

The Captain



The Captain

Dramatization of Jack London's "*Wolf-Larsen*"

by Christian Lanciai (2015)

The characters:

Ralph
a bartender
Maurice
another
Benjamin
Humphrey van Weyden
Maud Brewster
Four policemen
Johnson
Johanson
Thomas Mugridge, cook
George Leach
Ulf Larsen, called Wolf-Larsen, captain
Doctor
Kerfoot
Watson, shanghaied seal hunter
other sailors

After the introductory scenes around San Francisco,
the action takes place exclusively on board the schooner "Ghost" on the Pacific Ocean.

Act I scene 1. A disreputable harbour hook with relevant customers.

Enter Ralph like on the run from justice, taking a stand by the bar, concealing his face.

bartender You look as if you had seen a ghost.

Ralph Worse than that. Only living people.

bartender (serves him a whiskey) Do you need somewhere to go?

Ralph On the spot.

Maurice I know him. Have you escaped from prison again?

Ralph Are you pulling my leg?

Maurice Don't tell me that's your pinch.

Ralph I don't think anyone is after me.

bartender (whispering with another)

the other We need people who have seen ghosts.

Ralph For what? Chasing ghosts?

Benjamin (laying his arm around him) You have come to the right place, buddy. This is the right instance for people who want to get away from the injustice of society to freedom.

Ralph And what is freedom?

The other In this case the ghost ship called *Ghost*.

Maurice (turning away) Don't mention her!

Benjamin Why not? Am I not right?

Maurice Either you don't know what you are talking about, or you are a con man.

bartender *Ghost* is known as a ship you would gladly be shanghaied by.

Ralph You don't need to shanghai me. I volunteer. What is her cargo?

Benjamin None at all. She is loading. She is going seal hunting in competition with the *Macedonia*.

Maurice An even worse horror example of a ghost ship running on cadaver discipline.

Ralph When does she sail?

Benjamin Tomorrow.

Ralph Suits me fine.

Maurice I warn you, Ralph. It could be your last voyage.

Ralph I only know I made my last trip into jail. Never again. Any freedom is better.

Maurice Look out for spies and detectives, like him, for example. (*indicates a more orderly guest*)

Ralph No, he is too clean to be a policeman.

Maurice But he could very well be a detective.

Ralph I don't think so.

(*enter a woman, obviously stressed.*)

bartender Are you stressed?

Maud Does the police come here?

bartender Hardly. They shun this place.

Ralph Are you also on the run?

Maud Not at all. But they are after me.

Ralph What have you done?

Maud Nothing.

Maurice That's why they are on the run.

bartender Do you need protection? I have a place where no one would look for you.

Maud Anything is better than the grave. (*accepts a whiskey*)

Weyden (*the more orderly, prudent customer, politely lifting his hat as he accosts her*) If you need an escort, I could be of service. I will just take the ferry across the bay.

Maud With you for company, no one would ask me any questions.

Weyden Let's go at once then. (*wants to leave with her, when he sees two policemen coming in*)

bartender Take cover.

Maurice They don't see us. It's too smoky in here and too many people. (*Weyden takes Maud apart to a table out of the way where they sit down discreetly.*)

Benjamin What the devil is the police doing here? How dare they enter? Something big must have happened.

bartender (*to the policemen*) What can we do for you?

policeman 1 We are looking for escaped prisoners. There has been a considerable break-out, and about twelve inmates are on the loose.

Maurice They are of course scattered all over the city.

Benjamin You will find no one here. Not even such bums dare to show themselves here.

policeman 1 No, I can see that. Here is just the usual rabble of weirdos and con men.

Benjamin There are only regular seamen here.

policeman 1 Yes, I can see that. Except for that man over there. (*indicates van Weyden*) What is such a bloke doing here?

Maurice Never seen him before.

bartender Casual visit. He is just going across the bay.

Policeman 1 (*comes up to Weyden and Maud*) You haven't by any chance seen any escaped convicts around?

Weyden No. I have been looking for them myself.

policeman 2 How so? Who are you?

Weyden Journalist. I heard about the break-out and came here to maybe find something to write about it here, if they would pass this way, but unfortunately I haven't seen anyone. All I can do is to cross over to the other side.

Policeman 2 Is the lady with you?

Weyden Yes, she is with me.

policeman 1 Then we'll just be on our way, Charlie. No inmates seem to have passed this way.

bartender Good hunting, gentlemen.

policeman 1 Thanks. We are sure to get them. (*The policemen leave.*)

Maurice You made it, Ralph. No one saw you.

Ralph I am good at making myself invisible to justice. My problems with injustice are worse.

Weyden (rising) Come, my lady. The coast is clear.

Maud (following him. To Ralph) Perhaps we'll meet again.

Ralph (surprised) Are you also on the run?

Maud Only from injustice. *(winks her eye and leaves with Weyden)*

Benjamin Are you ready, my friend? The ship is waiting.

Ralph Absolutely. The sooner we are at sea, the better.

Maurice Don't tell me I didn't warn you.

Ralph You must know by now, Maurice, that I always enjoyed challenges.

bartender Then you are out for a treat, if you sail with Wolf-Larsen.

Ralph Is that the captain?

Benjamin Yes.

Maurice The hardest of all captains. There is only one who is worse, and that is his brother Death Larsen on the *Macedonia*. They try to sink each other during the seal hunt, but they are equally invincible and unsinkable, as the two worst captains of the sea.

Ralph Thanks, that's enough. I enlist immediately.

Benjamin Obviously you like some action?

Ralph Anything is better than nothing happening at all, like in prison.

Benjamin (pats his back) Then you are on the right way, pal. Have a nice journey.

Ralph I hope to never come back. *(leaves with the other.)*

bartender Do you think he knows what he is in for?

Benjamin It's best for him not to know. *(has another drink, and everything returns to normal.)*

Scene 2. On board the ferry. Dark weather and dense fog.
At the gunwale.

Weyden What are you running away from?

Maud What everyone is running away from. The past.

Weyden Is it worth it?

Maud That depends on what you reach.

Weyden Can you run away from yourself?

Maud Only by denying yourself.

Weyden Isn't that lying to yourself?

Maud Isn't everybody's life always just one great lie?

Weyden It depends on what you are living for.

Maud Do you have anything to live for?

Weyden Not yet.

Maud Do you think you could find it?

Weyden Fortunately you never can tell.

Maud I understood you are a journalist. What are you writing about?

Weyden I review books and concerts.

Maud So you are an intellectual.

Weyden Yes, I am afraid so.

Maud Does that satisfy you?

Weyden I am always looking for something else, something extra.

Maud Who isn't? And that's how you landed in the shabbiest harbour hook of San Francisco.

Weyden What did you do there yourself?

Maud You know that. I looked for a way out.

Weyden From what?

Maud From society. From my past. From everything.

Weyden Then perhaps we are in the same boat.

Maud Are you trying to be funny?

Weyden No, just spiritual.

(Two policemen show up.)

Maud (trying to make herself invisible) Remember, that I am with you.

Weyden Yes, you are not with anyone else.

Policeman 3 Pardon me, but we are looking for a lady on the run. You don't happen to have seen a lone lady on board?

Weyden No.

policeman 4 And who is the lady with you?

Weyden She is with me.

Policeman 4 Yes, we can see that, but who is she?

policeman 3 Can she identify herself?

Maud Can't you leave us alone? Don't you see that we are together?

policeman 3 If you can identify yourself, there is no problem.

Weyden She has left her identification papers at home.

policeman 4 And where does she live?

Maud In San Francisco.

policeman 3 Yes, we can understand that, but do you have a residence?

policeman 4 She can't identify herself, and she fits the description.

policeman 3 I must warn you. Protecting an escaped convict makes you an accomplice of her crime.

Weyden She is not guilty because you think so.

policeman 4 If she is the one we think, we know that she is guilty.

Weyden And can you prove that she is the one you think?

policeman 4 In any case we must arrest her as a suspect.

policeman 3 Just come with us, lady. *(wants to force her to follow)*

Maud Never in my life! *(strikes him with her handbag and runs away. The policemen run after her.)*

Weyden What on earth might she have done? She is probably just a shoplifter like everyone else.

(Suddenly a deafening thrust with following noise. Everything shakes violently.)

Voices Collision!
 That damned fog!
 Man over board!
 We are going down!
 Save who can be saved!
 Damnation in hell!
 Put out the lifeboats!
 Too late!
 That freighter didn't even give a signal!

(Complete chaos. Everyone runs in different directions, running into each other and pushing around each other bringing each other down.)

(Blackout.)

Scene 3. A lifeboat. The same fog.

Weyden (slowly recovering on the floor) Where am I? Who am I? What happened?

