

Where're we headed? CHIEF

Don't worry about where we're headed, sailor. Keep close in. JERE

AYRES

(Pointing out)

PT-Boat, dead ahead, sir. Looks like Commander Holiday's.

JERE

Where?

AYRES

Just the other side of this point, sir.

JERE

Can she see you?

AYRES

Negative, sir.

JERE

Cut the motor.

(CHIEF shuts the motor off. JERE climbs up beside AYRES.)

JERE

Where?

AYRES

There, sir.

JERE

Too far.

AYRES

We could-

JERE

If we were under sail we could approach, silent, they wouldn't hear us.

CHIEF

But they'd sure see us.

JERE

Disassemble this antenna. All of it. Take it down. I don't want anything visible above the tress.

(AYRES reluctantly begins taking apart the antenna and rigging.)

JERE

(To CHIEF)

All right, sailor, break out the oars, the next mile we row in, quiet like. Before we charge him I want to get close enough that his superior speed won't help him get away.

CHIEF

There's the base across the sound, sir. They'll see us.

JERE

I don't care about the base, Chief. So long as Holiday doesn't see us, or hear us. Get to work.

CHIEF

Base passes all scuttlebutt on to Holiday, sir.

JERE

That wouldn't exactly be fair, Chief.

CHIEF

Stands to reason, sir.

JERE

Break out the oars, Chief.

(JERE's side of the stage goes dark, HOLIDAY's PT-boat now visible stage left. HOLIDAY and ENRIGHT, a sailor, stand in his boat. ENRIGHT hands HOLIDAY a dispatch. HOLIDAY reads.)

HOLIDAY

All right, Enright. Warm-up the engines. Get ready to scoot.

(He swigs his chocolate milk.)

(JERE and crew stage right rowing the turtle boat. It is hard work. A few strokes, then JERE stands up.)

JERE

Ok, around this point, sailor?

AYRES

Yessir.

JERE

Chief, get ready to start the motor. Sailor, stand by forward with red paint. We'll charge her before he gets her engines warmed up. Sailor, don't wait till we're close enough to pour it. Throw the bucket with the lid off. I want red all over Holiday's deck.

AYRES

Yessir.

(HOLIDAY and ENRIGHT in the PT-Boat, their engine warmed-up and idling. They wait.)

ENRIGHT

(Pointing out)

Turtle boat, dead ahead, sir. She's charging us.

HOLIDAY

Ok. Open her up. Get us out of here.

(ENRIGHT throws down the throttle and the PT-Boat's engine roars. HOLIDAY raises his chocolate milk in salute to JERE and swigs it.)

(JERE and crew in his boat, their motor pattering along, now visible simultaneously with HOLIDAY's boat. AYRES stands down of JERE and CHIEF holding red paint.)

JERE

Son-of-a-bitch!

(HOLIDAY laughs and waves over his shoulder as if JERE's boat were behind his. JERE's boat is chasing HOLIDAY's, though they both face out, side by side.)

JERE

Full throttle!

CHIEF

Sir.

JERE

Hit it, Chief!

CHIEF

Sir-

(JERE shoves CHIEF aside and rams down the throttle. The turtle boat's motor screams in agony. HOLIDAY is laughing.)

JERE

Get ready to throw that thing, Ayres!

AYRES

Ready!

(HOLIDAY depresses the PT-Boat's throttle a little. He and ENRIGHT lean back as their engine gets louder.)

JERE

Dammit!

(JERE slams down his throttle to full. The scream of his motor becomes a deafening screech. CHIEF and AYRES cover their ears.)

JERE

Sailor, keep your goddam hands on that paint!

(AYRES picks up paint but shouts at the top of his lungs to try to equalize the pressure of the screeching motor. CHIEF reaches out to ease up the throttle but JERE shoves him away. HOLIDAY looks over his shoulder concerned. JERE begins to smile. JERE's gaining on HOLIDAY despite JERE's weaker motor. Then suddenly the turtle boat's motor makes a loud scraping noise and putt-putts out to silence and stops. It's dead. HOLIDAY laughs and turns his back on JERE. Blackout on HOLIDAY's boat. JERE shouts with frustration as PT-Boat's engine fades in the distance. JERE throws his hat on the deck. CHIEF and AYRES smile.)

(JERE leaves his boat and crosses to meet HOLIDAY center.)

HOLIDAY

(Offering him a sip of his milk)

Chocolate milk, Ensign?

JERE

Permission to speak freely, sir.

HOLDIAY

Go ahead.

JERE

You had your engines warmed-up. You knew we were coming because you had a spy at the base.

HOLIDAY

(Sarcastic)

You mean the enemy has intelligence? Initiative? Unbelievable, Brennan. Never happens.

JERE

No enemy has that kind of intelligence. That's dirty pool, sir-

HOLIDAY

Guess again, nimrod. Rowing and charging? Fuck you. Strike One, Yacht Club. Get dry. Tomorrow: 1500. Objective: PT-Boat. Weapon: Red paint.

(JERE starts to walk away.)

HOLIDAY

Oh, and Prince Brennan, you blow out another motor on one of my turtle boats I'll place you under arrest: damaging government property.

(JERE crosses to CHIEF and AYRES.)

JERE

Unload the boat, take off anything inessential.

(CHIEF looks at AYRES.)

AYRES

We're taking it out of the water, sir?

JERE

Just do it.

CHIEF

You heard the skipper.

(AYRES starts moving crates out of boat area.)

JERE

I'm going upriver of Holiday's position. I'll meet you on the frontage road in an hour. A friend from the motor pool will be here in twenty minutes to get you out of the water. Step lively. You heard me.

CHIEF

Yessir.

(HOLIDAY and ENRIGHT in PT-Boat. ENRIGHT hands him dispatch. HOLIDAY reads it and smiles.)

HOLIDAY

All right, Sailor. Get me a chocolate milk.

(CHIEF, AYRES and JERE are struggling to push boat back into the water. It slides away from them, we hear it slosh in water. They jump as if from shore onto boat.)

JERE

Ok, Chief, open her up. Head down river to Holidays' position. He'll have to get past us to get up river and I want you to intercept him, ram him if necessary.

CHIEF

Sir?

JERE

You got a problem with that?

CHIEF

No sir, only-

JERE

(Nudging CHIEF aside, impatiently)

Never mind. I'll take the helm. (To AYRES) Sailor, put the paint out on the bow.

AYRES

You want me to throw it if we get close?

JERE

No, just put it there. I'll run forward and do the honors myself. You two get behind me and stay out of my way.

(He throws the throttle down angrily and the motor putt-putts loudly.)

(HOLIDAY's boat appears left. ENRIGHT is at the helm; HOLIDAY sips chocolate milk. They have their backs to us as if they were headed the opposite direction from JERE's boat. Both boats visible.)

AYRES

(Pointing)

Commander Holiday's PT-Boat off the port bow, sir. Headed up stream.

JERE

How did he... Dammit!

(JERE slams down the throttle and turns his wheel in the direction of HOLIDAY. HOLIDAY raises his milk in toast and laughs. ENRIGHT throttles down and his engine roars. JERE slams down his throttle and the turtle boat's engine gets loader. ENRIGHT throttles down more and he and HOLIDAY lean back with the increased speed of the PT-Boat. JERE

slams down his throttle and the turtle boat screams with increased speed. ENRIGHT increases his speed. JERE increases his but the motor starts screeching. CHIEF and AYRES cover their ears. Hearing the screech JERE eases up on the throttle and the turtle boat stops screeching. HOLIDAY laughs and his side of the stage goes into darkness. JERE shouts with frustration as we hear the PT-Boat zooming away in the distance. JERE turns and stares at CHIEF and AYRES.)

JERE

How the hell did he know we were outflanking him? Chief?

(CHIEF shrugs.)

JERE

You two sent a signal to Holiday while I was up river?

CHIEF

Didn't need to, sir.

(JERE just stares at them, then crosses and meets HOLIDAY center.)

JERE

(Angry)

Permission to speak, sir. You have a spy in the motor pool who gave you the heads up we were outflanking you.

HOLIDAY

You accusing me of espionage, Freshman? Subterfuge?

JERE

I am.

HOLIDAY

Strike two, Golf Links. You strike out again, you'll be sailing a metal desk through a sea of paper. Get your butt back on that turtle boat. Tomorrow: 1500. Objective: PT-Boat. Weapon: Red paint.

(JERE crosses to CHIEF and AYRES.)

JERE

How's your swimming, Chief?

CHIEF

Permission to speak, sir.

JERE

Answer the question.

CHIEF

I'm an ok swimmer. Permission to speak, sir.

JERE

Get into your bathing suits, both of you.

CHIEF

Permission to speak, sir

JERE

Just do it.

CHIEF

Ensign Monroe tried that three months ago. Swimming up with snorkels and fins. Holiday threw a net over him and brought him back to base like a captured Halibut.

JERE

Just do it, Chief.

CHIEF

Permission to speak sir.

JERE

Get changing.

CHIEF

Permission to speak, sir.

JERE

All right, go ahead. Quickly.

CHIEF

Holiday told you not to trust us.

(JERE is silent.)

CHIEF

Well, you've got to because we're all you've got, asshole.

JERE

Chief.

CHIEF

Yessir.

JERE

You address me that way again I'll shoot you, in the head, with this. (Holds up his service handgun.) It's wartime, Chief. What you said is mutinous. I can shoot you.

CHIEF

Yes, sir.

(Pause. JERE puts gun away.)

JERE

Ok, go ahead.

CHIEF

Go ahead, sir?

JERE

Tell me about the last few idiots.

CHIEF

Everything's been tried getting at Holiday's PT-Boat, sir. Everything. It's impossible. He has spies everywhere. He pays them with shore leave. And even if you manage to get close he'll spot you at the last second and take off, superior speed. Ensign Gorman, three months ago, bought a diving kit and tried to dismantle Holiday's engine. Holiday runs current through the engine casing – electrocuted Gorman, he almost drowned. Ensign Morris deliberately sank his boat thirty yards off and tried to swim to Holiday's boat for help. Holiday threatened to shoot him in the water, took pot shots at him to make the point. Morris was swimming with the can of red paint. There's no solution, it's impossible.

CHIEF

Go on.

CHIEF

The only person who can get red paint on Holiday's boat is Holiday himself, sir.

JERE

Go on.

CHIEF

You get Holiday to get red paint on it, you got red paint on it.

JERE

Go on.

CHIEF

That's the only way.

(HOLIDAY and ENRIGHT on his boat, the engine idling. ENRIGHT looking through binoculars.)

HOLIDAY

What do you see?

ENRIGHT

Mr. Brennan's boat, dead ahead.

HOLIDAY

Headed this way?

ENRIGHT

(Handing him binoculars)

Check it out, sir. She's close. Charging us.

