

The Law of the Sea

A drama by

D. Richard Tucker

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The Law of the Sea

Synopsis: Fergus survived a shipwreck that took the life of his good friend Andrew. Now Andrew's wife wants to know what happened, but Fergus is reluctant to share the facts.

CAST (4M, 1F)

FERGUS Hays, M, 32

BERTRAM Latimer, M, 30

DARBY Kilpatrick, M, 24

ELIZABETH Irving, F, 30

GEORGE Jenkins, M, 40's

Also plays

Reverend COLE, M, 40's

Time: 1855.

Setting: New York. Various locations depicted by one or two pieces of furniture.

Scene 1	Train car (represented by a bench)
Scene 2	Pub (represented by a table with chairs)
Scene 3	Church (represented by a bench)
Scene 4	Pub
Scene 5	Church
Scene 6	Pub
Scene 7	Pub
Scene 8	Church

If an intermission is needed, it may be placed between Scenes 5 and 6.

Based on production needs, the roles of GEORGE and COLE may be combined or played by two actors.

The Law of the Sea

Scene 1

It is 1855. The stage is almost bare. Occasional pieces of furniture are used to differentiate locations. On one side is a bench which will represent a train's passenger car and a church pew. On the other side is a pub table with chairs. Lights up on the bench. BERTRAM enters and sits, opens a newspaper and reads. SOUND: Train starts moving. ELIZABETH, dressed in black, enters, unstable on her feet with the movement of the train, and approaches the bench.

ELIZABETH

Is this seat-?

BERTRAM motions for her to sit.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Thank you.

BERTRAM smiles and goes back to his paper. ELIZABETH settles in and then looks at the floor a few feet away.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Oh, my - someone lost a key.

ELIZABETH rises and picks up a key and makes her way back to the bench.

BERTRAM

There was a gentleman who passed this way a minute ago. Perhaps the key belongs to him.

ELIZABETH

No, this key belongs to a young girl....going to Brooklyn.... she's anxious, probably her first time traveling alone.

BERTRAM

How did you determine that?

ELIZABETH

I can feel it...on the key.

(pause)

I can do that ...sometimes.

(long pause)

I'll give it to the conductor.

(rising)

Will you watch over my things? I'll return straightway.

BERTRAM nods.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

(on her way off stage)

Excuse me!

ELIZABETH exits and after a moment,
returns.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Thank you. The conductor will find the rightful owner.

BERTRAM nods. ELIZABETH sits
nervously and then tries to break the ice,
unable to hide her nervousness, speaking
with a brisk cheerful cadence.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

So are you going to New York for a visit?

BERTRAM

No, I...I live there.

ELIZABETH

Oh! How exciting. I don't get the opportunity to visit New York very often.

(pause)

Oh! My goodness where are my manners? Please, accept my apology, I'm Mrs. Andrew
Irving, from Newburgh.

BERTRAM

Latimer. Bertram Latimer.

ELIZABETH

And where are you from Mr. Latimer?

BERTRAM

Two Bridges.

ELIZABETH

Two...bridges?

BERTRAM

Lower Eastside. Manhattan..... in New York.

ELIZABETH

Why, yes, of course, you just mentioned that, did you not? – Please forgive me, I'm so nervous – this trip has put me on edge, - please don't mind me prattling on.

BERTRAM

It's quite alright.

ELIZABETH

I don't want to intrude.

BERTRAM

No, not at all.

ELIZABETH

(pause)

So if you live in New York, then what would be the purpose of your trip?

BERTRAM

I have family in Milton.

ELIZABETH

Oh, of course. Visiting relatives.

Long pause. BERTRAM is feeling uncomfortable, as though he is expected to continue the conversation.

BERTRAM

(reluctantly)

And is your trip for pleasure or business?

ELIZABETH

Well, actually it's business. I need to pay a visit to the Pennington Line...the shipping company. Are you familiar with the Pennington Line?

BERTRAM

The name sounds familiar.

ELIZABETH

It's a shipping line – cargo – New York to San Francisco. My husband, Andrew - God rest his soul - was the Second Mate on the *Cannonball*, a clipper ship transporting cargo around Cape Horn. Have you heard of it?

BERTRAM

Yes, she sank in the Pacific, last Spring did she not?

ELIZABETH

So you know of the incident?

BERTRAM

I read about it...in the newspaper.