Johnson You were overrun. We are fishing up eventual survivors.

Weyden Are there more?

Ralph I recognize him. We met at the joint.

Weyden Of course. Where are we going? I was just going across the bay. Could you land me somewhere?

Johanson Out of the question. We could at best find our ship again, nothing else.

Weyden What ship?

Johnson *Ghost.*

Weyden Of all ships!

Ralph You would happen to the worst. Welcome on board!

Weyden We are not on board yet.

Ralph You are not likely to get away.

Johanson Attention! There's another fish!

Johnson And a lady at that! What a catch! We will have our nets full today!

Weyden It is she!

Ralph Don't tell me it's the one from the joint.

Weyden Thank heavens she made it!

Johnson She will probably be less grateful in time.

Weyden What do you mean?

Cook (rowing) He means, that you'll never get ashore alive from the *Ghost*.

Johanson Shut up, cook!

Cook I am just telling them what to expect. It would be wrong to inveigle our stowaways in any false illusion of comfort by withholding the truth. If they get a clear picture from the beginning, they might have better chances to survive.

Weyden You just said that no one gets home alive from the *Ghost*.

Cook And I meant it.

Johanson Attention! Rescue is coming, lady! We are here to catch you up! (*The sailors get Maud all wet through into the boat.*)

Maud I don't know how to thank you. You have saved my life.

Cook Don't be too sure of that. They just prolonged your misfortune.

Maud (notices Weyden) You here? We are then still in the same boat. Who is he?

Weyden He is apparently the cook on board and a knave who only knows how to belch venom.

Maud You should never take such for serious.

Cook I assure you, lady, that I was always serious and always right.

Maud (to the sailors) Is that correct?

Ralph Don't ask me. I am new on board, but of what I've heard so far, you can only expect the worst.

Maud You also here?

Ralph Voluntarily. I challenged destiny and volunteered.

Maud Then we are three in the same boat.

Cook No, lady, we are an entire crew, and you are just temporary stowaways, for which the captain will make life as sore as possible in the hope that you will not survive. The crew will manage and survive for being needed, but the only way for stowaways to survive is to become part of the crew.

Maud Has your captain then no respect for ladies?

Cook Not so far, for he never had any. None here has ever seen a live lady on board, he-he-he!

Weyden (to Maud) We are apparently facing a challenge.

Maud No one will bully me. I'd rather jump overboard and drown than compromise with any brute.

Ralph There seems to be one decent person on board, the ship's doctor.

Weyden As long as there is a doctor on board, there is hope for life.

Ralph Don't worry, lady. There are now two of us here to stand up for your protection.

Maud I am not worried, but I am curious about that captain. Who is he?

Cook The flying Dutchman.

Johnson Wolf-Larsen, together with his brother Death Larsen, the most notorious seal hunter of the Pacific.

Maud I hope he at least will allow me to get dry on board.

Johnson You can count on that, although there is nothing dry on board.

Maud What do you mean by that?

Johanson He means that no one ever will get dry internally.

Cook Thanks to the cook. Only he sees to it that everyone survives in spite of all by correct rationing. You had better, Miss, to stand up for strong stuff.

Weyden (tries to calm her) We will make sure to get ashore at first possible landfall.

Cook There's no risk. We won't see land again until outside Alaska.

Ralph This seems to amount to an interesting cruise.

Cook You can count on that, suicide candidate. You have chosen the right ship for a slow and certain perdition for all on board.

Ralph You are unusually encouraging for being a cook.

Cook My job is to stimulate the appetite.

Johnson Ship ohoy!

Voice on board Ohoy! Any survivors?

Johnson A slim fish and a mermaid.

Voice With tail and all?

Cook She certainly has something at the back, but not for you!

Weyden (*hits him*) Shut up!

Cook Take it easy. You were not the one I insulted.

Weyden Exactly!

Cook You have plenty to learn, landlubber.

Weyden No, on the contrary. We will have a hell on our hands.

Cook On which you will burn your hands.

Larsen(*'s voice*) Get them the hell on board!

Sailor 1 Ay ay, Sir! (*They climb the ladder.*)

Scene 4. On board.

The first mate lies on deck apparently lifeless. The crew pour buckets of salt water on him. He is half dead, groans, writhes a little, has tremendous pains, can't rise to his feet.

When Maud is brought on board, this is the first thing she sees and faints immediately.

Doctor This is no place for ladies. Carry her down to my cabin immediately. (*Two members of the crew carry her out.*)

(Weyden is helped on board and is met with the same scene. He turns away and pukes.)

 At least you do not faint. Have you never seen a corpse before?

Weyden He is not dead yet, is he?

Doctor No, but he soon will be.

Weyden What is the matter with him? What has he done?

Doctor He played around in San Francisco so lavishly that he will never be able to stand on his legs any more.

Larsen (*from upper deck*) Get some life into that body, for Pete's sake! Whatever you do, don't let him die away from us at once at the start of our journey!

Weyden Is that the captain?

Doctor Himself.

Weyden I need to speak with him. We can't stay here on board.

Doctor I am afraid you have no choice. Were you the only ones to be saved?

Weyden We were the only ones saved by you, if that was any rescue. This living corpse seems to indicate the opposite.

Doctor It will pass.

(The sailors pour another bucket of salt water over the mate. He rattles, has some breathing difficulties, suffocates and dies in a horrible death struggle.)

That's that. He is done for.

Larsen (from upper deck) Don't tell me he is dead!

Doctor (turning up towards him) Yes, he is dead.

Cook Not even the strongest grog will do him any good any more.

Larsen (comes down in a fury) I forbade him to die! I forbade him to disable himself by drinking! I forbade him to sabotage our journey! Now we are without a first mate, and it's entirely his own fault! You damned piece of shit, how could you be so stupid! How could you do this to me and to my ship and our journey! You don't go down and die for me if you are the mate of my ship! You cursed devil, all we can do now is to send you down to hell! May you suffer worse tortures there than ever under my command! Throw him over board! I's just a corpse anyway now.

Doctor Shouldn't we have some kind of a burial ceremony?

Larsen Does anyone know the ritual? I don't know it. Perhaps our lastest stowaway knows it? He maybe even is a preacher? He looks like it.

Weyden Unfortunately I cannot help you.

Larsen What are you? You look as if you never had done any honest piece of work all your life.

Weyden I am a gentleman.

Larsen What does that mean? A loafer?

Weyden I write articles.

Larsen A journalist?

Weyden Actually an author.

Larsen Now we are getting somewhere! And has never seen a corpse before? And you don't know your Bible?

Weyden If you had a Bible on board, we could manage the ritual.

Larsen We have no Bible on board and never had. We'll have to do without it. Sow him up in a sailing bag. We will have to appoint another mate. Johnson, you be mate. Leach, you'll be rower instead of Johnson.

Leach I don't want to be a rower.

Larsen It's an order. The captain's orders are obeyed, or you follow the mate. You have no choice. Move up.

Johanson You have no choice.

Leach Damn it! (*leaves*)

Larsen He obeys. And what shall we do about you, landlubber? You will be a cabin boy. Start from the bottom, and you will learn something. You'll have 20 dollars a month and free food and lodging, and you'll have your first decent employment in your life. Regard it as an honour.

Weyden I demand that you set me ashore at first possible landfall, or that I may join the first meeting ship back to San Francisco.

Larsen Listen to him. He makes demands. Little man, you are not in a position to demand anything. You are a stowaway and have no rights as such, least of all any human rights, unless you sign on. I offer you an employment, so that you may

survive. The choice is yours. If you don't accept my offer you won't survive, and we have the right to throw you back into the sea.

Weyden Will you threat the lady's life in the same way or give her an even more humiliating offer?

Doctor The lady is my patient and under my orders. No one can harm her.

Larsen Right, doctor. Keep her to yourself. We'll see what we'll do about her later.

Johanson The mate is all sowed up, Sir.

Larsen Good. Heave him over board.

Weyden No word at his departure? No decent farewell?

Larsen If you can't stand for any service to his memory, no one else can do that either. Heave him over board. It's his own fault. He drank himself to death.

Johanson And fucked himself to death.

Cook He stayed too long ashore.

Larsen Heave him over board. (*The mate is heaved over board.*) That's that. Back to work, boys! Mate! Take the helm!

Johnson Ay, ay, Sir.

Larsen Take the greenhorn along with you under deck, cook, and give him some work to do. He could always start in the kitchen. I guess you have potatoes waiting to be peeled.

Cook Always.

Larsen Make him peel some potatoes. He has to start somewhere. And if he doesn't know how to do even that, you can show him, but don't let him cut himself.