HOLIDAY

All right. Take us home. Open her up. Full speed ahead.

(ENRIGHT places hand on throttle about to speed away.)

HOLIDAY

Wait!

ENRIGHT

Yes, sir.

HOLDIAY

Sweep the deck. Look everywhere.

ENRIGHT

But Brennan is-

HOLIDAY

Shut up and do it.

(HOLIDAY looks through his binoculars. ENRIGHT looks about the boat. We hear turtle boat's putt-putt getting closer. ENRIGHT finds something upstage of HOLIDAY.)

HOLIDAY

What did you find?

(ENRIGHT holds up paint can.)

ENRIGHT

Can of red paint, sir. Filled to the rim. No lid.

HOLIDAY

All set to spill. OK, open her up slow in case there are any other hidden surprises. Well, that's it for Numbnuts. Three strikes.

(HOLIDAY opens his chocolate milk and drinks, a big swig. He gags and spits out red paint all over the deck.)

HOLIDAY

Motherfucker! What the hell!

(He wipes his mouth and sees red on his hand and then on the deck.)

HOLIDAY

Cock-sucking motherfucker.

(ENRIGHT is laughing.)

HOLIDAY

Enright, you fuck, clean this up!

(We hear JERE's boat whistle in the distance, loud, shrill, triumphant.)

HOLIDAY

Cut the engine. Cut it.

(ENRIGHT turns off engine and starts wiping up paint.)

HOLIDAY

(Shouting)

Brennan! Brennan! You're under arrest. Heave to, you motherfucker! Heave to!

(Blackout. We hear boat noises in the dark. Lights up on JERE and his crew beside HOLIDAY's boat.)

HOLIDAY

Brennan, you're under arrest. For attempting to poison an officer. Court martial, Brennan. I'm going to court martial your ass.

(ENRIGHT is wiping up the red paint.)

AYRES

Enright's destroying the evidence, sir.

HOLIDAY

Shut your hole, sailor. (To BRENNAN) You smart faced Ivy League college boy piece 'a shit, I'm going to keel haul your ass for this one.

(As HOLIDAY chews out JERE, CHIEF calmly steps onto HOLIDAY's boat and pours red paint all over the deck, making quite a stain.
ENRIGHT, flabbergasted, just stands and stares.)

HOLIDAY

Did you hear me, Mr. Brennan? Keel haul.

(HOLIDAY turns to see the stain on the deck. He tears off his cap and throws it on the deck, into the puddle of red.)

JERE

Just exercising initiative, sir.

(JERE crosses to CAPTAIN JEPHETSON who is reading a report and laughing.)

JEPHETSON

Well, Mr. Brennan, you sure made an ass of Commander Holiday.

JERE

That wasn't my intention, sir.

JEPHETSON

No, but it was a fortunate bi-product. He calls you "grotesquely insubordinate and a dirty cheat." That's high praise from a master of buttholeishness. He wants you hung from the highest yardarm. Well, since this isn't the King's Navy, we're going to give you a warning and ship you off to the South Pacific post haste. Congratulations, son. Holiday's red stain will long be remembered on these lakes. You got your dream. God help you.

(JEPHETSON exits. Bright light on cyc. Clouds drift by. We are suddenly in the South Pacific. Map of Hackett Straight and surrounding islands is flown in. COMMANDER DEMARTINI enters and stands in front of it.)

DEMARTINI

Good morning, Gentlemen. Our turf is Hackett Straight. The Japanese are bringing reinforcements down on barges every night, with a heavy destroyer covering force. They land them at Cape Valenciana and they then engage our boys on Bougainville. Our mission is to seek out and engage. Our little wood boats are no match for these destroyers; they'll blow you out of the water if they get a bead on you – so in a fight,

maintain speed, launch your torpedoes and get out of there. These are night attacks and the Japs are wicked at night. I hate to say be careful but... I'll state right now, from up here, I don't get this mission at all. There's obviously no air support at night and, as yet, no air-sea rescue during the day. If you get sunk, there are just a couple of PBYs on patrol. It's completely inadequate. The situation will change in a month when the seaplane base at Trepani is finished. Till then, we'll do our best. That's all. Brennan, may I speak to you.

JERE

Yessir.

(JERE joins him onstage.)

DEMARTINI

I saw you play once, at the Harvard-Yale game.

JERE

I wasn't much of a quarterback, sir.

DEMARTINI

You had a good first half when I saw you.

JERE

Thank you, sir.

DEMARTINI

What happened in the second?

JERE

Gammy back, sir. Ended my football days.

DEMARTINI

Well, I was impressed.

JERE

Thank you, sir.

DEMARTINI

It seems from your file that you're an aggressive officer

JERE

Is that a bad thing, sir?

DEMARTINI

No, it's good. I just hope I live up to your expectations.

(He smiles. JERE is confused by this encounter.)

DEMARTINI

Well, anyway... just wanted to say I'm glad to have you on my team.

(DEMARTINI exits as map flies out. CHIEF enters and stands next to JERE. They just stare in wonder about them.)

CHIEF

It's beautiful, Lieutenant.

JERE

Yeah. Amazing what the sun and clouds can do.

CHIEF

I grew up on the Great Lakes. Most beautiful country in the world. Until this. Never thought I'd see anything like this.

JERE

Nope. It's incredible.

(AYRES enters with MANN and MCQUIRE, two sailors. They are lugging a crate.)

AYRES

Hey, Lieutenant.

JERE

Yeah?

AYRES

Aren't we supposed to have ham and trimmings for Easter?

(MCGUIRE and MANN laugh.)

AYRES

I mean, isn't that what they do in fancy WASP families back east?

JERE

I wouldn't know. I'm Catholic trash.

(They all laugh.)

MCGUIRE

You really Catholic?

JERE

Yep, Irish Catholic.

MCGUIRE

But you're rich.

JERE

Well, I come from trashy Irish stock, soil scratchers, potato eaters. But yes, ok, my daddy's rich.

AYRES

Yeah, I figured. You got that noblesse oblige crap of the rich.

JERE

Noblesse oblige?

AYRES

Yeah, I don't know what it means but it's some kinda crap where if you're rich enough you're actually nice to proles like us. But you gotta be damn rich.

MANN

Why you let him talk to you like that, Lieut?

JERE

Because I got noblesse oblige.

(They laugh.)

CHIEF

McGuire, you must be Catholic too.

MCGUIRE

Naw. My mother was Catholic but she died the day I was born. My father was just a drunk.

CHIEF

Shit, McGuire, that's about the most depressing story I've ever heard.

AYRES

Kinda makes me want to blow a hole in my head. But I'm not going to.

MCGUIRE

Yeah, my father said confession was always a let down. You could commit the worst sins in the world and the priest would just listen and give you "Hail Marys." He said heaven was too easy to get into to be worth all the guilt.

CHIEFXXX

Did he beat you?

MCGUIRE

Usually too drunk to beat us. He tried to hit my brother once, ended up hitting a door.

AYRES

A door?

MCGUIRE

Yeah, my brother kinda looks like a door. You know one of those wood slat ones with the little peep hole in the middle. That's my brother.

AYRES

Interesting story, McGuire.

MCGUIRE

Thank you.

AYRES

What about you Mannstein? You don't eat ham, I bet.

MANN

I eat ham. My uncle was a rabbi.

CHIEF

And he let you eat ham?

MANN

He was very good on loopholes. He said that's what the Talmud is for.

AYRES

(Referring to a manifest)

Seriously, sir, you seen this provisioning? Dehydrated milk, dehydrated eggs, dehydrated meat. Everything's on here except dehydrated water.

MCGUIRE

Come on, dehydrated water's impossible.

AYRES

Thank you, McGuire.

MANN

You know what this shit tastes like? Sand.

AYRES

Boys on the big ships don't eat this shit. They have steaks and mashed potatoes for Easter Dinner.

MANN

And ham, bacon, prosciutto, pancetta.

JERE

Really?

AYRES

Yeah, it's what they were loading last night. When I picked up this crap. Under armed guard.

MANN

I even saw a crate of cigars. Labeled: "For Admiral Halsey."

CHIEF

Wow.

JERE

Cigars?

CHIEF

That's more depressing than McGuire's story about his dead mother and his drunk but ineffectual father.

JERE

Gentlemen, there's only two kinds of people who are going to eat hearty this Easter. Them that works for Admiral Halsey and them that steals from Admiral Halsey.

(Blackout. We hear Glenn Miller's "Doin' the Jive." Lights up on an MP standing next to a pile of stores. He is armed. MANN and AYRES enter and stand talking. They begin to fight – MANN shoving AYRES and AYRES taking a swing at MANN. Soon they are in a bear hug rolling around. MP rolls his eyes and crosses to them. He separates them and holds them apart as they gesture madly at each other. As he gestures wildly MANN removes gin bottle from his pocket and takes a swig. MP yanks bottle away from him and puts it in his own pocket. Fighting continues. Behind their backs MCGUIRE and CHIEF enter and start carrying off crates the opposite direction. MP sees and makes move to stop them. AYRES and MANN, pretending to fight still, grapple with MP in the middle. They maneuver him about the stage preventing him from stopping the theft of crates. Soon all three are on the ground locked in a tussle. JERE enters and sees the fight. He separates the fighters. MANN and AYRES run off. MP stands and starts towards CHIEF and MCGUIRE

who are still stealing crates. JERE snaps his fingers and gestures for MP to come to attention. MP does so. JERE removes gin bottle from MP's pocket and waves it in his face. MP looks angry and confused. JERE disarms MP and marches him off stage in one direction as CHIEF and MCGUIRE take the last crate off in the other. AYRES, MANN, MCGUIRE and CHIEF cross the stage from one side to the other looking sated with food. They are all smoking the admiral's cigars. JERE enters behind them. He watches them as they exit. JERE grabs his back in pain, holds it a minute, and straightens up. He strips down to his bathing suit, barely able to remove his clothes for the pain, and crosses to the center of the stage and begins a wading motion as if he was entering the surf. We hear the lapping of waves and the surge of water. Soon he is in deep enough water that he can dog paddle, now he lays on his back, floating. There is no pain when he's in the water and can make adjustments, work out a cramp. The sky turns tropical, a brilliant Polynesian sunset. He just floats, the sound of water around him. He stares up at the sky and smiles. We hear a faint whistle. At first JERE doesn't notice it. Then it happens again. He looks up. We hear a faint "Lieutenant! Yo, Lieutenant!" JERE roles over and breaststrokes in the direction of the voice. Soon he is able to stand and wade. As he slowly walks ashore MANN enters. JERE is now standing over his clothes.)

JERE

What is it, Mann?

MANN

It's Chief, sir. He and the others headed out about an hour ago. They haven't come back.

JERE

So?

MANN

They were pretty drunk, Lieutenant.

JERE

What's the problem, Mann? Spit it out.