ELIZABETH

Yes, the entire crew was lost, including my husband, Andrew.

BERTRAM

You have my condolences.

ELIZABETH

Thank you. In any case, I'm traveling to New York City to collect my husband's things. I waited so long, but the Pennington Line finally settled their claim with the insurers.

BERTRAM

What things would you be collecting?

ELIZABETH

His wages, what was due to him. And his personal belongings, whatever is left of them.

BERTRAM

Ummm....but the ship...sank. And everything went with it.

ELIZABETH

I realize that, but...I just felt that some of his things were returned.

BERTRAM

.....And how would these...belongings return to the Pennington Line?

ELIZABETH

I'm certain it sounds peculiar, Mr. Latimer, but the Lord works in mysterious ways and I have a feeling that some of Andrew's belongings are going to be returned to me. Besides, I wish to learn anything I can about the circumstances surrounding Andrew's death.

BERTRAM

It seems unlikely that anyone would have such information.

ELIZABETH

Perhaps, but I must ask, for I am certain that no one would volunteer any detailed narrative of Andrew's demise.

BERTRAM

Yes, I suppose so.....thoughit may be better not to ask – often times the truth is disappointing, and may leave you without any further benefit.

ELIZABETH

Thank you for your admonition, Mr. Latimer, but I intend to pursue the truth, for I must know, and I won't be discouraged by what I find, provided it is the truth.

BERTRAM

Well, again, my condolences on the loss of your husband.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

(long pause)

And what is your occupation, Mr. Latimer?

BERTRAM

I'm a carpenter.

ELIZABETH

Oh, that's a good trade. And much safer than going to sea, isn't it?

BERTRAM

Yes.....yes, it is.

Lights fade out.

Scene 2

The pub. FERGUS and DARBY enter..

FERGUS

Bring us some ale, George.

FERGUS and DARBY remove their jackets and sit at the table. GEORGE enters with two mugs of beer and serves.

GEORGE

There ya go, boys.

DARBY

Thanks, George.

GEORGE

Where's Bertram? Is he back yet?

FERGUS

Should be home by now. He said he wasn't going for long.

GEORGE

It's strange to see you without him. You three have been inseparable since you got back.

FERGUS

Well, you spend that much time with somebody you start to feel attached to each other.

GEORGE

I would have expected you'd want to get off on your own.

DARBY

I was thinking that too, but after talking with all the other folks around here, it seems like we just don't fit in any more - only us three.

GEORGE

That'll go away, I'm sure – just a matter of time. The strangeness will pass, the memories will fade. Just be patient.

DARBY

I've got a whole bunch of memories I'd like to see fade away. There's a man working for the newspaper wants us to tell him our story.

FERGUS

Says that the experience would bring us some catharsis.

GEORGE

That would sell a lot of newspapers.

FERGUS
Maybe.... I don't feel much like talking.

GEORGE
What about you, Darby?

DARBY
I don't even know what "catharsis" is.

GEORGE laughs and exits. FERGUS and
DARBY sip beer as BERTAM enters and
sits.

BERTRAM
(calling offstage)
Bring one for me, George.
(to FERGUS and DARBY)
Figured I might find you here.

DARBY
Where else would we be?

GEORGE (offstage)
Coming, Bertram.

FERGUS
What took you so long?

BERTRAM
Went up town to talk to a man about a job.

DARBY
Doing what?

BERTRAM
Carpentry.

DARBY
But you're a ship's carpenter.

BERTRAM
Not anymore.

FERGUS
Really?

BERTRAM

That was my last trip, boys. I'm a landlubber now.

GEORGE enters and brings BERTRAM a beer.

BERTRAM (cont'd)

Thanks, George.

GEORGE

How's Milton?

BERTRAM

Boring as ever. Glad to be back.

GEORGE

I would have expected you to look forward to "boring."

BERTRAM

Me, too, but that wasn't the case.

GEORGE exits.

FERGUS

How is everybody?

BERTRAM

Much the same.

FERGUS

Glad to see you?

BERTRAM

Some were, some weren't.

DARBY

Really?

BERTRAM

There was never a quorum as to how they felt about me – that's just one of the reasons I left in the first place. Half were glad I came, the other half wished I'd stayed in Peru. My brother Raymond didn't even come by to see me. Said that six miles was too far to travel. I almost went looking for him, but decided to let him sulk on his own.