Weyden I *can* peel potatoes.

Larsen What luck for all of us. You can start at once. Or else you would not have survived the first day. Every man to his duties! The ritual is finished! The mate is washed up and gone home! Johnson is our new mate!

The crew Ay ay, Sir!

(*Larsen returns to upper deck, and the cook brings Weyden with him down under deck. The others go to their jobs.*)

Scene 5. In the doctor's cabin.

Maud lies on a bed. The doctor examines her heart.

Weyden (enters) How is she?

Doctor She has had a bad shock. I can't get the hang of her heart. But she has to wake up sooner or later.

Weyden Is she in coma?

Doctor No, I don't think so.

Maud (awakes, sees the doctor, faintly) What kind of a hell have I landed into?

Doctor You may wonder indeed. What's this hell we all have landed into? None of us did it willingly, and none of us deserved it.

Maud What are we doing here then?

Doctor Enduring. (*Maud faints off again.*)

Doctor She is very weak. She has had too much of that medicine of violence. The shock of the shipwreck, the awakening to a dead body on board, mishandled in the middle of the deck. Women are psychically stronger than men as they are more sensitive, but therefore they more easily get affected by emotions and take their blows harder. (*turning to him*) How do you manage? Are you harassed, like all beginners?

Humphrey The cook pushes my life out of me. He forces me into slave labour.

Doctor He is the worst sadist on board. He is worse than the captain.

Humphrey He claims that no one could be worse than the captain on the seven seas besides his brother.

Doctor Death Larsen. I never saw him, but they say he is actually harder and worse than Wolf-Larsen. Still he seems to have spared you.

Humphrey No, he has just ignored me. To him I am just a piece of shit. No one seems to be of any worth to him, since he himself is so obviously physically superior.

Doctor Still there is a soul in him. You will get surprised when you get to know him.

Humphrey Have you learned to know him?

Doctor Enough to keep away from him. He is a monster and a volcanic beast with a strangely enigmatic intellect.

Humphrey So he does have an intellect?

Doctor Indeed. Haven't you seen his books in his cabin?

Humphrey Are there books?

Doctor At the farthest left. They are somewhat hidden, but they are there.

Humphrey I will check it next time.

Doctor Now she seems to come to again.

Maud (*without opening her eyes*) Can no one help me get away from here?

Doctor As soon as possible.

Maud I got out of the frying pan into the fire. Instead of being grilled by persecuting authorities, I will now be fried on a volcano.

Humphrey We'll get away from here as soon as possible.

Maud I don't think so. We ended up with the flying Dutchman, and he lets no one go. We will have to follow this ship down into the infernal abyss of eternity.

Doctor She is delirious.

Humphrey No, she is unfortunately realistic. Wolf-Larsen has made it clear to me that he never intends to let us ashore until we have completed his voyage.

Doctor It's well that you realize it. Then you won't have any illusions.

Humphrey What's your story, doctor? How did you end up here?

Doctor Let's take that some other time. As long as this patient is in emergency we are positively safe in her company, no matter how paradoxical it may seem. But the risk is that she will have a hell indeed when she gets on her legs.

Humphrey That's maybe why she has made herself a patient.

Doctor Nature protects her against the abuse of violence, and we must seek protection against it in her company. Whatever happens on this voyage, Humphrey van Weyden, you must not get surprised.

Humphrey I will try not to.

(The doctor dabs his patient's front, while she remains a patient with her eyes closed.)

Leach (looks down) Get up on deck, Hump. The cook needs you.

Doctor Hump? Is that what they call you?

Humphrey Yes. That has become my name on board. Wolf-Larsen gave me the name when I emptied ashes against the wind.

Doctor Did it all fall on him?

Humphrey And on several others.

Doctor (laughs) Then you'll just have to blame yourself. But you will learn much on this voyage.

Humphrey Captain Wolf-Larsen has indeed promised me that himself. *(goes up to Leach. The doctor goes on to take the pulse of Maud.)*

Act II Scene 1. Van Weyden cleans up the captain's cabin and finds his library, studies one title after another with astonishment.

Larsen (enters) So you are hear cleaning up, Hump. Just carry on with it.

Hump There is not much here to clean up. Everything is in a surprisingly exemplary order.

Larsen In what way?

Hump At least you keep your books in order.

Larsen Do I? You are the first one to have discovered them.

Hump You could not believe from your ruthlessness that you were so well read.

Larsen Would my seamanship and my intellectual interest be incompatible contraries?

Hump Almost.

Larsen How so?

Hump You treat your fellow beings as if you denied them any human dignity, but at the same time you study the greatest authors of humanism.

Larsen Do you call this crew of rotten eggs and drunkards with the cook for their leading them people? Are you that blind to man's fundamentally primitive and hopelessly brutal nature? Do you allow the folly of false idealism of illusions to lead you?

Hump Isn't idealism what all your books stand for?

Larsen Yes, but they are books and ideas, not people. People you find in the forecabin, where they lie drinking and fighting each other, competing about being roughest and most brutal. That's reality. The ideals and the idealizing concept of man of the books is the desirable and well needed escape from there.

Hump But it's the books and their idealism that bring humanity forward for its development.

Larsen Is that so? And is it worth it? Are people worth that you do anything for them? Do they have any soul worth cultivating and encouraging? I doubt it. You know the cook by now, since you are harassed by him every day. He is just a human being. Could you say that you love him and believe him to have a soul?

Hump I assume that I am not alone at hating him, and for that I have perfect reasons.

Larsen There you are. Has he got a soul? Could he be called human? Is he better than an animal or worse?

Hump Worse.

Larsen There you are. Animals cannot be as cruel as human beings. Animals cannot be as inhuman as human beings. Only man is capable of deliberate and calculating cruelty. No animal knows what cruelty or evil is, but man is an expert at it. He has cultivated these talents as long as he has been civilised.

Hump You admit then that she is still civilised.

Larsen Is she? I doubt it. To the extent that civilisation has helped her on, it has only made her crueller and more efficient as killer and monster.

Hump There are exceptions, and it's for them we are living.

Larsen The exceptions to me are my books. Well, now you have got to know me. You have seen how ruthless I am as a captain against my crew, and you have seen my back side, my library. Please assess me. Am I am monster like everyone else, or am I an exception, like the authors of my books? Or am I a combination of both?

Hump It's the very combination that I can't fit together. You *are* a combination but impossible as such.

Larsen Such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great were that as well, let alone Julius Caesar, a monster both as lover and dictator but a beloved general and a magnanimous statesman.

Hump I must wonder, what such an intellectual capacity and such a perfectly fitted man with such excellent qualifications is doing on board of an ordinary schooner built for seal hunting as a tyrant captain for a mob of delinquents and brutal ruffians?

Larsen There is nothing wrong with my ship. She is the fastest in her category. I refitted and rigged her all over myself. Originally she had much shorter masts and smaller sail area. Now I can race and beat anyone, and that's her purpose.

Hump To be the first to reach hunting grounds for butchering seals?

Larsen We all have a mission in life for which we were born to make the best of. I was made a captain and seal hunter, like my brother. It just happened that way. We vie with each other and do anything to beat each other in the competition. That's our lives. We were not born for anything better. You were perhaps born to an inherited fortune which allowed you to study all your life and do whatever you wished, but what has become of you? An incompetent weakling who can't stand anything and doesn't even know how to peel a potato.

Hump Has the cook been complaining?

Larsen *If he has complained! He wants you down in the keelson as a disabled shipworm, since you are good for nothing else than being in the way. I became at least a man who always could manage by himself in any circumstances, and no one dares to do anything against me.*

Hump Still we have that in common that we read the same books.

Larsen I am aware of this, and you are the first person I ever got on board with whom I could talk about existential matters. We will continue our talk some other time. Now I have to mind the navigation. Carry on your cleaning. (*goes up again*)

Hump A remarkable man. I can't make him out. (*goes on cleaning*)

Scene 2. In the doctor's cabin.

Maud (in bed as before) How shall I get out of this, doctor? I don't want anything to do with this horrible crew, and the captain refuses to let me ashore.

Doctor You are not alone, Miss Maud. I have been in the same situation ever since I joined on board.

Maud Why did you do it? How did you happen to it?

Doctor It's a long story. I lost my practice and had to leave San Francisco. Captain Larsen thought he could make use of me, and he did, the way he mishandles his crew. I don't think anyone of them was a beast before he became their tamer.

Maud How could you lose your practice? Did you misuse it?

Doctor I was too alcoholic to be entrusted any more with responsibility for any patients. I was excluded from the medical society. That was after my wife's death. Liqueur was no good substitute for her but still a substitute. Captain Larsen promised me unlimited access if I signed on.