MANN

They said they were going to go looking for women.

JERE

Women?

MANN

Yeah.

JERE

There're no women on this island, Mann, you know that.

MANN

Yessir.

JERE

You mean nurses? They were going to get themselves a nurse?

MANN

I think so, sir. They were pretty drunk, sir. And ornery.

(JERE is now dressed.)

JERE

Come on.

(He runs offstage. MANN follows.)

(The stage is very dark. Ensign Nurse BENSON enters. She is twenty, dressed as a Navy WAVE, and carries a purse. It is dark. She sees something offstage and stops. She looks around her nervously. CHIEF, AYRES and MCGUIRE enter. They are very drunk.)

CHIEF

Evening, Ensign.

BENSON

Good evening, Gentlemen.

CHIEF

You lost, sir?

BENSON

No, are you?

AYRES

Oooooo, she's a saucy one.

(The others laugh. She removes a rusty metal pipe from her bag.)

BENSON

All right, Sailor. I've made you and your friends. You touch me I'll report all of you.

CHIEF

You can't see us, Ensign. Don't play games.

BENSON

I can see you.

CHIEF

No, you can't.

(He springs forward and grabs her. She brings the pipe down on his head. He cries out in pain and falls to the ground.)

CHEIF

Goddammit!

(AYRES and MCGUIRE grab her and take the pipe away from her. She struggles furiously. CHIEF stands up with blood on his face.)

CHIEF

Fucking bitch!

(He is advancing on her. JERE enters with handgun drawn. MANN is behind him.)

JERE

Ayres, McGuire, let her go. Let her go or I'll shoot you. It's not a threat.

(AYRES and MCGUIRE release her.)

JERE

Chief, you son a bitch, clear out of here.

CHIEF

Bitch attacked us, Lieutenant. She fucking-

JERE

Clear out of here, Chief or I'll shoot you in the thigh. I will do it. All of you, get the fuck out of here!

CHIEF

Mann, you goddamn snitch.

JERE

Out!

(MCGUIRE, AYRES and CHIEF stumble off the stage. JERE crosses to BENSON.)

JERE

You all right, Ensign?

(BENSON refuses his help, shrugging him away.)

BENSON

No thanks to you, Lieutenant. Mann, McGuire, and their Chief. I'll remember that. I'm reporting your entire crew, all of them. You didn't save me from nuthin'!

JERE

I'm sorry about what happened, Ensign.

BENSON

Take your hands off me, Lieutenant!

(She pulls herself together, straightens her clothes.)

BENSON

Jesus.

JERE

Are you all right?

BENSON

No, I'm not fucking all right, Lieutenant! I was almost raped. By three guys.

(She is crying. He just stands near her, not knowing what to do. MANN hands her her purse. She snatches it from him.)

JERE

Mann, go back to the boat. Go ahead.

(MANN exits. She is sobbing.)

BENSON

They told me to get an officer boy friend, for protection. If I screwed an officer I'd be protected from the men. Is that true, Lieutenant? Is that why I joined the Navy, to screw someone for protection from rapists?

JERE

I don't know.

BENSON

Are you going to protect me, Lieutenant? Next time? Even if I don't screw you? Are you going to follow me around with a gun to make sure I don't get attacked?

JERE

I'm sorry about what happened.

BENSON

You're sorry. What the hell did you guys expect? Sticking us on this fucking island with four thousand sailors. What did you think would happen? (Pause. She forces herself to regain control.) I'm sorry, Lieutenant, I'm reporting them, all three of them. I appreciate you saving me, but I'm reporting them. Two of my friends had this happen to them and the guys were never caught. These guys are going to get caught. And punished. I won't stop shouting till they're locked in the brig. I'm an officer in the United States Navy, Lieutenant. Like you. Just like you. And until I can walk across this island and not worry about this shit, I'm going to scream my head off.

(They look at one another. BENSON exits. JERE goes the other way, meets men on boat.)

CHIEF

Sir.

JERE

Don't talk to me, Chief.

CHIEF

Sir, I want to know-

JERE

I said don't talk to me.

CHIEF

I want to know what she's going to do.

JERE

You mean you want to know what she's going to do since she's still alive and can actually do something?

CHIEF

We wouldn't have killed her, sir.

JERE

You were drunk off your ass, Chief. How do you know what you would have done? She's going to throw the book at you. And you're going to take it, Chief. You're going to take whatever they give you. And I'm going to give testimony if they ask me, as an eyewitness. So will Mann. And if you intimidate him I'll place you under arrest and lock you in that shed over there until the trial. Is that clear? Did I answer all your questions?

(Pause.)

JERE

Commander Holiday said to me, the first thing he said to me about my men: "Don't trust them." And you were so fucking offended when I didn't.

CHIEF

Is this different from stealing government provisions?

JERE

You don't see a difference?

CHIEF

No, I don't.

JERE

Well maybe this will teach you the difference.

CHIEF

In my neighborhood...

JERE

Yeah? Tell me about your neighborhood where stealing could get your hand cut off but raping girls was just considered good sex. Go ahead, tell me about it.

CHIEF

Never mind.

(JERE crosses away and waits. CAPTAIN JEPHETSON enters and JERE confronts him.)

JERE

I want to know why her charges weren't acted upon, sir.

JEPHETSON

Because they weren't.

JERE

Why not?

JEPHETSON

Lieutenant.

JERE

Sir, I want to know.

JEPHETSON

Because someone talked to her. Her charges have been dropped.

JERE

Someone talked to her?

JEPHETSON

Yes. Someone explained it to her. How it works.

JERE

How it works?

JEPHETSON

Yes.

JERE

Who talked to her, sir?

JEPHETSON

Lieutenant, give me a break.

JERE

Who explained to her how it-

JEPHETSON

I did, Lieutenant. I did! I explained to her how it works. (Pause.) Those are your men, Lieutenant.

JERE

They're mashers.

JEPHETSON

Attempted mashers.

JERE

They should be prosecuted.

JEPHETSON

And who the hell are you? St. Theresa? I got thousands of men on this island, Lieutenant. And until someone provides them with some R and R I'm not going to go prosecuting every one of them that gets drunk and frustrated. It's not their fault.

JERE

No, but it's your responsibility, and I want them at least disciplined. I want something in their records. I want something that says what they did even if it also says it was ignored in light of external circumstances.

JEPHETSON

Jesus, you really are a bleeding heart, aren't you?

JERE

That's none of your business, sir.

JEPHETSON

It is if I have to listen to it.

JERE

I want it done, sir.

JEPHETSON

Or what? You'll whine to the Ambassador?

JERE

No, I'll write to the Pentagon. My name's good enough without my father's.

JEPHETSON

You mean it's good enough because it's your father's. You know a black mark like this will mean they get a dishonorable discharge when they get out.

JERE

I hope it means that.

JEPHETSON

They're just stupid sailors.

JERE

Maybe this will make them smart.

JEPHETSON

You really believe all that crap, don't you? Tough love with the working classes and all that.

JERE

Don't worry about what I believe, sir.

JEPHETSON

They're as likely to shoot you in the back as thank you for the tough love, Brennan.

JERE

(Starting to leave)

It's fine, I'll talk to someone else about it.

JEPHETSON

Brennan.

(JERE stops.)

JEPHETSON

I'll do it. Black mark in their records. No skin off my nose.

JERE

Thank you, sir.

JEPHETSON

You should write to your college chums in the Pentagon about these men, and their needs. It's just hopeful nonsense that they can go without it indefinitely. It's just more of the old plan for nothing in this war and hope for the best. Sex is a reality, Lieutenant.

(JEPHETSON exits and JERE crosses to AYRES, CHIEF and MCGUIRE in boat. We hear the engines. They are underway at night, AYRES is aloft; CHIEF beside JERE; MCGUIRE in the stern keeping a lookout in that direction.)

JERE

Keep a sharp eye inshore, Ayres. Everyone on this patrol is looking out to sea, we might just spot something by looking towards the islands. (Pause.) You get that, Ayres?

AYRES

Yessir.

JERE

Then acknowledge.

AYRES

Aye, aye, sir.

JERE

(To CHIEF)

You and the crew going to keep playing these games indefinitely, Chief?

CHIEF

I don't know what you're talking about.

JERE

Sulking around here mumbling "aye-ayes" and being assholes to me.

CHIEF

You complaining, sir?

JERE

I am, Chief. I'll transfer you, get another crew.

CHIEF

Not a crew on this island would trust you now, sir.

JERE

Then I'll satisfy myself with having you reprimanded for insubordination.

CHIEF

Why'd you insist on those black marks on our records, sir?

(AYRES squats down to listen.)

JERE

I insisted you be court martialed. The black marks are all I could get.

CHIEF

No other boat officer would have done that, sir.

JERE

Well, I guess you got lucky. (Pause.) No other boat officer has a crew of rapists, Chief.

CHIEF

We were drunk.

JERE

You should have seen that Ensign when I talked to her. You should have seen her face. They say wild animals hunt each other because they like the fear they excite in their quarry. They can taste it when they bite into the flesh of the prey. That's what I saw: fear. That's what you wanted to taste.

(Pause.)

MCGUIRE

What am I supposed to do when I get outta here with a Dishonorable Discharge, sir?

JERE

I don't know, McGuire, you'll figure it out. Life is full of challenges.

MCGUIRE

My life was already full of challenges without this.

JERE

I'll say one more thing then we're done talking about it. This is a patrol, not a coffee klatch. You men did a bad thing, plain and simple. When you own up to that you'll feel much better about it. So long as you feel the sting of injustice you're just going to be bitter. You knew you were up to no good, you knew it. I'm not falling for any crap about "we were just drunk." Forget it.

(Pause.)

AYRES

We helped you through PT school.

JERE

Yes, and I'm grateful. That's why I didn't shoot you when I got you off that nurse. That's why you are lucky.

(Pause. AYRES looks out, sees something ahead.)

AYRES

That's the signal. Commander's breaking off, Lieutenant.

JERE

Jesus, it's 0100. What's he mean by breaking off at 0100?

(MANN emerges from below wearing a radio headset and holding a dispatch.)

MANN

Commander says, "Break off, return to base."

(Blackout. Lights immediately back up on them in the boat – it is another night.)

JERE

How many nights is this, Chief?

CHIEF

Seven.

JERE

I thought it was eight.

CHIEF

No, just seven.

JERE

Have we once gotten to the middle of the channel?

CHIEF

No sir. (Pause.) Cigarette, sir?

JERE

No lights on the boat, Chief, you know that.

CHIEF

You could save it for later.

AYRES

Or chew it, sir.

(AYRES shoves cigarette in his mouth and chews.)

JERE

How's that taste, Ayres?

AYRES

Good.

JERE

You're a pig, Ayres, you know that?

(AYRES spits it out gagging. CHIEF and MCGUIRE laugh. AYRES is wiping his tongue when he stands up straight and points at something.)