FERGUS

When do you start work?

BERTRAM

Don't know – the boss man wasn't there - have to go back tomorrow.

FERGUS

Tell Bertram what you're going to do, Darby.

DARBY

Thinking about working on the Ferry.

BERTRAM

You're pulling my leg.

DARBY

They need some hands for the Hoboken and Lincoln Harbor routes.

BERTRAM

The Ferry?

DARBY

There aren't any shipwrecks on the Hudson River.

BERTRAM

I don't know. What about you, Fergus?

FERGUS

Don't know anything else.

BERTRAM

You're going back, then?

FERGUS

When my money's all gone, I head down to the harbor.

DARBY

You're a brave man, Fergus.

BERTRAM

Brave or stupid?

FERGUS

Maybe both. I can't get used to living in such comfort as this– need to get back on a ship.

BERTRAM

Well don't be surprised if discomfort finds you sooner than you expect.

FERGUS

What do you mean by that?

BERTRAM

(pause)

Do you still have Andrew's wedding ring?

FERGUS produces the ring which is tied to a string around his neck.

FERGUS

Right here.

BERTRAM

His wife is coming back to claim it.

DARBY

How do you know?

BERTRAM

We had a small conversation on the train.

FERGUS

(pause)

Well, I guess that saves me a trip. How does she know I've got the ring?

BERTRAM

She doesn't - I mean, ... she thinks Pennington may have some of his personal items.

DARBY

But the ship went down-

BERTRAM

I know - It doesn't make any sense - she's just got some creepy feeling.

DARBY

Did you ever meet her, Fergus?

FERGUS

No, but Andrew told me all about her.

BERTRAM

When you two sailed together on the *Flying Cloud*?

FERGUS nods. GEORGE enters with three more mugs and serves.

DARBY

I've never been on an extreme clipper.

FERGUS
She wasn't.

DARBY
No?

FERGUS
No, her dead rise was less than forty foot.

BERTRAM
I did not know that.

FERGUS
Aye, Andrew and me were side by side back in '53 when she broke the record – rounded the Cape and made it to San Francisco in

FERGUS, BERTRAM, and DARBY
Eighty-nine days and eight hours.

GEORGE
You've heard this before, have you?

BERTRAM
A time or two.

FERGUS
And we sailed together on the *Alena Leigh* in '51.

DARBY
Fergus saved Andrew's life on that one.

GEORGE
Did you, now?

FERGUS
(modestly)
It was nothing. The williwaw came in off the mainland – stirred things up and ripped off the mainsail. Andrew went overboard, but I was able to pull him back in.

BERTRAM
He makes it sound easy.

GEORGE exits. Long pause as FERGUS
stares at the wedding ring.

BERTRAM
What are you going to tell her?

FERGUS
I don't know.

DARBY
You're not going to tell her everything.

FERGUS
Well, I have a -

BERTRAM
You can't tell her the whole story, Fergus.

FERGUS
Doesn't she deserve to know?

BERTRAM
Not necessarily. Think of what that could do to a woman.

DARBY
She wouldn't want to know.

FERGUS
She might.

DARBY
She'd be sorry if she found out.

FERGUS
So what do I tell her?

BERTRAM
(pause)
Tell her anything.....Tell her that he died a hero's death, trying to rescue the crew.....washed off the deck into a watery grave.

FERGUS
And the ring?

DARBY
(pause)
He once nailed his wedding ring to the main mast, remember?

FERGUS
But that was-

BERTRAM

And told us all that if he didn't make it back, then we should see to it that it went to his loving wife.

DARBY

Aye.

BERTRAM

He was a courageous man.....a brave manum....forced to succumb to the power of an angry sea.....and now he sits at the feet of God Almighty enjoying his heavenly reward.

DARBY

That's exactly what she should hear.

FERGUS

(pause)

I guess I'd better look her up then.

BERTRAM

There's no hurry.

FERGUS

But won't she-

BERTRAM

She doesn't know we're alive. She thinks that all hands were lost.

FERGUS

So she doesn't know about us?

BERTRAM

Or Stanley. Or Tom.

DARBY

Then maybe you don't have to tell her anything.

FERGUS

Won't be long until she finds out we're here - somebody will say something.

BERTRAM

Aye, that's true.....but whatever you do, Fergus – don't let her touch you.

FERGUS

What?