Maud So he bribed you with alcohol.

Doctor No one is incorruptible. We all have our weaknesses. And there are always monsters or so called supermen who are mean enough to use them for their own purposes.

Maud So your slavery under alcohol made you a slave under captain Larsen.

Doctor He keeps me sober enough with his blind discipline. No one can ever relax here on board as long as he is allowed to go on, and it actually saved me somewhat from the worst addiction.

Maud I have to admit as an acknowledgement that I never felt a smell of alcohol from you.

Doctor You were yet another motivation for sobriety. But here is our fellow prisoner.

Hump How is she?

Doctor Thank you, she is alive, but she doesn't want to appear on deck.

Hump For good reasons. How long can you keep her in quarantine out of reach from the crew?

Doctor As long as possible. I can always insist on her continued sick leave to captain Larsen. It suits him perfectly that she is kept away from deck.

Hump Let her stay under deck as long she pleases.

Doctor That's exactly what I will do.

Hump How are you, Miss Maud?

Maud I never felt better. My only illness is my allergy against the roughness on board.

Hump I suffer from the same illness, but I am not as fortunate as you. I am no shipwrecked woman but must manage as a man, and that is not the easiest thing under such an arch brute as the cook.

Maud What is he doing to you?

Hump He does everything to make life as hard for me as possible. He claims that I must accept being shanghaied.

Doctor Couldn't captain Larsen relieve you of the cook?

Hump I believe he will do that eventually. He has learned that the cook has stolen all my money.

Doctor How much was it?

Hump 185 dollars. The cook dried my clothes and charged for it without giving a receipt.

Doctor That's the cook. He is the worm on board. The captain is the goshawk. He sees everything that goes around on board but doesn't strike until it suits him.

Maud He must still be the worst brute on board?

Doctor Yes, but there are other sides to him. The cook is just selfish and insidious. The captain is not as simple and has several hidden depths, which you must have noticed, van Weyden?

Hump He is gradually letting me in to his other world of knowledge and speculation. I was astonished when I noticed he was an intellectual.

Doctor (to Maud) There you are.

Maud I will not continue nourishing my prejudice against him.

Doctor You had better go up again, van Weyden, before they start wondering what you are doing down here.

Cook (from above) Hump! Where is that miserable wretch?

Maud We hold our thumbs up for you. One day the cook will have to pay.

Hump I sincerely hope so. I have nothing else to live for at the moment. (*returns upstairs*)

Cook (up there) Do you think this is some kind of a pension? And that you have the right to take liberties with the only lady on board?

Doctor That cook is digging his own grave, and he is so stupid that he doesn't notice it himself.

Maud Let's just hope that he doesn't pull others with him down into that grave.

Scene 3. The cabin. Larsen playing cards with the cook.

Larsen You already played your card, Cookie!

Cook Are you accusing me of cheating?

Larsen Not yet! But you are trying hard!

Cook You are the one who keeps winning all my money!

Larsen Imagine how lucky I am! It must be beginner's luck. I usually never play cards, butn then I heard you were an expert at it.

Cook I usually only play with the crew.

Larsen So, I am not good enough? Do you have better opponents than me?

Cook You just keep pulling my leg! There, I lost again!

Larsen You must have an awful bad luck to keep losing all the time. Are you really such a bad player?

Cook I am the best one on board!

Larsen I believe you. But your turn of bad luck must make a turn some time. No one can have bad luck all the time.

Cook Exactly! And now I've got you! This time you won't get away! You can't guess what's on my hand!

Larsen Surely you must be right, if my guess is right. Give our cook some more rum, Hump, now when he is getting lucky again. (*Weyden refills the cook's glass.*)

Cook How on earth did that happen? My hand was sure as hell!

Larsen Hard cheese, Cookie! Once more! Give luck a break! It has to turn some time!

Cook Shame on him who gives up! I never give up an honest game! I never admit a defeat! I was well born! I have blue blood in my veins! No one can outwit me!

Larsen I believe you. Start playing! And who were your noble parents?

Cook I was born out of wedlock, but of noble parents! Discretion forbids me to reveal their names! I was born without privileges of heritage, and that's how I became a cook on a ship.

Larsen A profession as good as any other.

Cook No, it's a tragedy! I had great expectations of becoming something great! I was just born at the wrong time under the wrong circumstances! It wasn'tmy fault! I just got destiny turned against me!

Larsen But you studied yourself to be a cook.

Cook I had no choice. I had to leave England.

Larsen Why? Were you leaving under any sort of threat?

Cook I couldn't compromise my parents by revealing my real rank.

Larsen So you left England to save the honour of your parents.

Cook And my own. Since then I have struggled hard all my life, when I ought to have been a student at Oxford and Cambridge! When at least I ought to have been a sea captain! When my career should have been in the navy!

Larsen And you might have ended up an admiral?

Cook Precisely! I should have been an admiral! But I was obliged to vanish out at sea the back way and ended up in backwater on board a primitive seal hunter!

Larsen Do you have any complaints?

Cook Not directly.

Larsen You have yourself got a cabin boy to harass and empty your gall on. You can torture him as much as you like and that way forget your own pains and bullies, while I am probably the only one you have on board.

Cook I shouldn't have come here. You are playing me out of all my money.

Larsen No risk. You have more. You should see it as a privilege to amuse your captain by a simple honest game of cards. Give him some more rum, Hump, to make him like it here.

Cook I shouldn't drink so much, but it is good all right. I never have such good rum as this in the kitchen.

Larsen That's why you get the more of it here.

Cook Thanks for that. I don't think I can tear myself away from here until it is finished.

Larsen Have a glass yourself, Hump. Help the cook winning. He deserves it. He is after all a gentleman.

Cook A genuine washproof gentleman! From the highest noble circles of England! I was actually born a marquess!

Larsen We believe you. Then you wouldn't have to walk around here smelling of oil all day in an incurably dirty and tattered apron.

Cook I am not complaining.

Larsen And you are doing right in not doing so. Go ahead and play now.

Cook It's your turn.

Larsen No, it's your turn to win. Just play on.

(They play, the cook gets constantly more excited, and suddenly he has lost again.)

Cook How did this happen?

Larsen You bet on the wrong card.

Cook You must have cheated!

Larsen Must I? Captain Larsen never cheats. Have I cheated, Hump?

Hump I have not seen you cheating, but I have seen the cook trying to cheat.

Cook (rising furious) What are you saying, you bastard? I will flay you alive to your bare skeleton! When I am finished with you, you will long for never having been born!

Larsen Leave Hump alone, Cookie. I am the one you are playing with.

Cook But I have no money left! Hump has made me play out all my money!

Larsen It wasn't Hump's fault. He was not the one you played with. You yourself played out all your money and no one else. I can only regret that you happened to have such bad luck when you for once had the honour of playing with me. Give him a full glass for comfort, Hump. Then he is ripe for his berth. He has toiled enough for today.

Cook He shall pay for sure! He will have to pay for all that I have lost! It was his fault! *(knocks back the rest of his glass and goes under)*

Larsen (whistles, and enter a few sailors) Carry him down to his berth. He is finished here.
(*The sailors carry him out.*)

Hump How much did you win from him?

Larsen Exactly 185 dollars.

Hump That's the exact amount that was taken from my wallet.

Larsen I thought so. He didn't have a cent when he came on board.

Hump Could I have my money back now?

Larsen No.

Hump Pardon?

Larsen It's not your money any longer.

Hump But it was my money, which the cook stole from me.

Larsen Without doubt, but it was your own fault, who exposed him to that temptation. Now I have honestly won it from him and have the right to keep it.

Hump But you know that he stole it from me!

Larsen It doesn't matter.

Hump But you won it from him by cheating and foul play!

Larsen That doesn't matter either. All that matters here is that I won it from him and that it consequently from now on is mine. Then you and the cook may say what you like. Go and comfort yourself with the cook and make your complaints to him, if you like. He loves to take care of you.

Hump You are just mocking me.

Larsen Cookie deserved to lose his money. He is a mean coward who doesn't mind plundering shipwrecked of all their possessions. Now he has lost all he owned. Serves him right. If I now would entrust you with it, the risk is that Cookie in one way or another would rob you of it again. So it's best for the safety of all that I keep it, isn't it?

Hump You are a slavedriver and a tyrant.

Larsen I know. It's my job. Rather that than to be under someone. How is it that John Milton describes it? It's better to rule in hell than to be anyone's slave.

Hump Paradise lost. Satan's spite against the lord.

Larsen That's me. We live in hell. I try to make the best of it. Within my ship I have succeeded, since no one dares to spite me as a captain. Just subordinate yourself, Hump. You will learn much from the experience of the journey. With time it could prove the best thing that ever happened to you. You are after all a venturing author.