AYRES

Silhouette, sir. Two o'clock.

MCGUIRE

(Pointing)

And another one, sir. Starboard flank, five o'clock.

(They all look towards the sightings. JERE shifts his binoculars to the head of the column.)

JERE

Commander DeMartini must see that. He must see that.

AYRES

Commander slowing down, sir.

JERE

Reduce speed.

(CHIEF eases up the throttle, the motor grows quieter.)

JERE

What's he doing? (Pause.) What the hell is he doing?

(MANN enters with dispatch.)

MANN

That's the signal, sir. Return to base.

JERE

Return to base?

CHIEF

Yes, sir, it's a definite. Flag is turning around.

MCGUIRE

Must be too big for him.

AYRES

They're destroyers.

JERE

All right, turn her around, Chief.

(JERE crosses away from boat and meets CAPTAIN JEPHETSON entering.)

JERE

Permission to speak, sir.

JEPHETSON

What is it now, Brennan?

JERE

Our assignment detail designates Hackett Straight as our patrol area.

JEPHETSON

Get to the point, Lieutenant.

JERE

Most nights we barely enter Hackett Straight. The Japs are in the center of it, we barely even skirt the rim.

JEPHETSON

You criticizing Commander DeMartini, a career officer and your CO?

JERE

No, sir, I'm only stating-

JEPHETSON

Listen, Brennan, I'll tell you this just once because you shouldn't need to be told it at all. But I'll do you a favor. The thing that's going to win this war is personal initiative, not whining to me or asking permission. You want to do something? Do it. You think your boat belongs in the middle of the Straight then get your boat there. I'm not ordering DeMartini to order you to do it. That's not how it works.

JERE

That's a hell of a way to run a navy, sir.

JEPHETSON

It's like your rape incident, Mister. You wanted justice? You were so hell bent on justice? You should have shot your men, gunned them down on site. You know that. You think it's any different from playing football or polo or whatever it is you do.

JERE

Why is this war such a class thing? Why is my upbringing always such a big fucking deal?

(He turns away, realizing he probably shouldn't have said that.)

JEPHETSON

Listen, Brennan... I'm sorry. All I was saying... You know what to do. If you've got the guts, do it. DeMartini will do it, eventually, when there's proper air/sea rescue, if there's ever any goddamn air/sea rescue. But someone could do it now, right now. You're right. Forgive me.

(BENSON has entered. She hands a report to JEPHETSON. Awkward moment as they all realize their situation.)

JEPHETSON

Thanks, Ensign.

(JEPHETSON exits. JERE starts to exit.)

BENSON

How's your Chief's face?

JERE

Fine. I made him get a tetanus shot.

BENSON

Yes, my mother made me get one anytime I got a cut.

(They stare at one another.)

BENSON

I thought they'd get some time in the brig, a week or two.

JERE

Yeah, well...

BENSON

I didn't think there'd be anything permanent on their records.

JERE

Well...

BENSON

Anyway, I'm glad. I feel sorry for them but-

JERE

You'll excuse me, Ma'am.

(He starts to leave.)

BENSON

You know, it's a funny thing about the service. Everyone of us gals is made an officer, every single one of us. To protect us from the men. But we're like the men. Come from the same backgrounds, the same hick parts of the country. Then we're elevated to officer but we're not like any of you real officers at all. You're all upper crust. You might date us but you'd never marry us. And the sailors who would marry us are not allowed to speak to us.

JERE

You asking for a date?

(She laughs.)

BENSON

No. I'm just saying, it's pretty cockeyed. One of my friends in the barracks is actually dating a sailor. They don't tell anyone. She could be court martialed for it.

JERE

I doubt that would happen.

BENSON

No, but they'd tell her she had to stop seeing him and if she didn't they'd transfer him right quick. I'm just saying what happened is pretty sad.

JERE

Yeah.

(Pause.)

BENSON

You'd never marry me, would you?

JERE

I'd never even date you.

(She laughs.)

BENSON

You never would date me, would you?

JERE

No.

BENSON

Because I'm a hick.

JERE

Because we wouldn't have anything to talk about.

BENSON

That's true. Because I'm a hick.

JERE

I grew up with a silver spoon in my mouth. I didn't put it there but I can't change the fact that it was there and it left a mineral infection – like tetanus. I have a silver stain and I can't change that it's there. I'm used to women who talk about art and fashion and world capitols and history. Do you know about those things?

BENSON

I don't.

JERE

Well then. We could complain about the Navy or talk about how beautiful it is on this island.

BENSON

Doesn't sound very interesting.

JERE

No, it doesn't.

BENSON

Is talking so important?

JERE

It is.

BENSON

I guess.

JERE

Well, I mean fucking's important too but...

(She laughs.)

JERE

I think you're right. I think you guys were dressed up as Ensigns to provide us with dates. It's a game that's fixed. I grew up with a lot of that: fixed games. Usually the big games were fixed for my brother, I could pick up the leftovers. Made me sick of the fixing because, as you pointed out, it was so half-assed, so sloppy. But it's all fixed, right? Nothing I can do about it.

BENSON

No, but I see your point. It makes you kind of sick of it.

JERE

Yeah. Damn sick of it. Problem is...

BENSON

What?

JERE

I haven't figured out what to replace it with. You'll excuse me, Ensign.

BENSON

Of course, Lieutenant.

JERE

I'll see you around.

(BENSON exits. JERE crosses to CHIEF and AYRES at boat.)

JERE

What's up, Chief, why isn't the boat ready?

CHIEF

Patrol's cancelled, sir. Mann got the word at four.

(CHIEF hands JERE the order, he looks at it.)

JERE

Three boats damaged? From what? Barnacles?

CHIEF

Night off, sir.

AYRES

We still confined to the boat, sir?

JERE

No, you're not.

MCGUIRE

So you'll let us have shore leave?

JERE

No, because we're going out, on our own.

CHIEF

Sir?

JERE

Get the boat ready. We're shoving off.

AYRES

Patrol's cancelled, sir.

JERE

Yeah, so we'll go out alone.

CHIEF

Alone?

JERE

Yeah, Chief. Alone. We'll radio base once we're underway. Just cause DeMartini's taking the night off doesn't mean we have to.

CHIEF

It's not safe, sir.

JERE

War's not safe? Shocking. Get the boat ready.

(Blackout. Engine sounds. Lights up on boat underway. AYRES keeps forward lookout, MCGUIRE aft.)

JERE

Middle of the channel, Chief.

(CHIEF moves the wheel such that boat now moves towards the middle of the channel.)

JERE

Relax gentlemen. The worst we might find is the enemy.

CHIEF

Damn foggy, sir.

JERE

Better to hide in if we get lucky and can do a run. See anything, Ayres? McGuire?

AYRES

It's quiet, sir.

MCGUIRE

Nothing.

JERE

Seems this would be the perfect night for the Japs to sneak things in here.

MCGUIRE

Nothing.

(Pause – time passes.)

AYRES

Approaching Vella Lavella. We've crossed the channel, sir.

JERE

Ok. Turn her around.

CHIEF

Taking her back to base, sir?

JERE

No, we'll keep cruising.

(Engine fades. JERE removes letter from his pocket and reads aloud.
There are cuts in the letter where words have been removed by censors. As
he reads he crosses and lies on cot.)

JERE

“Dear Jere: How are you? Blank is wet. Bet you're loving the blank and all that blank. Hard to write a letter knowing the censors are going to take out anything interesting. Dad was here shaking everyone's hand and trying to help me make connections. He always says, 'Find glory, son, but be careful.' How about that for clear and specific instructions? I think I am headed for glory. Something specific. Might be a long shot, I don't know. How are you? I miss you. I know that sounds strange coming from me. We always fought so much, were always so competitive. A lot of that comes from me. Your confidence intimidates me sometimes. You always know what to do, exactly what to do. Whereas I second guess myself so much. I should know what to do but Dad's always done so much thinking for me it's tough. I guess deep down I don't want the things he wants for me. But I'll probably never have the guts to tell him that. Even when I'm in the White House. Boy, this is a confessional letter, ain't it? No one to talk to here. No one like us. I guess that's what I miss most. When I got done beating you up, talking to you. Tough not having a brother when you need one. I know there are seven others. But they were never as close as you. Take care of yourself. You don't have Dad there so I know this isn't that big a deal, but don't take any risks. They ain't worth it.”

(DEMARTINI enters. JERE stands up.)

DEMARTINI

Morning, Lieutenant.

JERE

Sir.

DEMARTINI

Be seated. What did you see out there?

JERE

Nothing, sir.

DEMARTINI

Amazing. You crossed the channel?

JERE

Yessir. Many times.

DEMARTINI

They were supposed to come down last night. Coast watchers said they would. I wouldn't have let you go if you'd asked me.

JERE

It was just a pleasure cruise, sir. No disrespect.

DEMARTINI

I know. I'd enter the channel myself if I had adequate air support.

JERE

At night?

DEMARTINI

It's the men I'm concerned about. If we get sunk there's no one to pick us out of the stew in the morning.

JERE

There's PBVs at Trepani.

DEMARTINI

Two. Two PBVs. Anyway... this isn't for me. This war. (He sits next to JERE on cot.) Christ. I feel a physical revulsion when I'm out there, like a panic I can barely keep down, just barely keep it from overwhelming me. It's all I can do to cruise along the coastline. I don't think I'm physically capable of giving the order to enter the channel. The other night, when we saw the Jap destroyers out there, I could not give the order to engage. I couldn't do it.

JERE

Sir.

DEMARTINI

Yes?

JERE

You don't have to tell me this, sir.

DEMARTINI

I have to tell someone. Can't tell my wife, the mail gets read. You entered the channel last night, Brennan. On your own initiative.

JERE
Yes.

DEMARTINI
How could you?

JERE
I had to. I was curious. I wanted to see what was there.

DEMARTINI
And you crossed it. Patrolled it for four hours.

JERE
Yes.

DEMARTINI
I couldn't do that.

JERE
I'm sorry, sir.

DEMARTINI
I'm cancelling the patrol again tonight. Mechanical difficulties on three boats.

JERE
Are you trying to get yourself relieved, sir?

(DEMARTINI just looks at him. He stands and leaves. JERE crosses to boat. He is back on patrol with the crew.)

JERE
Ok, Mann, send the signal: out on patrol, Hackett Straight.

(MANN disappears below. AYRES is above and MCGUIRE aft, both listening to JERE and CHIEF during the following:)

JERE
How you doing there, Chief?

CHIEF
So bright tonight.

JERE
Yeah.

CHIEF

Wish the other boats were out with us.

JERE

Mechanical difficulties, Chief.

(CHIEF mumbles to himself.)

JERE

I know you're nervous, Chief. So am I.

(AYRES squats to listen.)