BERTRAM

She's um.... she's, you know...one of those.

FERGUS

Those what?

BERTRAM

She can sense things. Things that aren't spoken.

DARBY

Like a witch?

BERTRAM

No, she just.....she found a key someone dropped on the train and she could tell who it belonged to. And where the that person was going. And how the that person felt about the trip.

DARBY

I've heard of those. There's a woman down at the market who can put her hand on your forehead and tell you what you ate for breakfast.

BERTRAM

It might be better if you-

FERGUS

Yeah, I hear you.

(pause, then looking into his almost empty glass)

Last sip, boys.

BERTRAM

(raising his glass)

To the Law of the Sea.

FERGUS, BERTRAM, and DARBY

(with raised glasses)

The Law of the Sea.

They turn up their glasses, drinking the last sip, then rise and exit. Lights fade out.

Scene 3

The church, represented by bench.
Reverend COLE is seated and Elizabeth enters and sits.

ELIZABETH

Thank you for seeing me, Reverend.

COLE

What can I do for you?

ELIZABETH

My name is Irving – Elizabeth Irving... Mrs. Andrew Irving.

COLE

Yes?

ELIZABETH

I've come here from Newburgh to pay a visit to the Pennington Line.

COLE

The shipping line?

ELIZABETH

Yes, and I'm afraid they haven't been much help.

COLE

And what is it you wish to ship?

ELIZABETH

No, Reverend, I'm not interested in cargo, you see, my husband Andrew was employed by the Pennington Line.

COLE

Yes?

ELIZABETH

And I came to collect my husband's wages.

COLE

Do they actually give a man's wages to his wife?

ELIZABETH

Well, they did for me, but then I have extenuating circumstances. I suppose I failed to mention that.

COLE

Yes?

ELIZABETH

You see, Reverend, Mr. Irving was the second mate on the clipper ship *Cannonball*, which as you know –

COLE

Was lost at sea last April.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

COLE

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Irving.

ELIZABETH

Thank you. In any case, I came to collect my husband's wages and his things.

COLE

What things?

ELIZABETH

His personal items.... anything he might have had with him when he died.

COLE

Mrs. Irving, typically in a shipwreck there are no personal items remaining – everything is washed to sea. That which doesn't sink may end up on an abandoned coast line many months later.

ELIZABETH

That's exactly what the gentleman said at the Pennington Shipping office.

COLE

That is the general consensus.

ELIZABETH

But Reverend, I know it may sound strange, but I just feel that there is something here – something of Andrew's.

COLE

And there was nothing at the Pennington Line.

ELIZABETH

No, and the gentleman there found me to be just as peculiar as you do.

COLE

I wouldn't say-

ELIZABETH

It's quite all right. I don't mind being peculiar, after all how *should* a woman conduct herself in the wake of losing her husband? I don't know the answer.

COLE

Nor do I.

ELIZABETH

Andrew was not a perfect man, but he was good to me, and loved me. We have two children who now have no father.... And I am without my closest companion. Perhaps I do appear strange, or deranged, or somewhat pathetic, but I simply want answers.

COLE

I am deeply sorry, Mrs. Irving.

ELIZABETH

Andrew was faithful, a good father, a good friend to all, and the only thing that could separate us was the call of the sea. He loved the ocean, maybe as much as he did me, and nothing I could do would dissuade him from following her out again. In the end, she not only took him away, she took him from me forever.

COLE

I'm sorry.....thoughI'm not certain how I can help.

ELIZABETH

There is some reason I'm here, Reverend, something has driven me to this point, and it's because of Andrew. I need to know what happened. I feel like he left something for me that I can find here.

COLE

Perhaps if you knew what had happened to your husband – perhaps that would give you some peace.

ELIZABETH

And how would I find that out?

COLE

I can't say for certain, but there is chance that one of the survivors may know what happened to your Andrew.

ELIZABETH

You mean there were some who lived through the shipwreck?

COLE

Yes.

ELIZABETH

I heard that all hands were lost.

COLE

No, though almost – there were five who were rescued off the coast of Peru.

ELIZABETH

And where can I find these survivors?

COLE

Well, two of them stayed in Peru, actually, but the other three returned home two weeks ago. Perhaps they know of him.

ELIZABETH

I'm certain that they do – he *was* the second mate. I would so much like to speak with these men. Where can I find them?