Hump I will have patience until further, captain Larsen, but I never forget anything.

Larsen Don't be too sure. We all have something we wish to forget, so take another glass before you turn in, so you might get over your worst hatred against the poor old cook.

Hump 'Poor'?

Larsen What else? Every rotter is to be pitied who doesn't realize what a rotter he is. Such rotters only grow worse all the time, like the cook. Therefore he is to be pitied – he can't get any better, only worse. It's just to let him and all other rotters like him to go under. Sleep well, Hump. Mind today's lessons.

Hump You give me nightmares.

Larsen Me or the cook? Mind you that he doesn't appear one night to stab you in your sleep.

Hump I will learn to defend myself.

Larsen Yes, that's what you are here for to learn. You never had to defend yourself earlier in your life. At last it's time for you to become a man.

Hump Do you think the cook also has something he wishes to forget?

Larsen Do you think that rotter could be that human? An interesting hypothesis. Let's examine the issue. (*calls*) Cookie! Come back! I am not finished with you yet!

Cook (makes a peek) You have taken all my money away from me. What more do you want from me?

Larsen Bullshit. I won it from you honestly in fair play, no matter how much you tried to cheat.

Cook Me cheating?

Larsen Who else? Serve me and Hump some more rum.

Cook But he is my cabin boy!

Larsen You could do without him for the rest of the night. Now he is my guest, and I want to see what he is good for. He isn't even used to drinking, so we must teach him.

Hump I usually have a good beer sense until I fall over.

Larsen That's what we must test. Cheers, Cookie, to the education of the cabin boy! (*raises his glass. The cook joins him but all the time with creeping caution.*) He wondered if you had anything to regret. Do you have anything to regret, Cookie?

Cook Certainly not.

Larsen No offences? No harbour fights leaving someone dead? No frauds? No embezzlement? For being so mean you must have acquired the money of others more than once.

Cook Never. I am as honest as you.

Larsen Then you are at least not more honest. No other crimes? No murders or homicides? However did you then land on a ship like mine?

Cook It is my honour to serve under captain Larsen.

Larsen Listen to him! Have you ever heard such proof of a falser hypocrisy? They are all like that. They fear me, therefore they fawn on me, and therefore they will flatter me with any lies. Can you be honest, Hump?

Hump I always tried to.

Larsen Did you succeed?

Hump To some extent.

Larsen Did you ever fail?

Hump No, but it has happened that I did not reach all the way.

Larsen Then you are at least trying to be honest. Now, tell me honestly what general impression you have made of me. – Serve him some more rum, Cookie! (*He gladly refills Hump's glass, who gladly strengthens himself with it.*)

Hump You are a wild beast but not without self discipline. You are superior in every way, which makes you dangerous, since so far I have discovered no weakness in you, but there must be one, for a human being is not human if he has no weakness.

Larsen What is the cook's weakness?

Hump Cowardice.

Cook I'll be damned!

Larsen Can't you take criticism, Cookie? Then it's justified. Hump is just trying to be honest. Fill up his glass. (*The cook fills it up.*) But I was the issue here. Do I really have no weakness?

Hump You must have one, but I haven't discovered it yet.

Larsen Could I really be without any single weakness? An interesting hypothesis. I have no weakness for women. I have no weakness for liquor. I can take whatever nature exposes me to. No man is superior to me.

Hump What about your brother?

Larsen He is as stillborn as I. We are both hopeless. We have fought all our lives and will do it until we die. He desires my death as much as I desire his. We are both in the way of the other. To be rid of the other one has always been our most important aim in order to survive. So far none of us has succeeded.

Hump This is perhaps your weakness – a perpetual conflict that never can be resolved.

Larsen If it is a weakness I have never felt it as such so far. Come back with that hypothesis after he or I have perished in the conflict, which is the only real challenge in my life.

Cook (to Hump) He always meets him at sea during the seal hunting season, but this year Death Larsen has a cannon at his disposal. He never had that before.

Larsen A cannon on board a ship is worthless, since you cannot take aim, since the ship is constantly rolling. The constant movement of the sea makes the application of a cannon impossible. Do you want him to sink me, Cookie? In that case you will be without job and ship.

Cook I am just observing, that he can sink you, but you cannot sink him.

Larsen I am more sure in my aim than he is with a gun. The chances are better that I will hit him from the rail than that he will hit my hull. Fill up Hump's cup, Cookie. He is not finished yet. What else, Hump? Your evaluation is not satisfactory.

Hump That's another part of your character. You are never satisfied. Nothing can satisfy you, you are never content, you can't even get drunk, to you everything is just boring, but that's how you are. It is no weakness, just a symptom of your dangerous superiority.

Larsen And why is my superiority dangerous?

Hump Because with your power you are capable of causing series of events that you can't see the consequences of. You can cause more harm than what is good for yourself and can't control yourself. You are capable of volcanic eruptions, the results of which you are not responsible for, although you started them. You can't quite control your own forces of nature.

Larsen It is true. I sometimes brought people to their death without intending to. If I squeezed your arm it would soon be broken although I didn't make any greater effort. Therefore I am a captain and terrible as such, for no crew member could anything else than fear me. Everybody knows, that I always retaliate with more than just interest.

Hump Still you could be human and decent, since you have a brilliant intellect, but you have never allowed this to get the better of you. In a way you have betrayed yourself by choosing the way of brute force instead of humanism.

Larsen I was born that way. It was not a choice of my own. Everyone in the family are ruffians and sea bullies. It wasn't natural to become anything else.

Hump Didn't you feel any urge to rebel against the family tradition and become something better? Did you have no private ambitions? This is perhaps what's wanting in you. Instead of grabbing hold of your destiny and rule it, you allowed it to bring you where it pleased and where it was most comfortable to navigate.

Larsen I was born in a hell of raw natural force and made the best of it. I became a captain and my own. You can't be anything better than a captain of your own ship. If you go ashore you get stuck in the treadmill of the sick society, like you did from the beginning, for you were born in it and have never been able to get out of it, since you are dependent on your inherited annuities for your survival. Am I right?

Hump I studied though, and I find no joy of life more constructive than to gather knowledge.

Larsen There you are. You are not yourself aware of that you are brainwashed.

Hump On the contrary. I am liberated by my knowledge.

Larsen That is of no use. What knowledge? Science? Literature? History?

Hump Aren't you yourself interested in all that?

Larsen Not as a permanent occupation and encumbrment. I don't like sitting still too long. I have to move and exert myself physically. Or else I would stagnate, and even my brain would dry out. You never had the healthy education of physical labour. Therefore all of you is just a pitiable complex of pathetic weaknesses.

Hump Still I think I am happier than you.

Larsen Why do you think so?

Hump Because I can see that you have never been happy. I have always been happy by the freedom I was born in to intellectual development.

Larsen What is happiness?

Hump To feel satisfaction. That's what you can never do.

Larsen There is something to it. That's why you are my guest. Forget Cookie and his bully manners. From now on you will have all your meals with me, since we could have something to talk about. At least I don't have that with anyone else on board.

Cook (protesting) Do I then have to do everything myself?

Larsen You did that well before Hump came on board. Just carry on with that. Pretend that Hump never existed, and you might forget him. You did miss something that you wanted to forget. *(the cook groans and is discontent)* There is not much left in it, which we can use ourselves. *(The cook leaves in groaning dissatisfaction.)*

Hump (empties the last glass almost completely) I suppose we are also rather finished here for today.

Larsen Let's then continue tomorrow. Forget the cook. He is no longer over you.

Hump Perhaps then instead you could make a seaman out of me.

Larsen I could make a seaman out of anyone and even of you.

Hump Good night, captain Larsen. *(downs the last drink and leaves)*

Larsen (alone) He will manage. But the cook will not, but the cook will not give in without a fight, and with his evil propensity for scheming his toughness could make trouble. We are far from finished with his insidiousness yet. We shall see. *(empties the last of his glass and breaks it on the table.)* Soon we reach the glorious hunting grounds of the seals. Then at last my war with my brother will start again. Let's see what it will lead to this time.

Scene 4. At the doctor's.

Doctor You had better keep as invisible as possible, for your own sake.

Maud (sitting on a chair by his table) Is there a mutiny at hand?

Doctor Almost.

Maud I don't think they can ever do anything about that captain.

Doctor I don't think so either. But they could try, and then there would be more patients here.

Hump (coming down) Thank heavens for this single oasis on board!

Doctor Has anything happened?

Hump Too much.

Maud Mutiny?

Hump No, but an aborted attempt.

Doctor I heard about some scuffle up there. What happened?