CHIEF

We don't belong here, sir.

JERE

We do.

CHIEF

You think there's a black stain on us, because we got drunk and attacked that girl. Shit, this is all just to remove that black stain.

JERE

It's not.

CHIEF

Every boat's crew gets up to mischief. We got stuck with the only CO who turned it into a federal offense. Now we're going to die for it because you think we should be punished.

JERE

We're supposed to patrol the straights, Chief. That's our job.

CHIEF

Your commander doesn't think so. He thinks it's an impossible task. And it is.

JERE

Get off my back, Chief.

(AYRES, having heard this, stands up and scans the horizon.)

JERE

This is where we belong, Chief. It's our duty. That's the one thing I'm confident of.

AYRES

(Pointing out)
Phosphorous, sir! Dead ahead.

(JERE raises binoculars to his eyes.)

MCGUIRE

(Pointing in another direction)
Phosphorous!

(AYRES points in another direction.)

AYRES

Phosphorous!

(JERE smiles. We hear distant engines, all around them.)

AYRES

Jesus, we're in the middle of a convoy.

(The engines grow louder. They all stare in different directions, in awe.)

JERE

Bingo. Chief, open her up. Line up, Ayres. Get a baring on that target, McGuire.

(CHIEF throttles up. We hear the PT-Boat's engine roar. MCGUIRE moves between CHIEF and JERE and looks through range finder.)

AYRES

Destroyer dead ahead, sir.

MCGUIRE

Adjust three degrees starboard.

(CHIEF swings wheel.)

CHIEF

Three degrees.

MCGUIRE

Good baring, she's dead ahead steaming across our bows.

(Suddenly they are lit up in a blinding glare - searchlight.)

CHIEF

Jesus.

JERE

Keep us steady, Chief. Activate tubes one and three.

MCGUIRE

One and three activated, sir.

(Gunfire.)

AYRES

Incoming!

JERE

Keep us steady.

(Huge explosions left and right, splashing noises as shells hit water. They duck from the drench of the spray. Boat is rocked mercilessly, indicated by the actors movement.)

JERE

Fire one! Fire three!

(MCGUIRE presses firing mechanism. Whoosh sounds.)

MCGUIRE

One away! Two away!

(More gunfire. The sound now is thunderous.)

JERE

Stand-by two and four!

MCGUIRE

Two and four activated!

JERE

Mann! Get a line up, McGuire!

MANN

(Appearing from below wearing headset)

Yessir.

JERE

Take my handgun. See if you can take out that searchlight.

(Huge splashing noises, close – in-coming shells. They are drenched. They rock with the sudden turbulence.)

JERE

Do you have a line up?

MCGUIRE

Too much turbulence.

JERE

Get a line up!

(More gunfire, more splashes, more wet. MANN has taken JERE's handgun and is firing off stage up at the angle of the searchlight.)

MCGUIRE

Line up!

JERE

Launch three, launch four!

(Whoosh sounds.)

MCGUIRE

Three away, four away!

(Huge splashes close in. A deluge falls on the stage soaking everything. Gunfire close-by. MANN is shooting. All are yelling. Pandemonium.)

JERE

Chief! Goddammit, Chief!

CHIEF

Yessir?

CHIEF

Get us out of here! Head for Vella Lavella.

(CHIEF spins wheel. They all lean with the force of the turn. The noise of shellfire and engines is tremendous. CHIEF swerves the boat several times dodging splashes. Water from near misses continues to drench them. Slowly it gets quieter as they move away from the enemy. CHIEF eases up on throttle, the engines get quieter. Slowly the gunfire becomes more distant. Soon it is only them and the sound of their engine. All are visibly shaken, clinging to parts of the ship. JERE alone seems somewhat composed, but even he is rattled.)

My God. CHIEF

Everyone all right? JERE

(No one responds.)

Is everyone all right? Ayres? JERE

Yessir. AYRES

Mann and McGuire? JERE

Yessir MANN/MCGUIRE

Chief? Chief? JERE

Fuuuuuuuck! CHIEF

JERE
He's all right. Mann, reload that handgun. Throttle up, Chief. Chief, ease up, we're getting too close in. Chief!

(JERE leans forwards and eases up throttle, down to an idle. CHIEF slams the wheel in rage.)

JERE
McGuire, keep an eye on that reef. It'd be stupid to survive all that then run aground. Congratulations gentlemen, you just survived the first PT-Boat attack in Hackett Straight.

(Pause.)

Did we hit anything? MANN

I have no idea. JERE

I heard something. An explosion.

MCGUIRE

It might have been a gun flash.

AYRES

My God.

CHIEF

(Pause.)

We have two more fish, gentlemen.

JERE

Jesus, sir.

CHIEF

We have to cross the channel anyway, to get home.

JERE

We can wait till they've cleared.

CHIEF

What do you see, Ayres?

JERE

Sir.

AYRES

What do you see?

JERE

(AYRES reluctantly stands and scans the horizon.)

Silhouettes.

AYRES

Destroyers?

JERE

No. Lower outlines. Barges, sir.

AYRES

JERE

Those are the reinforcements, Chief. That's what we're here for – to get the barges.

CHIEF

Jesus.

JERE

Chief, get her around. Mann, radio our position, then get back up here and keep an eye out for searchlights.

(MANN goes below. Pause.)

JERE

Chief. Turn us around.

(CHIEF slowly throttles up the engine and swings the boat back into the channel. Engine roars.)

JERE

McGuire, stay at that rangefinder.

AYRES

Something's burning out there, sir. I can see it.

JERE

So we did hit something. Congratulations, gentlemen.

(MANN back on deck with handgun.)

AYRES

Barge dead ahead, sir.

JERE

Line her up, Ayres. McGuire, sing out when you have the range on her. Stand-by tubes five and six.

MCGUIRE

Standing by tubes five and six.

MANN

Phosphorous on the port bow, sir.

AYRES

(Looking in that direction)

Destroyer.

JERE

Eyes front, Ayres. Keep an eye on that barge.

AYRES

Aye-aye, sir.

CHIEF

This is suicide.

JERE

Shut up, Chief.

AYRES

(Looking left)

Destroyer closing fast.

JERE

Barge, Ayres! Barge!

(Gunfire. Searchlight snaps on, floods the boat with light. MANN fires.)

MCGUIRE

Adjust four degrees.

CHIEF

(Swinging wheel)

Four degrees.

MANN

Jesus she's close.

(MANN is firing up at searchlight source. Gunfire returns, close and loud. More splashes, more water.)

JERE

Stand by five and six.

MCGUIRE

Five and six-

(High above them appears a light, like the light that passed over JERE and DENISE in the opening sequence.)

AYRES

(Looking at light high above them)

What the hell is that? Phosphorous! At flank! Port side!

JERE

Fire five and six!

(Whoosh.)

JERE

All right, Chief, get us out of here.

(CHIEF dives at the throttle. The engine roars. The light towers directly above them.)

JERE

Chief, full throttle! Full throttle!

(The light passes directly overhead and divides the boat between JERE, MANN and MCGUIRE on one side and AYRES and CHIEF on the other. There is a heart-rending crack as the boat is divided in two followed by the deafening sound of destroyer engines churning through the sea. We hear a loud explosion as of the PT-Boat's engine combusting. Searchlight sweeps the stage from far above. Men have been thrown onto the stage in corresponding groups: AYRES and CHIEF right; MANN, MCGUIRE and JERE left. Red light passes between the two groups high above, thunderous churning sound passes and fades – the destroyer's screws. The ship has passed. Men are left in the water, flat onstage. They lie on the stage but should move as if they were on the surface of water, swimming free-style or breaststroke on their stomachs, paddling on their backs. MANN is the only one making sound, he is screaming. JERE regains his focus, looks around.)

JERE

Mann! Mann!

CHIEF

Lieutenant!

JERE

Over here!

CHIEF

Where's McGuire?

JERE

Mann!

(JERE has swum to MANN. On his back he takes hold of MANN. MANN, also on his back, cries out in pain.)

Jesus. JERE

Ayres! CHIEF

What the fuck- AYRES

Ayres! CHIEF

I can't- AYRES

CHIEF
(Taking AYRES around the upper torso)
Here, I've got you.

JERE
Mann, give me your hand, give it to me.

(MANN extends his hand, JERE takes it.)

JERE
Chief, how's Ayres?

CHIEF
Full of water. I've got him.

JERE
Hold him on his back.

CHIEF
I know. Who've you got?

JERE
Mann. He's scalded. He's bleeding like hell.

CHEIF
Where the hell's McGuire?

(AYRES starts coughing up water, groaning. MANN rolls over.)

JERE

Come on, Mann, you're sinking.

(JERE gets a tighter grip on MANN, who cries out in pain. MANN and AYRES now are making a lot of noise.)

JERE

Shut up, Mann! Shut up!

(JERE covers MANN's mouth so his screams can't be heard. Now only AYRES is noisy.)

JERE

Chief!

CHIEF

What?

JERE

Shut him up.

CHIEF

How-

JERE

Shut him the fuck up!

(AYRES lets out a load groan, MANN screams.)

JERE

Shut up. Everyone!

(JERE clamps his hand again on MANN's mouth; CHIEF does the same on AYRES'. Silence.)

JERE

They're looking for us.

(Churning sounds of destroyer engines close, searchlights sweep the stage from right to left. Searchlights exit, sound fades.)

CHIEF

Maybe we should... Maybe we should surrender, sir.

JERE

Shut up.

(Searchlights and engines return. They cross in the opposite direction.)

JERE

Where's McGuire?

CHIEF

Mac! Mac!

JERE

Shut up. Come on, Mann, come with me.

(JERE swims with MANN to MCGUIRE who is facedown in the water upstage. Most of the swimming can be done in place. When a moment like this requires actual movement across the stage the distance should be kept short and can be achieved by a breaststroke which actually drags the torso across the stage surface.)

JERE

McGuire.

(JERE rolls him over. MCGUIRE groans. JERE feels MCGUIRE's limp arm.)

JERE

Jesus. McGuire. McGuire.

(MCGUIRE spits up a mouthful of water, moans.)

JERE

Chief, Ayres, come to me.

(CHIEF swims with AYRES to JERE.)

JERE

Mac's arm is busted. We're going to get him onto the wreck. He'll be ok until morning when we can get back to him.

CHIEF

From where?

JERE

Get him onto the wreck. Do it.

(They lean MCGUIRE onto a piece of the boat. MCGUIRE indicates this by leaning on one arm, slightly elevated.)

JERE

Ok, get that board, three of us. Put Mann on.

(They move downstage, AYRES now able to swim for himself, JERE still towing MANN, who groans throughout. AYRES and CHIEF throw their upper torsos over a board, which they indicate by slightly elevating their arms in front of them. JERE places MANN over the board, making sure his arms have a good grip. They catch their breath.)