COLE

Well, most of the establishments they frequent are not acceptable localities for a lady.

ELIZABETH

But I need to speak with them.

COLE

Yes...well.....perhaps you would allow me to look into this matter on your behalf. I'll see if I can locate these sailors and establish a meeting for you.

ELIZABETH

I would be most appreciative.

COLE

Come back tomorrow and I'll let you know what I've found.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Reverend. That is most kind.

COLE

It's my pleasure.

ELIZABETH

Thank you. I'll be back tomorrow, without fail.

COLE

Goodnight, Mrs. Irving.

ELIZABETH exits. Lights fade out.

Scene 4

Lights up on the Pub. BERTRAM and FERGUS sit at the table drinking.

COLE
 Good evening, gentlemen.

BERTRAM
 Evening.

FERGUS
 Hello, Reverend.

COLE
 Mind if I join you?

FERGUS
 Not at all.

BERTRAM
 (rising)
 Take my seat. I was just leaving.

COLE
 Were you? I don't mean to-

BERTRAM
 No, it's quite all right. I need to be on my way.

COLE
 Thank you.

BERTRAM nods and exits. COLE sits.

COLE (cont'd)
 I hope that I-

FERGUS
 Don't worry, Reverend. Bertram's always been like that. He's a bit uncomfortable around clergyand police officers.

COLE
 Is that so?

FERGUS
 Has an issue with authority figures and religious figures..... and religious authorities....

COLE

And authoritative religious figures?

FERGUS

Those too.

COLE

Well, I didn't intend to make him ill at ease.

FERGUS

Not to worry – he's been ill at ease most all his life.

COLE

So..... how are you doing, Fergus?

FERGUS

Good.

COLE

Are you three adjusting to being back?

FERGUS

As well as we can. It's all a bit strange, you know.

COLE

I'm sure it is. I can't imagine, really, what all you've been through, just trying to survive like you did.

FERGUS

Yes, well, in many cases, we'd like to forget all about that.

COLE

I'm sure you would. Of course, Fergus, if there's anything you need to talk about – need to get something off your chest – feel free to come see me. I'd be happy to talk with you.

FERGUS

That might hinder my forgetting of the matter now, don't you think?

COLE

Not necessarily. You see, often times when someone has an unpleasant experience, something to the high degree that you and your friends experienced, the tendency is to keep it inside – stifle it, try not to think about it.

FERGUS

Yes.

COLE

But in doing so, it only seems to feed that unpleasantness....allows it to ferment, to fester, and it just makes the burden that much bigger. And more miserable.

FERGUS

Does it?

COLE

Sometimes the act of getting it out – talking about it – releases the venom that it holds, unburdens the mind and soul which latched on to these painful memories. Just the act of acknowledging this misfortune can clear the soul and head, and eventually allow the heart to heal.

FERGUS

So are you asking me to tell you-

COLE

No, not necessarily. I mean, you're welcome to, if you find that agreeable. Or you might tell someone else. It could be someone you trust, or frankly, I find it good to talk to a complete stranger, someone you've never met, and are likely never to see again. There's a bit of peace in talking to someone who doesn't know anything about you. In any case, if there's anything I can do for you fellows, please let me know.

FERGUS

Thank you, Reverend.

COLE

And Fergus..... there is one thing I wanted to ask you.

FERGUS

Yes?

COLE

Mrs. Andrew Irving has come to town.

FERGUS

Mrs. Irving.

COLE

I believe you knew her husband.

FERGUS

Andrew.

COLE

Yes, and I was wondering.... if perhaps you could speak with her.

FERGUS

Me?

COLE

Well, she's a bit shaken up about her husband's death, as I well imagine you can understand, and she feels that if she could talk to someone about him, well, that perhaps, it may just give her some relief, some easing of the heart.

FERGUS

Why me?

COLE

Well, Fergus, I don't mean to speak ill of Bertram, but he doesn't have the patience that might be required to address a woman in the midst of her distress.

FERGUS

You mean he's a bit of a curmudgeon?

COLE

I would never say that.

FERGUS

(playfully)

But that doesn't keep you from thinking it.

COLE

And Darby is a bit young – he might not know the most tactful way to talk to a widow.

FERGUS

So what do I say to her?

COLE

Just tell her you're sorry about her husband and then answer any questions she might have.

FERGUS

What questions would she have?

COLE

It's difficult to guess, but I'd assume that she'd like to know how her husband died.