Hump They tried to slug captain Larsen to death and throw him over board. They thought they had succeeded, when he came crawling on board again with a hole in his head. He got hold of the log line and saved himself that way. I happened to be on deck then. I turned ice cold of terror when suddenly a wet arm from the other side of the rail took hold of me. It was the captain. He asked me to follow him down to the sleeping crew in the foc's'le. It is dark and no space there. By feeling the pulse of the sleepers he tried to find out who had attacked him and thrown him over board. The one who did was of course awake, sounded the alarm, and then he was attacked again by the whole crew in the fo'c'sle. Only one kept out of the scuffle.

Doctor Louis?

Hump Yes.

Maud And he managed the whole crew?

Hump He fought his way step by step up the stairs again. He is now recovering in his cabin but will probably soon be here to have his damages attended to.

Doctor Who were they?

Hump Leach, of course. They had murdered the mate and thrown him over board and thought they would get rid of the captain as well, but that was not so easy.

Doctor Then it was true. I heard about the quarrel with the mate.

Maud What quarrel was that?

Hump Mate Johnson complained about the bad oilskin clothes. The sailors have to pay for their oilskins themselves on board, while the ship must accommodate them, but captain Larsen can't take criticism. He took mate Johnson's complaint so badly that he almost beat him to death.

Doctor How dared he complain?

Hump He would never have done it himself. He complained to mate Johansen, who forwarded the complaint to the captain, who then summoned mate Johnson, who then could not keep quiet about his remonstrances.

Doctor So the captain almost beat Johnson to death, and Johnson and his fellows took revenge by doing away with mate Johansen as an informer.

Hump Something like that. They only made it half way. The captain got back on board.

Maud Here he is now.

Larsen (coming in, grasping his head in pain) They tried to beat me to death, doctor, but they didn't succeed. They will never succeed.

Doctor (examines his head wounds) The axe has almost cloven your head.

Larsen Almost is no good. They will never be able to do a thorough job.

Doctor Take it easy for a few days, don't take any new risks, leave the crew alone, and try like Miss Brewster here to keep as invisible as possible.

Larsen A captain can't do that. He has to be a captain. Can you fix the hole in the skull?

Doctor It will heal by itself or not at all. How does it feel?

Larsen I have been slashed in the head before. It's just an old damage that now has been reopened. It hurts like hell, but I won't die of it.

Doctor At least it doesn't have to be sown. It could have been worse.

Larsen Yes, I could still have been lying out there in the sea without anyone noticing my absence until tomorrow. This is just the beginning of a struggle between me and the rebel leaders, and one has already gone down. There will be more.

Maud Wouldn't it be wiser to treat your seamen as human beings?

Larsen Are they human beings? No, Miss, they are wild animals. They are more evil and more soulless than any real wild animals. Wolves are angels in comparison with these irrational maniacs who really are good for one thing only: to fight until they die for what never can be settled.

Maud And you only make matters worse by mistreating them.

Larsen Mistreatment? I am rubbing them up the right way! They mishandle and abuse themselves! That's all that base ruffians of their deficient sort is good for!

Doctor Take it easy, captain. Don't get excited. Then you will just have your headache back again.

Larsen I already had it for days.

Hump Headaches?

Doctor The captain suffers periodically from the worst kind of migraine, but no one must inform the crew. No one knows about it apart from us.

Larsen (rising again) Since I have survived everything so far, I will just have to continue surviving. That's all I can do. But I will heed your word, doctor, and try not to beat anyone to death for a few days. *(to Maud)* Your diplomacy would be needed up there among the ruffians, Miss. Will you always keep hiding down here?

Maud Only as long as the doctor advises me to.

Larsen (to the doctor) Is there anything wrong with her? Is she still in a state of shock?

Doctor She is just generally weak and easily take strong impressions of the sailors' behaviour.

Larsen I know. Female over-sensitivity. The sailors only know brute force, and she can't stand it. Come on, Hump. We are one mate short. You will be mate.

Hump But I can't navigate! I have no experience!

Larsen You can hold on to the helm. That's all you need. And you can read the compass. Hopefully you can also obey orders. Also you are not one to get into trouble with the crew. You are the only one on board who has made friends with both them and me.

Doctor It's not so difficult to manage the ship, van Weyden. What you don't know already, you will learn quickly.

Hump I hardly have any choice.

Larsen No, you don't. Come on. *(leaves with Hump)*

Maud How serious was the damage in his head?

Doctor It looked bad, but he has been up to worse things. He will manage. His headache is a more serious matter.

Maud What about it?

Doctor It's getting worse all the time, recurs constantly more often and lasts for longer periods. That's no good.

Maud High blood pressure?

Doctor His iron health is the best possible. He has never been and can't be ill. But already as a young sailor he had a serious damage to his head, and that has now worsened.

Maud What could it lead to?

Doctor Anything. If he only could control himself, he could manage, but he lost control when faced by the mate's complaint. That sign is worse than any symptom. If that nastiness in his head takes over him, the ship and all of us are lost, for he is the captain.

Hump (returning) I have some other bad news, Maud.

Maud Well?

Hump The captain orders that you start eating with us in the cabin.

Maud With the crew?

Hump Not all of them, just the command, that is the captain, me and the mates and the hunters.

Maud That's bad enough. I will not have any appetite.
Doctor You can't just sit down here all the time, Miss Brewster. Sooner or later you must get to know the crew.
Maud It feels as if I already knew them better than what is good for me.
Doctor That can't be helped. You will get hardened like van Weyden here. He was also completely at a loss and impotent when he came on board. He has at least become a seaman.
Maud I will never be that.
Doctor You don't have to. But you must prove human.
Hump You could then in front of the whole command ask the captain when he intends to let you go ashore.
Doctor A relevant question, which captain Larsen has to answer.
Maud Well, I will take the risk and stick out my head so that captain Larsen may hang me, if he dares.
Doctor That's good, Miss Brewster. Thus you will gain the respect of both him and all the others. As long as you just keep hiding down here you are at point zero.

Act III scene 1. The cabin.

Kerfoot Is it true that the lady from now on will be having her meals with us?
Larsen She will have no other choice. I have commanded her. Or else she will have to do without food.
Cook She can't just go on keeping invisible at length anyway.
Kerfoot But what about her health? Wasn't she on sick leave?
Larsen She will have to be well now. Or else she will be.
Cook Here they come. (*leaves for the pantry*)
Larsen Welcome, Miss Brewster. (*does not rise*) Make yourself at home.
Maud Thank you, I never will on board.
Larsen It will pass.
Maud Yes, as soon as I get ashore. When will I get ashore?
Larsen Perhaps in four months, at best in three.
Maud But aren't we just one day off Yokohama?
Larsen Yes, but that's not our destination.
Maud I was on my way to Yokohama when you came in between. Isn't it the duty of a captain to a shipwrecked to bring her ashore as soon as possible?
Larsen My duties are to the company I am working for. My duty to them is to hunt and kill seals. Our destination is the seal colonies, not Yokohama.
Maud So you will keep me on board for four months by force and against my will.
Larsen No, you will remain on board voluntarily for as long as you please, if you don't prefer jumping over board. I am afraid that is your only possible alternative.

Kerfoot Unfortunately no one has ever been able to compromise with captain Larsen madam. He does whatever he pleases on board his own ship, and no one can stop him.

Maud No wonder then that there are mutiny attempts while others try to escape.

Larsen Accidents at work. It happens on board of all ships.

Maud But it appears to be getting on worse on your ship than on others.

Larsen So? Do you have anything to compare with? I thought you made your first sea voyage when you happened to a shipwreck bringing you into my claws.

Maud The doctor has told me one thing and another.

Larsen Like what? In his drunkenness? He is usually intoxicated.

Maud Is that so strange? Like me, he also hasn't been able to leave the ship.

Larsen Why aren't you eating? Do you have no appetite?

Maud Is that so strange, the way you just keep bantering me and making a joke and a trifle of your own inhuman cruelty?

Larsen It is no joke.

Maud That's why I have no appetite in your company.

Larsen Is there some particular tale of horrors that the doctor has been troubling you with?

Maud The source of the worst one was sober.

Larsen So? Tell us!

Maud Your treatment of the sailors Johnson and Leach. I witnessed myself how you intentionally played your cruel game with them by constantly sailing away from them when they tried to come back on board, until they could make it no longer but drowned, since you didn't even want to save their capsized rowing boat. But when they were gone you saved the boat.