CHIEF

What the... What the hell happened, sir?

JERE

Destroyer cut us in two. Simple.

(Searchlight sweeps the stage. They lay flat on the board as it passes. Searchlight leaves.)

JERE

Jesus.

(Searchlight returns moving much slower, actually creeping across the stage methodically illuminating every inch.)

JERE

Go under.

(JERE, CHIEF and AYRES all take a deep breath and go under water, leaving MANN slumped on the board. We see them tread under water, on their backs, holding their breaths. Searchlight lands on MANN, who looks dead. It lingers on him and then moves on, eventually exiting. JERE, CHIEF and AYRES surface, gasping for air. They get a grip on the board. We hear destroyer's engines fading. CHIEF and AYRES are gasping for breath on the board. JERE shoves off from them and swims back to MCGUIRE. He removes flare gun satchel from around MCGUIRE's neck and places it over his back. He swims back to AYRES and CHIEF. CHIEF is struggling to take his shoes off.)

JERE

Don't do that?

CHIEF

What?

JERE

Keep your shoes on, you'll need them. (He now has his arms over the board.) Come on, start kicking.

CHIEF

Where the hell are we going, Lieutenant?

JERE

There's a sand bar near here. Start kicking. Come on. You too, Mann. Kick.

(They kick behind them, holding the board with their arms. MANN is barely able to kick, groaning. JERE supports him with one arm. Blackout. The cyc brightens to indicate the coming of day. Lights up on the four still kicking. They are all exhausted, mouths hung open, breathing hard. Soon they are able to put their feet down and slowly rise up, wading ashore. JERE is always supporting MANN who can only barely help himself.)

AYRES

Jesus... Jesus... Jesus...

JERE

Here, get Mann up. Help me.

(CHIEF helps JERE get MANN ashore. They stumble forward, on to a beach, and collapse.)

JERE

There.

CHIEF

My God.

JERE

Ok. Rest. Rest.

(They lay on their backs, breathing hard.)

CHIEF

Where are we?

JERE

Listen to me, Chief.

CHIEF

Where the hell are we?

JERE

Listen to me. (He gestures out) If you walk along this sand bar it connects with the island there. There might be fresh water on it. At least coconuts. Get Mann there, the two of you. Get him in some shade. See if you can dress his wound.

CHIEF

Where are you going?

JERE

Get McGuire.

CHIEF

Mr. Brennan.

JERE

Get Mann ashore. It shouldn't take you long.

CHIEF

I'm exhausted.

JERE

Do it. When the sun gets up this place will be an oven.

CHIEF

Fuck.

JERE

Listen to me, Chief. Ayres. Don't signal any ships, they're all Japanese. Don't do it. Just try to get to the island. Just do that. Ok?

CHIEF

Aye-aye, sir.

(JERE stands and enters the water, stumbling, holding his back. As he wades in he sinks to a flat position onstage. He grabs the board and starts kicking away from AYRES and CHIEF. Blackout onstage. Cyc gets bright, scalding brightness. It is high noon. Lights on JERE who has swum back to MCGUIRE, still lying on the wreck.)

JERE

Come on, McGuire. Lay on me. Come on. Ok. I'll take you.

(MCGUIRE is completely limp, no movement. JERE puts MCGUIRE's arms around his own neck, holding them together at his chest. He swims with one arm back in the direction he came. Blackout. Cyc cools, it is afternoon. Lights on CHIEF on shore, asleep. He wakes up when he hears splashing noises and rises to help JERE with MCGUIRE, as they stumble out of the surf. JERE dumps MCGUIRE in the sand and collapses, exhausted. CHIEF examines MCGUIRE.)

CHIEF

Jesus, sir. He's dead.

JERE

He's not. Bullshit.

CHIEF

He's dead.

JERE

He's not.

CHIEF

(Reaching out to touch him)

He is, sir.

JERE

Get off me!

(JERE crawls back to MCGUIRE. He puts his head on MCGUIRE's chest.)

JERE

Ok, he's dead.

CHIEF

Was he dead when you found him?

JERE

No. I don't know. Fuck!

(Pause. JERE stands and stretches his back, winces. Obviously there is pain. He can barely stand. CHIEF says nothing.)

JERE

How's Mann?

CHIEF

Not good. His wound is... well, it stinks.

JERE

You think it's gangrenous?

CHIEF

I don't even know what that is.

JERE

Neither do I but... it's something bad.

CHIEF

Well he smells bad, if that's any clue.

JERE

You get him into some shade?

CHIEF

Yeah.

JERE

How 'bout Ayres?

CHIEF

Sleeping. We've been taking turns keeping a lookout.

JERE

Our planes will be out there, middle of the passage.

CHIEF

What about ships?

JERE

Same place. All middle of the passage. You find any water?

CHIEF

A little.

JERE

Food?

CHIEF

No.

(JERE stares around.)

CHIEF

There's a bigger island over there.

JERE

Yeah, probably full of Japs starving to death. They're as likely to eat you as feed you.

CHIEF

What do we do?

JERE

I'm going to swim out the direction of the straight. See how far it gets me. Maybe I can get out far enough to signal one of our planes.

CHIEF

You sure?

JERE

They'll never look for us here.

CHIEF

Will they even look for us?

JERE

Get me some water.

(CHIEF stumbles off. JERE looks at MCGUIRE. Stares at him. JERE deliberately looks away. Out to sea. CHIEF enters cupping a leaf in his hand.)

CHIEF

Here.

(CHIEF hands JERE leaf, which has water in it. JERE sips it and then licks the leaf dry.)

JERE

Any more?

CHIEF

That's it.

(Pause. He looks at CHIEF, then turns. JERE enters the surf, retrieves board and begins to kick again. This tires him quickly. He feels a stab of pain in his back and stops, massaging his spine. He tries kicking again but has trouble. He shoves board aside and swims free style. This works

better. He is now swimming easily, without pain or exhaustion, his strokes steady. Occasionally he stops to look around and correct his direction. He is swimming easily and comfortably, making headway. He feels a swish against his leg. Stops. Looks around him in the water. We hear the swish of a fin. He feels another swish. Panic. He hurriedly turns around and swims back towards shore. Faster and faster. He is obviously terrified. Blackout. Cyc gets cooler – it is afternoon. Lights up on JERE stumbling out of surf to CHIEF. He collapses next to him. Panicked breathing.)

JERE

Horrifying. Made it to a gap in the reef. Felt a... felt a shark brush my leg. (He is crying.)

CHIEF

That's all... it's... sir.

JERE

I came back. Couldn't take it.

(Pause. JERE lies back, covering his eyes.)

CHIEF

Maybe if we swam it. To the next island.

JERE

Swarming with Japs.

CHIEF

Might not be.

JERE

There's a Jap flag flying over it, Chief, for Christ's sake.

CHIEF

Maybe they'd feed us.

JERE

Starving men don't feed people. Use your brain. Let me rest. At six... (He looks at his watch, which obviously doesn't work.) Or when the sun starts sinking. I'll head out again.

CHIEF

Still sharks.

JERE

Along the reef. I'll walk on the reef. I've got to get to the middle of that passage. With the flare gun.

CHIEF

There's no air/sea rescue at night sir.

JERE

DeMartini will come out, with his boats. Looking for us.

(JERE stares at the horizon. CHIEF falls asleep. JERE hums "Blue Moon" to himself as the lights change to indicate the passage of the day. Eventually he stands and starts peeling off his clothes. CHIEF wakes up, sees JERE undressing.)

CHIEF

I think you're crazy.

JERE

What do you suggest?

CHIEF

You're going to swim out into the middle of the Pacific Ocean hoping a PT-Boat passes you in the dead of night so you can shoot off a flare and get rescued.

JERE

Yeah.

CHIEF

You're insane.

(AYRES has entered and is listening.)

JERE

Closest thing to us right now is an island full of Japs. We're starving. We either surrender and eat rice for the next decade or we get help. I'm getting help.

CHIEF

What's with you people?

JERE

What?

CHIEF

Blue chip bastards. You really need to play the hero, don't you?

JERE

Chief.

CHIEF

No, shut up. That's what it's all about with you.

JERE

Maybe you shouldn't worry about it. Maybe you shouldn't worry 'bout my motives if it means that you might get saved. Who cares why I'm doing it. It needs to be done.

CHIEF

No it doesn't.

JERE

It does, Chief. Just 'cause you're not willing to do it doesn't mean it shouldn't happen. (Pause.) I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean it.

CHIEF

Of course you did.

JERE

I'm going.

CHIEF

Your brother's a big hero, you need to be a big hero.

JERE

Look, I need to swim maybe fifteen, twenty miles tonight. I could really use your support on this one, your confidence.

CHIEF

Forget it.

AYERS

Of course you have our support, our confidence. We'll be ok. Don't worry. We'll look for your flare.

CHIEF

How are you going to do it?

JERE

I'm going into the middle of Hackett Straight. There'll be a patrol tonight – PT Boats. I'll get out into the middle of the straight and wait for them. When I see one I'll fire off a flare. They'll see me.

CHIEF

The middle of Hackett Straight.

JERE

Yes.

CHIEF

How?

JERE

I'll wade out to the reef, walk along the reef until I reach the end of it then...

(Pause. CHIEF only stares at him.)

CHIEF

I have the life jacket. I can't drown.

(JERE has shed his clothes such that he is naked but for shoes, life jacket and flare gun in pouch.)

CHIEF

You haven't eaten since Wednesday.

JERE

I'm fine. I'm a swimmer.