FERGUS

(long pause)

Reverend, you know – without me having to tell you – that what happened was greatly unpleasant. I believe you said so yourself – an unpleasant experience, didn't you call it?

COLE

I believe I did.

FERGUS

So what am I going to tell this woman about the miserable circumstances that ended her husband's life? I don't think that telling her what happened would set her mind at ease.

COLE

Yes, though she does need to hear something, something to set this all to rest. Perhaps you could tell her how brave and honorable he was, how he died quickly without suffering, and that his last thoughts were of her and his home.

FERGUS

You want me to lie to her?

COLE

No! I just... well, it's just that-

FERGUS

Reverend, that was the most horrible thing I've ever been through - The fact is that those who died that first night the ship capsized were better off than all the others who were left to suffer for days and weeks adrift in a watery hell.

COLE

Well, why don't you emphasize that? That his death was quick...and how brave he was the ship began to sink. I mean, he was the second mate- I'm sure he must have been trying to save the rest of the crew.

FERGUS

I really don't remember what he did that night.

COLE

Well.... can you imagine what he may have been doing? Just to provide a grieving widow a little peace of mind?

FERGUS

(long pause)

All right, Reverend. I can talk to her.

COLE

Are you sure?

FERGUS

You want me to change my mind?

COLE

No! I mean..... I really appreciate this Fergus. It will mean a lot to her.

FERGUS

Sure.

COLE

(rising to go)

Come by the church at half past three. I'll arrange for her to be there.

FERGUS

Now, I'm not going to talk long. Just a little bit and then I'm gone.

COLE

That's fair. Thank you, Fergus.

FERGUS nods and COLE exits. FERGUS sips his beer as BERTRAM enters.

BERTRAM

What did he want?

FERGUS

Andrew's wife wants to discuss the incident –

BERTRAM

The incident?

FERGUS

The shipwreck. The Reverend volunteered me to do the talking.

BERTRAM

That's convenient. What are you going to tell her?

FERGUS

As little as possible.

BERTRAM looks at FERGUS's glass.

BERTRAM

Last sip.

FERGUS

Aye.

BERTRAM

To the Law of the Sea.

FERGUS (weakly)

The Law of the Sea.

The turn up their mugs drinking the last sip.
Lights fade out.

Scene 5

Lights up on the bench, representing the church. FERGUS is seated. Reverend COLE enters with ELIZABETH.

COLE

Mrs. Irving, this is Fergus Hays. Fergus, this is Andrew's widow, Elizabeth.

FERGUS

Ma'am.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Hays. My husband spoke very highly of you.

FERGUS

He mentioned you a good deal, as well.

ELIZABETH

You were with him on the *Alena Leigh*.

FERGUS

In '51, yes.

ELIZABETH

You were the man who saved his life when that storm came up just north of the Cape.

FERGUS

It was nothing more than anyone else would do. I just helped him back on board when the storm took out the main sail.

ELIZABETH

That is hardly how my husband described it. He said you dove in to pull him out from the depths just before he lost consciousness.

FERGUS

Andrew was always an eloquent one. It was just a williwaw that came in off the mainland. Not much of a storm.

ELIZABETH

And you were together on the *Flying Cloud*, as well, were you not?

FERGUS

Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH instinctively moves toward
FERGUS who backs away subtly using
COLE as a barrier between them.

FERGUS (cont'd)

The Reverend said you wished to talk to someone from the ship.

ELIZABETH

Yes, and it's such good fortune that it's someone who knew my husband so well.

COLE

(still surprised at this revelation)

Indeed, it is.

FERGUS

It was truly an honor to serve with your husband. Under your husband's leadership. He was second mate.

ELIZABETH

Yes.

FERGUS

I am deeply sorry.

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

COLE

Fergus, perhaps you could tell Mrs. Irving about that night...what happened.

ELIZABETH

Yes, please.

FERGUS

It was... it was quite late – I don't remember the time. I woke up suddenly - the movement of the ship and the noise of the crew. I knew something was wrong. When I got on deck I saw a large black cloud headed towards us from the west, - even at night, the cloud was so black it stood out in the sky. The crew scrambled - trying to haul down and clew up, but in just a wink, a heavy sea raised directly ahead, and we plunged straight into it. All but the forward part of her was under - with water pouring in through the bow-ports and over the knightheads, carrying everything overboard as it splashed across the deck. We tried to double reef the topsails..... furl the other sails, but we never got the chance. The ship strained against the head sea, and the gale grew worse. Several hands had fallen overboard. Your husband dove in to pull them out.