Larsen We can't afford losing any hunting boats. We could afford losing Johnson and Leach, for they had sworn to kill me and had tried. Hump can testify to that. They had nothing more to do on board. Still they tried to come back from their escape. They couldn't make up their minds. In the same way I could not make up my mind whether to accept them back or not. If I had saved them they would only have tried to kill me again. They threw me over board once, but to their immense horror I managed to get back on board by the log line with a hole in my head. Both Hump and the doctor can testify to that. I am sorry, madam, but there are almost only rotten eggs on board, one worse than the other, and whoever gets lost and are wasted in the rough rounds on board, there will always be some even worse ones left. Believe me. I have been a captain for many years and seen many crews. None is better than any other, but they are all worse than all others.

Hump He exaggerates, Maud. Don't take him seriously.

Maud Unfortunately the reactions of my stomach are unmistakable. They react strongly against his entire being of predominant brutality.

Larsen You will get over it, madam. Hump was as squeamish as you when he got on board, and look now how he even speaks for my defence with all my brutality. He has almost become a man. Relax, Miss, and obey Hump's reasonable recommendation

not to take me too much for serious. Have some rum, and your stomach will get more tolerant. It might even help your appetite. (*pours her some*) Fetch some more, Cookie. (*The cook goes to fetch some more.*)

Hump It will do no harm to try, Maud. You have to stay here on board anyway, so it's just as well to make the best of it, which as a human being you even can do in hell.

Maud Have you ever before had a crew member like Humphrey van Weyden, captain Larsen?

Larsen No, he is a sensation. I admit it. I see him as an interesting experiment, and you add to it.

Maud Then you never had a woman on board either?

Larsen No, thank heavens. So far we have managed without the necessary evil of life here on board.

Maud I can promise you that I will do my best to become a challenge for you.

Larsen I take your word seriously.

Maud Cheers, captain! I am a lone woman on board against an entire crew, but no man has ever defeated a woman at length.

Larsen Except by rape.

Maud Pardon me, captain, but I actually don't believe that of you.

Larsen You are right in doing so, Miss Brewster. I accept the challenge.

(They toast.)

Scene 2. On deck.

Cook Why the devil are you picking on me? I was not I who squealed!

Ralph Yes, it was! We are tired of your dirty tricks and your wicked intrigues!

Kerfoot Throw him over board! Let him have a bath!

Cook (terrified) What will you do to me?

Ralph Just an ordinary keel hauling. Captain's orders.

Cook Captain Larsen! You can't mean this! I am innocent!

Larsen No one is innocent on board and you least of all. A cold bath will freshen you up and teach you not to tamper with the food any more!

Cook I have not tried to kill you! I have not tried to throw you over board!

Larsen No, but you are behind all other covert attacks and actions that happened on this journey so far! You are worse than a hoodlum! You manipulate!

Cook Not at all! All the others do it but not I!

Kerfoot Listen to him! Cool him off! Let him get fresh!

Ralph Let him bathe! Cool him down! He needs a freezer!

(The sailors tie a rope around his breast and throw him over board aft, while they let out the rope like a log.)

Hump Do you think that will make him better?

Ralph He could anyway not get worse.

Maud (coming in) What is happening?

Hump You don't want to be part of this, Maud.

Maud Why not? New brutalities going on by order of captain Larsen?

Kerfoot It's just the cook, madam. He has messed with us once too much.

Maud What have you done to him?

Ralph Thrown him over board. We should have done that long ago.

Hump It's just a keel hauling.

Maud *Just?*

A sailor Look out! Shark ohoy!

Larsen (at once) Haul him in at once! *(All sailors work in panic together to get the cook back on board.)*

Maud Are all sailors such beastly bastards?

Larsen You have only seen the beginning, Miss Brewster. There are worse sailors, like my brother, for instance.

Kerfoot Too late! *(They haul up the cook, who lands half drowned on deck, bleeding copiously from the leg.)*

sailor I think the shark took his foot.

Ralph He was lucky to get off alive.

Larsen (comes to inspect) At least we seem to have got the cook back alive on board. Is there anything left of him?

Kerfoot Everything but the foot.

Cook (yelling) You damned bastard! You will never again have any peace for me! I was just an innocent cook!

Larsen (untouched) Is he trying to threaten me, or is he just hysterical?

Kerfoot Attention! He has sharp teeth! *(The cook bites Larsen in his knee. Larsen removes him like a pinching crab.)*

Larsen Carry him down to the doctor. Make sure he never gets sober again until we have got him a prothesis, so that he doesn't go on biting people around him at random. – What do you think about his wound, doctor?

Doctor (has come forth) He has undeniably lost his foot. We must stop the bleedings.

Larsen Do that and keep him out of reach from the crew. He is no longer accountable.

Maud (to Hump) I can't bear it any longer!

Hump You have to. We have no choice. We have to make the best of it.

Maud No one can do anything good about this ship and its damned captain and crew.

Hump Then you have surrendered to him. That's the last thing we must do.

Maud Several have taken a boat and escaped. Couldn't we do the same?

Hump We have to wait for the right moment.

Maud I see it as our only hope. Soon no one will stay on board here any longer.

Hump (to the doctor) Could he become a man again, doctor?

Doctor That is the question. He was always resentful. Now he will never give up until he has got some kind of a revenge, and his mind is the most insidious on board. I

am afraid you will have to manage the kitchen alone from now on at least for some weeks.

Hump It will actually be easier to manage the kitchen without Cookie.

Maud I could assist you.

Hump Thank you, Maud. I didn't know that you could cook.

Maud I happen to be a woman and have learned many things. We shall see. What I don't know I can learn.

Doctor We always needed a woman in the kitchen.

Larsen Carry down that body so that we don't have to see that creep any more! It would have been better for him to have died.

Ralph Perhaps the best for all of us.

Larsen What do you mean, Ralph?

Ralph Nothing, but all evil on board came from the cook's intrigues.

Larsen Even all evil that I did?

Ralph It was always the cook who got you started.

Larsen Take care of him, doctor! Keep him inebriated, until he gets happy again! If he never does, then keep him constantly drunk anyway, for general security.

(The cook is carried out and down under the care and direction of the doctor by some of the sailors.)

Back to work, Hump. Mind the helm. *(to Maud, softer)* The shark was not according to plans. I hope you can endure the sight of blood.

Maud Captain Larsen, you are playing with the lives of your fellow beings and don't hesitate to risk their lives for nothing, and even less you hesitate to kill them.

Larsen Is it an accusation or just a statement?

Maud It's a protocol for the future and its court! *(leaves in a fury)*

Larsen (looks thoughtfully after her, after a short while) You know what, Hump? I am actually more afraid of her than of the cook. He is just intriguing and causing general damage and mischief, but she causes nothing but instead actually means what she says.

Hump If anyone of us will survive this journey, captain Larsen, I don't doubt that her word will weigh heavily.

Larsen Don't worry, Hump. The only ones who don't survive my journeys are such who aren't worthy of them. *(leaves, smoking his pipe.)*

Kerfoot Captain! A smoke! A ship!

Larsen Indeed! It could only be the *Macedonia*.

Hump Your brother's ship?

Larsen Exactly. Just as we are arriving at the seal colonies. He is naturally here to anticipate me. Well, we shall see who will anticipate who. The one who first launches his seal boats will be the first to pay.

Hump What will you do?

Kerfoot He will board his brother's seal boats, if they come within reach. It's the same combat every year. Death Larsen has more boats and places them as a barrier to Wolf-Larsen's fewer and lesser boats, but then he attacks the boats.

Hump Open war between the brothers?

Kerfoot It's more like a tournament. There will be many rounds. It will be like a tug-of-war between the brothers of the seal hunters.

Hump As if we didn't have trouble enough on board already.

Kerfoot We never have. There is always more to come.

Hump No place for a woman.

Kerfoot Yes, that will be the new interesting ingredient in the conflict and war about the sea. I don't think even she could reconcile the two wildest brothers of the seven seas.

Hump I will ask her to not even try.

Kerfoot That would be the best thing for her.

Larsen (giving orders) Keep still! We wait and rest on our resources! He has his cannon, so we must keep out of reach. We wait until he feels safe enough to launch his boats.

(BOOM! A cannon shot)

He has discovered us. That's his signal that he claims the entire ocean for himself. Have you ever been in a naval battle, Hump?

Hump Never in my life.

Larsen That will be yet another new and enriching experience for you. I can guarantee that the naval battle will be double.

Hump Double?

Kerfoot You'll see, mate. There will be both cannon thunder and drinking bouts.

Larsen Attention all men! Keep ready when he starts launching his boats!

various sailors Ay ay, Sir!

Kerfoot Suddenly everyone is with him on the alert. Now starts the game and the fun. It's for this that they at all signed up with him. They know he will always offer plenty of drama. Now it begins. There is the smoke puff! Another cannon shot! Cover your ears when then bang comes! *(covers his ears. Another cannon crack.)*

Hump He must be aware that he cannot hit us.