(Blackout. Dusk. Lights up on JERE heading out into the water, which he represents by moving slower, sluggishly as if through sand. Throughout these sequences he moves in place, indicating all forward motion through movement. He raises his arms to simulate the rising water level. Soon he is sloggng forward. He finds coral reef under his feet, which means that his movement can be steadier, less ponderous than on the sand, but the footing is uneven with his knees bending to adjust to the various levels of the coral. At times he goes deeper, as the coral is deeper, in which case he can barely keep his head above the water, his mouth gulping for air. Finally he reaches a place where he has no footing in front of him – there is a gap in the coral. He surges forward and swims now. His two arms and a free leg represent the breaststroke as he paddles forward, one leg in place to keep the actor's balance. Soon he lands as he feels coral once again under him, and the effort of walking almost neck deep on coral resumes. As he moves forward in this varying manner the lights dim - night is falling on Hackett Straight. But it does not get dark. There is phosphorescence from the sea, from the deck of the stage. The stage actually glows. He continues. He is always looking about, getting his baring, keeping an eye on all of his surroundings. He is a man, alone, in the middle of the ocean, barely clinging to any kind of footing, at times swimming free from land all together. The sound is that of the tide, of gentle waves on coral, at times of large waves, wind, and always the sound of water, endless water, right at ear level, an oppressive sound. It would be

terrifying except that he is so much a part of it, more and more as he continues, that he becomes one with it. He loses the look of panic and becomes only a machine of movement and surveillance. He is looking for something: a sign that he's reached the end of the coral, that he is at the edge of Hackett Straight. Suddenly he is. He has run out of coral. He looks around, changes direction by facing away from center and then plunges forth. The actor shoots out of the water with a gasp, arcs again toward center and slowly lowers himself facing downstage onto his life vest, he is now prostrate on the stage, his head raised by the vest, actually swimming free style towards the audience. He is completely free from the shore, the coral, any sense of land or haven. The sound changes, becomes gentler somehow. He continues to look about him, surveying the horizon, looking for the spot that will put him closest to the place of interception with the PT-boats he hopes will come. And then he stops. He's found the spot. He rises slowly to his knees, dog paddling with his arms, then up again on one leg until fully upright, dog paddling in place. He checks the flare gun. It's loaded, seems to be working. Now he scans the horizon. There is no sound. He is alone waiting to find rescue, dog paddling. He removes shoes to make dog paddling easier, ties the laces together and puts them around his neck. Now he treads water easily. We hear a thrashing sound and he moves as if something brushed his leg. He jumps with fear. Another thrashing sound. Panic crosses his face. Sharks! He side strokes as if away from this spot and then begins dog paddling again. Another thrashing sound. Fear. Another. He paddles faster, trying to scare them off. More thrashing, as if multiple sharks. Frantic dog paddling, scare them away. Now silence. No more thrashing. He paddles silently, looking about, for the PT boats, for sharks, terrified.)

(The beach. CHIEF, AYRES and MANN become visible upstage on beach, JERE in darkness downstage – he lays down to become invisible to audience. This will be the pattern as we shift back and forth between JERE in the water and the others on the island. CHIEF and AYRES sit on the beach, cold. They are looking out. MANN is slumped asleep. There is wind. They too look frightened, but also exhausted, fatigued, they have nothing like sharks to animate them. AYRES begins humming “Moonlight Becomes You” in a croaked voice. He hums alone for while. CHIEF smiles, can't believe it. Then he joins in. Then AYRES props up MANN and gets him humming as well. Soon a pitiful chorus of parched voices humming a love song. Suddenly rain, a deluge, the sound but also huge spots on the stage, as if it were raining on the beach. The humming stops and they all open their mouths. They lap at the rain greedily. It continues for a bit. CHIEF and AYRES are drawn into a standing position, heads back, mouths open, tongues lapping at the sky. Then it stops, as suddenly as it started, and they sit, silently.)

(The ocean. CHIEF, AYRES and MANN go into darkness and JERE returns to view standing upright and dog paddling. He too is humming but in a much lower voice, fearful, even more pathetic than that of the others. His position afloat in this empty sea is beyond absurd. Can't tell what he's humming. "Take the A-Train" maybe. Then we hear the low drone of a motor. JERE shuts up. Silence. Was it a dream? He hums again. We hear the motor again, he shuts up. No, it's definitely there. But where? He looks around desperately. Nothing on the horizon. Not a boat. He looks up. It's above him. A plane. He reaches for his flare gun. Wait a minute – he stops himself. What if it's Japanese? He looks up again, follows the trajectory of the plane with his finger. Can barely make it out. It's flying from left to right, east to west. He thinks for moment, "Must be American, has to be American." Raises the flare gun. Motor sound disappears. Looks discouraged. Motor returns. He raises the gun again, fires. The flare arcs into the sky. He watches its glow above him. The glow fades. He is left afloat on the dark sea.)

(The island comes into view, night: MANN in agony – making noise, holding himself. CHIEF rises and moves away, to far side of beach. AYRES joins him.)

CHIEF

He making too much noise for you?

AYRES

No, he stinks. Those burns. He smells gross. Makes me sick.

CHIEF

Yeah.

(MANN awakens and sees no one around him. He panics.)

MANN

Mr. Brennan? Ayres? Chief? Where the hell is everyone?

AYRES

Mann, I'm here. It's Ayres. We're here.

MANN

Where're the others?

AYRES

Looking for help. Go to sleep. It's fine.

MANN

No Japs?

No. AYRES

I'm scared. Someone come here. MANN

No. AYRES

Why not? MANN

You stink, Mann. Your flesh stinks. CHIEF

Oh. (Pause.) Sorry. MANN

It's ok. Just go to sleep. We're here. CHIEF

(MANN drifts off.)

What are you doing? AYRES

He stinks. CHIEF

Go sit with him. AYRES

You sit with him, he stinks. CHIEF

You're the Chief of the boat. Go sit with him. AYRES

(CHIEF stares at AYRES, then slowly rises. He starts to cross to MANN, then stops and turns to AYRES.)

Go see if you can gather some water. Mann needs it. CHIEF

AYRES

How?

CHIEF

There must be puddles in one of these tree trunks. Figure it out. He needs water.

AYRES

Yessir.

(AYRES exits. CHIEF crosses and sits with MANN. He puts his arm around him.)

(JERE treading water, trying to reload flare gun. He listens. No more motor sound. He only slowly realizes it. The plane has gone. He begins treading water again. Thrashing sounds return. He looks terrified. He begins making breaststroke motions, almost frantic. He's having trouble with his gear, too much of it: life jacket, shoes around his neck, flare gun. He is almost whimpering with frustration. Thrashing sounds louder, something brushes his calf. He panics, yanks shoes off his neck and rips off his life jacket off. He lowers himself into full swimming position, only the flare gun slung over his back. He is swimming fast towards the reef. Somehow the shoes and life jacket drift off behind him as he swims away.)

(The beach. AYRES giving MANN water from leaf. MANN licks the leaf greedily, then passes out in AYRES' arms. CHIEF stands and looks out.)

(The ocean. JERE back on the coral, walking forward. This is incredibly painful now as he has no shoes. Every third step causes him pain as coral slices his feet. The sun is rising. He looks back at it with fear. The sun will bring the Japanese maybe. He has a long way to go.)

(The beach. Morning light on cyc. AYRES sits on sand looking out. He sees nothing.)

AYRES

Chief.

CHIEF

Yeah.

AYRES

How's Mann?

CHIEF

Still stinks. Asleep. Resting. Any sign of him?

AYRES

Nothing.

(JERE on coral. He takes a step. Excruciating pain. He crouches, puts his hand on his foot, holds it up and looks – it is covered with blood. He tries to stand; it is too painful. He looks at the water around him. Is he really going to get back into it? He has to. Can't walk any more. He lowers himself into it. He stretches out in water and begins swimming free style. Soon he is swimming as fast as he can.)

(AYRES and CHIEF on the beach. AYRES asleep. MANN slumped beside him, CHIEF staring out. CHIEF nudges AYRES.)

AYRES

Yeah, what, you see him?

CHIEF

I have just about enough strength to wade to that island.

AYRES

Ok.

CHIEF

Come on, let's go get some food.

AYRES

You think?

CHIEF

Yeah, he's not coming back.

AYRES

Ok.

CHIEF

We'll leave Mann. Japs wouldn't feed him anyway.

AYRES

Mann's dead. Died last night.

CHIEF

Lucky Mann.

AYRES

Well...

Well what?
CHIEF

He doesn't smell as bad.
AYRES

Shit. Let's go.
CHIEF

(They rise and shuffle off. Pause. JERE crawls on from opposite direction. He is barely moving. He lies in the middle of the stage. CHIEF and AYRES enter and shuffle to him. They roll him over, cover him.)

Jesus, Lieutenant.
AYRES

I need some water.
JERE
(In a barely audible croak)

I'll see what I can find. (He shuffles off.)
AYRES

I need food.
JERE

There is no food.
CHIEF

How's Mann?
JERE

Dead.
CHIEF

(JERE rolls over on his side, low groan. That's two men he's lost. AYRES enters with a leaf. He pores water on JERE's lips. JERE sits up and sips the water slowly.)

What did you see?
CHIEF

Corsair. Looking for us.
JERE

CHIEF
Did he see you?

JERE
I need food.

CHIEF
You could eat Mann.

AYRES
I wouldn't. (Makes barfing face.)

JERE
Ayres, I want you to climb up that tree. Get the nuts. Bring them down. Chief, figure out how to get them open.

CHIEF
I don't have the strength, sir.

JERE
You had the strength to swim to the Japs. You can break open a coconut. Do it.

CHIEF
You going back out there tonight?

JERE
Yes. I need your shoes. And more water. Give them to me.

(Blackout. The cyc is dark again. It is night. Lights up on JERE on the coral, wearing CHIEF's shoes. He is moving forward but holding his back, which is obviously causing him pain. He reaches the end of the coral and launches himself out into deep water. He is now swimming. His back pain dissipates. He lays on his back, paddling, content, looking up at the stars. He hums: "Moonlight becomes you..." He is gently floating. He hears the swish of the sharks. He makes paddling on his back motion that carries him away from the swish. It fades. He continues to hum, gently paddling, no longer in pain or afraid. He is so content he almost doesn't hear the sound of motors. But then he does. He looks around, from his position on his back. He raises the flare gun and fires. Another flare arcs into the sky. He smiles at it. He seems delirious, happy. Blackout. Cyc gets bright – daytime.)

(CHIEF on the beach, his head slumped on his knees, asleep. Sound of motor, close. AIRMAN comes onstage, wet having waded ashore.)

AIRMAN

Sailor! Yo, sailor!

(CHIEF wakes up, stares as if at a mirage.)

AIRMAN

Come on, we saw a Jap launch shove off from that island as we were landing. Come on.

CHIEF

Lieutenant Brennan. He's out there.

AIRMAN

We'll pick him up on the way in.

CHIEF

How'd you find us? You see his flare?

AIRMAN

I don't know. Army pilot reported you. Saw something in Hackett Straight last night.

CHIEF

He saw the Lieutenant.

AIRMAN

Let's go!

(AYRES has entered and is staring at AIRMAN, bewildered.)

AIRMAN

Get the lead out, Sailor.

(We hear rifle shots, off.)

AIRMAN

Let's go!

AYRES

What about Mann?

AIRMAN

Come on.

CHIEF

Leave him. Let's go.

(Lights shift to JERE on his back, eyes closed. We hear a plane cross from right to left. JERE does not open his eyes. Plane fades to silence. JERE floats. He sings in a whisper: "Missed the Saturday dance, Heard they tore up the floor, Just can't bare it without you, Don't get around much anymore.")

JERE

(To himself, in play Irish brogue)

Brennan, my boy. Ain't nothing coming to save you. That's just your stupid old belief in God. Your mother would be proud. But God don't care. He just don't care. Worse than that, he don't even notice. Only one thing going to save you, Brennan. Swim back to base. Swim back to base. Only forty miles. Swim back. Get help. Just swim forever. Swim.

(He roles over and starts swimming, slowly but surely.)