ELIZABETH

Much like you did on the *Alena Leigh*.

FERGUS

Yes. He tied a noose in a rope and slipped it around his shoulders. Then he would dive in, and we would pull him back in with him holding one or two who had been swept off the deck.

ELIZABETH

I had no idea he was such a strong swimmer.

FERGUS

He was very strong. And very modest about it.

ELIZABETH

What happened to him?

FERGUS

(pause)

We heard the cook's boy yell off the starboard. Andrew jumped in to save the lad, but we lost sight of him. When we pulled the rope back in..... the noose was empty.

ELIZABETH sits, in shock. There is a long pause. Reverend COLE sits next to her.

ELIZABETH

I assume then he was never found.

FERGUS

No, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH

He always loved the sea. I was jealous of how much he loved her.

FERGUS

It was ... in his blood. He was a very good sailor.

COLE

And a brave man.

ELIZABETH

Thank you for telling me this, Mr. Hays.

FERGUS

Yes, Ma'am.

COLE

Is there anything else you would like to ask, Mrs. Irving?

ELIZABETH

No, I suppose not.

(pause)

Mr. Hays?

FERGUS

Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH

It is a honor for me to hear the news from you..... My husband loved you dearly.....had great respect for you..... He was grateful for your friendship, not to mention saving his life,

FERGUS

Yes, Ma'am.

ELIZABETH

Did he tell you that he wanted to name our youngest child "Fergus," after you?

FERGUS

No, he didn't.

ELIZABETH

As it turned out, the baby was a girl, so we named her Constance, after my grandmother.

FERGUS

A much better choice, I'm sure.

FERGUS then remembers and produces the ring.

FERGUS (cont'd)

Mrs. Irving, your husband wanted you to have this. He nailed it to the mast and told us that should he not return, to make sure it made its way back to you.

FERGUS gives the ring to COLE.

FERGUS (cont'd)

Again, you have my condolences.

FERGUS exits. COLE gives the ring to ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH

His wedding ring. He never wore it on his hand. He hung it round his neck on a string.

COLE looks back, surprised that FERGUS had not mentioned this before.

ELIZABETH holds the ring and then looks
at it intently.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)

Reverend Cole?

COLE

Yes?

ELIZABETH

What is the Law of the Sea?

Blackout.

Scene 6

Lights up on the pub. FERGUS and BERTRAM are seated drinking.

BERTRAM

No, because it's so perplexing.

FERGUS

The job?

BERTRAM

No, it's the foreman. I tell you the man is a complete foozler – I've never seen anyone so clumsy. That's probably why they made him the foreman, 'cause he hasn't the dexterity required to use a hammer.

FERGUS

That bad, heh?

BERTRAM

And he can't speak in normal tone of voice, either – has to yell out everything. Like it shows he's in charge or something.

(raising his voice)

"Looks like rain is headed this way." "Keep it up lads – looking good." "I just love the smell of fresh lumber." You ask a simple question and he just starts screaming.

FERGUS

Kind of like you're doing now?

BERTRAM

(loudly)

Exactly like I'm doing now. Just blaring out inconsequential information at the exaggerated volume of a fog horn.

FERGUS

That would make it difficult on the job site.

BERTRAM

It does.

FERGUS

Of course, a smart fellow like yourself would certainly be able to overlook this foreman's petty habits and take it all in stride, now wouldn't he?

BERTRAM

You know, you'd think that I would.

FERGUS

Yes.

BERTRAM

Which is why this situation is so perplexing. Either I'm not as intelligent as I think I am – and we know that's not true, - or this stinking braggart has such a hideous effect on the people around him, that their tolerance, no matter how great it may be, just shrivels up and dies at the mere sound of his voice.

FERGUS

That is perplexing.

BERTRAM

That's what I was telling you all along.

GEORGE enters with two more glasses and serves.

GEORGE

Bertram, if you don't like the job, then why don't you quit?

FERGUS

Aye.

BERTRAM

Got to have a job, George. I got some bad habits, you know, that need the financial support of regular employment.

GEORGE

Well, I'm grateful that you're keeping me in business.

BERTRAM

It's my pleasure.

GEORGE

What about you, Fergus? Thinking about what you'll do to support your vices and transgressions?

BERTRAM

Ah, Fergus doesn't have any bad habits.

GEORGE

No?

BERTRAM

Well, unless you include eating on a regular basis.

GEORGE

Really?

FERGUS

And sleeping indoors. That's a major fault of mine.

GEORGE

I can't believe the derelicts that frequent this place.

BERTRAM

I'm thinking it's your pristine character that attracts them.

GEORGE

(to FERGUS)

So what about work – any ideas?

FERGUS

I'm looking into the *Paulina*. She sails next week.

GEORGE

A Trans-Atlantic?

FERGUS

New scenery. I've been 'round the Cape enough, I suppose.

DARBY bursts in, excited and angry.

DARBY

(loudly to FERGUS)

What did you tell her, Fergus?

FERGUS

What?

DARBY

What did you tell her?

BERTRAM

Calm down, boy. Tell who?

DARBY

That Irving widow. What did you say to her, Fergus? What did you say about Andrew?

FERGUS

Nothing. I told her that he drowned.

BERTRAM

Drowned?

FERGUS

Yeah, trying to rescue the cook or some such as that.

DARBY

That's all you told her?

FERGUS

Aye – what's the matter, Darby? George, a glass for the boy, will you?

BERTRAM

Sit down.

BERTRAM forces DARBY into a seat as
GEORGE exits.

FERGUS

Now what's this about?

DARBY

She's out there, talking to people, all over town.

FERGUS

What's she saying?

DARBY

She said we killed her husband.

FERGUS

What?

DARBY

That's what she said. Says we murdered him. In cold blood.

BERTRAM

That's not true.

DARBY

We know that, but nobody else does knows for sure.

GEORGE returns with a glass for DARBY.
DARBY take a long drink.

DARBY (cont'd)

Everyone in Two Bridges is starting to get suspicious – giving me strange looks when I go out. They think we did it.

GEORGE

They can't be thinking that, Darby. You're just imagining all that.

DARBY

It's true. I can tell. They think we did something to poor Andrew.

BERTRAM

And there's nobody to defend us, in the event someone wants to make an accusation.

GEORGE

What kind of accusation could she make?

FERGUS

Aye. She wasn't there. She doesn't know what happened.

DARBY

Doesn't matter, if she stirs up the folks they might come at us anyhow. Could get carried away and lynch all three of us.

FERGUS

For what?

DARBY

Doesn't matter for what. If you've ever seen a crowd go crazy, you'd know what I mean. Remember that mob in Peru?

FERGUS

That was different.

BERTRAM

I don't trust her.

FERGUS

What did she say?

DARBY

That Andrew was murdered. Shot through the head.

FERGUS

It's not true, George.

GEORGE

I believe you. How could she say something like that?

BERTRAM

She's one of those..... Did she touch you, Fergus?

FERGUS
No.

GEORGE
Those what?

BERTRAM
She didn't come in contact with you in any way?

FERGUS
No.

GEORGE
What difference does that make?

BERTRAM
She's some kind of clairvoyant or something. She senses things that other people can't see.

GEORGE
What would she sense from Fergus?

FERGUS
It's not important.
(handing his mug to GEORGE)
Another round, George?

GEORGE exits.

FERGUS (cont'd)
No, she didn't touch me.

BERTRAM
Did you give her the wedding ring, Fergus?

FERGUS
Aye.

BERTRAM
Then that's how.

DARBY
That's how she knows?

BERTRAM
I saw her do it with a key – why not a ring? She knows, Fergus.

Then why would she say-

FERGUS

Then why would she say-

BERTRAM

If she doesn't know it all now, she'll know soon enough.

FERGUS

We don't know why she-

BERTRAM

Fergus! We can't have that.

DARBY

Good Lord – no! Remember what happened to Tom?

FERGUS

That's different, Darby.

BERTRAM

Is it? How is it different?

FERGUS

Bertram-

DARBY

That's why Stanley wouldn't come back. And that why Tom went and-

FERGUS

Enough, Darby!

DARBY

Then you need to go find her, Fergus, and talk her out of these notions, because I can't stay in Two Bridges if the people here –

FERGUS

Darby! Enough.

To read the rest of this script, you may contact the author for a full copy. Please contact him at WriteDaveTucker@yahoo.com.