(CHIEF in hospital bed. JEPHETSON and DEMARTINI stand over him.)

JEPHETSON

When did you see him last?

CHIEF

Last night. Two nights ago. I don't know.

JEPHETSON

(To DEMARTINI)

Sharks.

DEMARTINI

Where was he headed?

CHIEF

Hackett Straight. With a flare gun.

JEPHETSON

(To DEMARTINI)

You going out tonight?

DEMARTINI

Yes.

JEPHETSON

I mean are you really?

DEMARTINI

Yes, I am.

JEPHETSON

Scour the straights. Even if it means you miss the convoy.

(JERE floats on back, delirious, his limbs spread about him. He mumble-sings:)

JERE

“Oh, Danny boy, the lights, the lights are calling... Danny Boy...” Jesus, how does it go?

(We hear swishing sounds.)

JERE

Oh, come on, boys.

(He paddles a bit away from that spot. Swishing fades.)

JERE

“Oh, Danny Boy...”

(He closes his eyes, as if actually asleep and floating. He smiles. We hear a motor and then another. Blackout.)

(Lights up on JERE covered with a sheet. DEMARTINI stands beside him. JERE opens his eyes, looks up at DEMARTINI.)

DEMARTINI

Hello, Lieutenant.

(JERE smiles.)

DEMARTINI

Wanted you to know we go out into the straights every night now. First to find you, now to hunt destroyers. Actually got one two night ago. Might have been the very one that cut you in two. You looked like a stick when we found you. A white, translucent stick floating in the middle of the sea. Pilot said he almost didn't take a second look, said you looked like you'd fallen off a tree. A branch. (He kneels down to JERE.) Jesus, Brennan, what a mess. Don't know. Sounds kinda corny but you snapped me out of it. My fear. My shaking panic in the Straight. I could barley choke it back. The first time I felt sure out there is when I went looking for you. I felt like if I didn't find you I was an ass, a failure, some kind of criminal. And I didn't find you. A plane found you. I'm forty-five years old and I was a fucking coward. Thank Christ, I didn't have to go home feeling that the rest of my life. I could live in that straight now. It makes me feel alive. It's where I want to die. Not in Arkansas. There. My mom's still alive. And my wife. They'd be proud of me. If I died there. Shit, they're already proud of me. Finally. After a lifetime.

(JERE raises his hand and places it over DEMARTINI's mouth.)

DEMARTINI

Ok, I'll shut up.

(JERE stands and dresses, in his swimsuit and shirt from the first scene. He sits on the stage. The cyc has been restored to his family's view of Cape Cod. We are back on his lawn. DENISE enters. She is a mature and beautiful woman now, maybe dressed a little too old for her age.)

DENISE

Big hero.

(He turns to look at her, smiles.)

JERE

You read the newspaper?

(She crosses to sit beside him.)

DENISE

Listen to the radio, go to the movies, open magazines, you're everywhere.

JERE

Like mildew or dust.

(She smiles.)

DENISE

Lookin' to get laid?

JERE

I thought you got married.

DENISE

That's run its course. He was a bum.

JERE

Rich bum.

DENISE

Rich and a lousy kisser. (She kisses him.) Hmmmm... Now that's kissin'. (They kiss some more.) I was sorry to hear about Jim.

JERE

You sure know how to turn a guy on.

DENISE

Yeah. Woops. I just... I felt bad about what I said... about him.

JERE

Jim was... Jim was Jim... I knew him better than you. So I know what you meant. But he was my brother. He loved me. I know that.

DENISE

He was a hero.

JERE

Yeah, like me. Tried to do something, failed, and became a hero.

(They kiss some more. He groans. She kisses him deeper. He really groans.)

DENISE

Boy, when was the last time you made out?

JERE

My back, my back.

(He grabs it and winces. She lays him down.)

DENISE

Now how did you swim across the South Pacific with that back?

JERE

It's certain activities set it off.

DENISE

Football and foreplay?

JERE

Jesus, it hurts.

DENISE

Lay very still, with your hands at your sides, now turn your head...

(Having positioned him correctly she lays beside him and kisses his lips. He moans now in contentment. JIM SR. enters, dressed as before, smoking a cigar. DENISE sits up.)

DENISE

Ambassador Brennan.

JIM

The Lady from the Sea.

DENISE

(Standing)

Well, no, this time I came in a Buick.

JIM

You're Denny Hale. Jerrod's wife.

DENISE

I was. We're separated.

JIM

You should get back together. No Jere, don't get up. (JERE hasn't moved.)

DENISE

He's in pain.

JIM

I can see that.

DENISE

Well, I'll scoot. I was just... (She kneels to JERE) Relax, ok? Take it easy. And call me.

JIM

Oh, he will.

DENISE

Good night, Ambassador Brennan.

JIM

Good night, Mrs. Hale.

(She leaves.)

JIM

Nice girl. Always was. Husband's a prick. But I always liked her.

JERE

Well, he's no longer in the picture.

JIM

Oh, fiddle sticks. Women like that don't divorce men like that. Rich as Croesus. (Looks at JERE.) Well, here we are, you haven't changed much.

JERE

She said she was sorry about Jim.

JIM

Yeah, everyone's sorry about Jim. The idiot.

JERE

What does that mean?

JIM

Nothing. Forget it.

(Pause.)

JIM

They say that mission, Jim's mission... was doomed. A ridiculous idea.

JERE

Dad, what are telling me?

JIM

It's not easy to tell so please listen.

JERE

Ok.

JIM

Some hair-brained idea to load a B-25 up with explosives and glide it into a Kraut dry dock. A dry dock. Can you imagine anything less glamorous? Anyway, it would have crippled their U-boat force if it had worked.

JERE

Why didn't it?

JIM

Chance in a million. He was supposed to point the thing at the dry dock, get it as close as possible, and then bail out. Now have you ever heard anything so stupid?

JERE

Might have worked if they hadn't shot him down.

JIM

Shot him down? You believe that malarkey? No one shot him down. The thing blew up before it even reached the German coast. I got his CO drunk in the Commodore Bar, he told me the whole story about the hair-brained scheme. In order for the dynamite to

detonate on impact it had to be highly volatile, one good jolt and it would all go up. Well he hit turbulence over the North Sea. It just blew up. He was a hundred miles from his target.

JERE

Forgive me, but ... isn't there someone you can sue?

JIM

I tried that. Turns out everyone, from his commanding officer to his best friend, told him not to do it. They even issued him orders, written orders, that the mission was off. They must have known I'd be looking for blood if he got hurt. Turns out he organized it himself. Made the whole thing happen. It was suicide. Plain and simple.

JERE

I'm sure he thought it would work, Dad.

JIM

The longest shot imaginable. Turns out that was my Jim. The longest shot imaginable. He was probably drunk.

JERE

Dad...

JIM

I suppose you can hear this, you're an adult. He made the decision, the decision to go through with it, on December 4th. Day after he heard about your exploits in Hackett Straight. Day after he got his issue of *Life* in the mail.

JERE

Oh, come on.

JIM

Nope, that's what his CO told me. He said he'd never seen Joe so upset. He just stopped talking. For a day he didn't speak. Just stared at your mug all over that copy of *Life*, like he was transfixed. Then he became the most motivated person on the planet. He was determined to make it work. Guess he couldn't stand a rival in the family.

(Pause.)

JERE

Why did you tell me that?

JIM

Thought you should hear it.

JERE

It was just cruel.

(JERE stands suddenly to move away but is stabbed by back pain, and has to sit.)

JIM

You'll have to get better at hiding that. Knowing when it's coming and adjusting your moves so people don't notice.

JERE

What people?

JIM

Just people.

JERE

Voters?

JIM

Whoever. People you do business with. Son, you can do whatever you want. Anything, the world is yours. That's all I have to say to you.

JERE

Now that Jim is dead.

JIM

Jim. Jesus, that kid. I loved him, loved him. And he never deserved it.

JERE

Of course he did.

JIM

You'll go farther than me. You have a good heart. Not a saintly one like your mother's, but good. Decent. People like you. I'm jealous. People never liked me.

JERE

I don't want to be Jim, Dad.

JIM

Thank God.

JERE

I mean, I don't want to be Congressman. Or Senator. Or any of that.

JIM

Don't worry about it. Be nothing for now. There's time for everything.

JERE

Not for me.

JIM

My God, you swimming across the Pacific, saving those men. Amazing. I've relived it every night since I read about it. It's something out of Homer or Beowulf. God, you're lucky.

JERE

It's just a story, Dad.

JIM

No, it's not. It happened. I can see you doing it. You're like that.

JERE

They ended up saving themselves, Dad. The rescue plane would have come eventually.

JIM

There's a cosmic thing, son. You try really hard to do something, you don't succeed, and it happens anyway. But it happened because you tried really hard.

JERE

That's hogwash, they're unrelated. (Pause.) I'll say this for it. It felt clean. It felt good. I made myself feel useful. Even if I accomplished nothing.

JIM

And now, how you feeling?

JERE

Empty.

JIM

You should be proud of yourself.

JERE

That *Life* article... Complete puff piece.

JIM

That's good journalism.

JERE

When I was swimming, swimming in the ocean, I felt alive, full, scared shitless but necessary, primal, like an animal. It felt... It felt good. Damn good.

JIM

Yeah. I used to scare myself. All the time. Deliberately. Do things that scared the shit out of me. Business tricks, scams, take someone's job, ruin them all at the risk of my own life, my own family. But it made me feel full, alive. It still does. My whole life I've spent building a family and I've almost destroyed, deliberately destroyed it a dozen times. Because it was exciting. That's life. Excitement. I've tried to gain influence, so I could gamble with countries, peoples' destinies, the future itself. Now that, that would be something.

JERE

Jim did that, ran a risk.

JIM

Jim was an idiot. He ran a stupid risk. Jesus. I bust my ass to raise a hero and my wife ends up doing it behind my back. I never even noticed you. Still, I feel useful.

JERE

Jim loved you, Dad. He adored you. He wouldn't have done what he did if it wasn't to impress you.

JIM

Thanks for saying that.

JERE

It wasn't really a compliment.

JIM

One thing you'll learn in life, take anything that sounds remotely complimentary as high praise. It makes things simple.

(JERE winces in pain, lays back onstage breathing hard. JIM crosses to him, sits beside him. He strokes JERE's hair, gently. JERE takes JIM's hand, holds it. They sit like this for a moment; then JIM collects himself and stands up.)

JIM

Come inside when you feel better. Your mother's still awake. It makes her so happy to see you before she goes to bed.

(JERE smiles. JIM exits. JERE stands painfully; it is really difficult for him to get up. He crosses to the surf. He strips down to his bathing suit and wades out into the water. Soon he is able to roll over on his back and spread out his limbs. The water laps by his ears. He lays and stares up at the stars, content. Blackout.)

End of play