Kerfoot He thinks he can frighten us. He is the last one to frighten Larsen. Not even the cook can frighten him with his insidious intrigues. But I think he is afraid of that lady.

Hump He is.

Kerfoot We shall see what it may lead to.

Hump Still she is the least dangerous of all.

Kerfoot She is not the danger. It's the dangers that a woman releases, which she always does.

Hump I see what you mean.

Kerfoot You are also in love with her, of course?

Hump It cannot be denied.

Kerfoot I suppose everyone in the crew is who at all are still in possession of any human feelings. But I am not sure about the captain.

Hump So he is himself.

Kerfoot Exactly. There I see the danger.

Larsen Attention! He is launching a boat! Set full speed! Make the boats ready! We must make certain to always have the wind on our side!

Kerfoot He means, that he must be able to get away when Death Larsen sets on to chase him.

Hump It sounds like a well rehearsed strategy.

Kerfoot But every year there is something new. We'll see what it will be this year. Now I must get to my seal boat. See you! And keep a watchful eye on the cook. He is so desperate now in the harm of his despair that he could start doing anything.

Hump Trust me.

Kerfoot That's why you are a mate. Everybody trusts you. (*leaves*)

(*Great stir and movement on board with the preparations for the coming manoeuvres.*)

Scene 3. The cabin.

Doctor You have to drink more. It's the captain's order.

Ralph Drink yourself, doctor! It's your whisky!

Doctor That's what I am doing. But you must also drink. It's the captain's order.

Watson What a bloody captain you have! Shanghais strangers on board and drowns all resistance in whisky and rum. What a generosity! What a splendid sense for efficient bribes! What a business mind! What corruption!

Doctor Drink some more!

Watson What are you doing here yourself, doctor? How did you get here on board? Were you also shanghaied?

Ralph He was baptized by force in whisky and brandy.

Doctor The whisky was my salvation. Or else I would have perished long ago.

Ralph Whisky only prolongs the perdition and makes it more bitter and pathetic.

Doctor Says you, Ralph, who only lives for your distruction.

Ralph What else have I to live for? That's why I signed up on this ship of madness. All on board are monsters. This is the fore-court to hell, and the captain keeps whipping us all down the abyss and enjoys it and teaches us to enjoy it as well. It's a school of sado-masochism all the way until we die or escape or perish at sea in absolute loneliness and desertion, like Johnson and Leach.

Doctor Shut up, Ralph. You don't know what you are talking about.

Ralph You are right, doctor. You know the captain better than I. Is he Lucifer or Satan?

Doktorn Both.

Ralph That's what I thought.

Watson What an honour in that case to serve on his ship! It's just that he has provoked Death Larsen to even wilder madness. Death Larsen will not give in until Wolf-Larsen is annihilated. You don't provoke Death Larsen, and even less you cheat and defeat him.

Ralph Tell that to Wolf-Larsen. I don't think he will listen.

Doctor Of course he will not listen. He never did. He just goes on running over everyone else. He doesn't know of anything else.

Watson It will be interesting to see what will happen when Death Larsen finds him out. He can't stay hidden in the fog forever. Death Larsen never gives in, and when the fog lifts, Wolf-Larsen will be finished.

Ralph We'll see about that.

Watson What do you think, doctor?

Doctor I don't think anything. I am here to repair the damages, not to speculate in them. When the battle is over, the barber-surgeon comes to amputate. He has nothing to do with the madness of the generals. They will have to account for that themselves.

Watson That's right, doctor. Tranquilize the patients and the damages and your own considerations with whisky. It always helps. It scatters the broodings and extinguish the memory. Keep under the influence, and you will manage.

Ralph And thus he manages the patients as well. It's just to keep them drunk. That's the infallible policy of Wolf-Larsen. In that way he overcomes all his enemies and all resistance and get all his victims to follow him.

Doctor It's not quite that easy. Wolf-Larsen only thinks of himself and his ship, but I am thinking of everyone's optimal survival.

Ralph Including your own?

Doctor That's not equally important. I have nothing to live for anyway. I will die on board at sea and vanish without notice.

Ralph What were you before you became a doctor on board this flying Dutchman?

Doctor It doesn't matter. I was something that I am not any more.

Watson You were a society doctor, weren't you? It shines through your language, your ways, your sensitivity and your gentle way of doing your job. You are no barber-surgeon. You are rather like a gynaecologist.

Doctor I *was* a gynaecologist.

Ralph In San Francisco?

Watson Did you pluck at the ladies too carefully?

Doctor It was worse than that. I fell in love and went under in a scandal, but let's take that some other time. (*drinks deep*)

Kerfoot (enters) Doctor, the captain asks for you.

Doctor What is it now?

Kerfoot He is engaged in deep conversation with Hump and the lady and wants you to join.

Doctor Just that?

Ralph He is too drunk. He can't stand on his legs. He has spent all his day obeying the captain's orders to keep the newly shanghaied under deck and drunk, and he has succeeded, so he is the most drunk of all.

Doctor I am coming. (*tries to rise, fails pitifully and falls*)

Kerfoot I will help you. (*offers him a helping hand and manages to get him on his feet*) Come now. (*takes his arm around his shoulder and tries to get him out*)

Watson That will never work.
Ralph Don't be too sure. The captain always gets what he wants. We'll have to amuse ourselves in the meantime. We still have some whisky left.
Watson The captain seems to have unlimited resources.
Ralph He must have, since he has to shanghai so many seamen to make sure the crew of his ship will not die out. There must be constant refills. For that labour you need at least one extra boat load of whisky.
Watson Let's entertain ourselves with that as long as it lasts and meanwhile try to forget what kind of death ship we have ended up on.
Ralph The doctor will stagger over board one of these days.
Watson In that case he will get a narrow escape.
Ralph In contrast to the rest of us.
Watson How many have escaped?
Ralph Only one boat with two people have succeeded. All others have been recaptured or been forced to capsize and allowed to drown.
Watson Did they have any choice? Did they prefer coming back on board to drowning?
Ralph They actually tried to get back on board, some of them, although they never would have survived for long on board. They were doomed. But the captain particularly enjoys playing cat and rat with such unlucky ones and pretended to entice them to get back on board before he let them die.
Watson What kind of a captain is that?
Ralph Don't ask me. Our only hope is to pass over to Death Larsen and let him annihilate his brother.
Watson He isn't any better.
Ralph Could he be worse? *(They drink and toast in mutual understanding.)*

Scene 4. The cabin.

Larsen That's what I've always said. Of what good is all the knowledge of the world? What else are books for than escape from reality? It's a greater challenge in life to get into clinch with reality than trying to avoid it in the books.
Hump But books are experience and wisdom. You must know that who at least has studied Kant.
Larsen Kant is a meaningless dried out bore and pedant like all German philosophers, possibly with the exception of Schopenhauer and Goethe, but the best idea of Goethe's was his association with Mephistopheles.
Hump It's just a play.
Larsen But alive as such. The devil has never been presented more alive and convincing.
Maud Do you believe in the devil?

Larsen It's not a matter of belief. Either you accept such an existence or you do not. To refuse to do it, suppress it and deny it is also a kind of reality escape.

Hump You call the devil an existence. Is he then neutral?

Larsen An essence, a dark force in all of us, that could take control of anyone and lead him to hell or worse places, a kind of subconscious additional ego like your own reverse side and contrary, a demonic complement to yourself, an inexhaustible extra power of resource.

Maud So you mean that everyone has access to this demonic nature?

Larsen No, only those who are willing and who understand to handle it and use it. It's a kind of an extra association with a supernatural power, which none the less is latent in all of us.

Hump Here is Kerfoot with the doctor.

Maud (rises as Kerfoot stumbles in with the doctor) How is he? (*helps them*)

Kerfoot He has had too much whisky.

Hump Just that?

Kerfoot No, plenty of rum and brandy as well.

Larsen He is used to that. He can take anything and just gets a little groggy sometimes. He is as wise and pathetic as a drunk as when he is sober. – How are you, doctor? What about a drink? You are in good company here.

Doctor (drunk) Huh?

Kerfoot I think he needs a glass of water.

Maud (offers) Here.

Kerfoot Have some water, doctor, for a change.

Larsen Let him relax. Drop him on that bench over there. We were just talking about Kant and other nonsense like that and thought you could enlighten us on the subject.

Doctor You don't know what you are talking about.

Larsen That's why we felt we needed you.

Doctor What can I do about it?

Larsen Enlighten us.

Doctor How?

Maud Captain Larsen thinks there is a demonic power in all of us that could take over control of anyone.

Doctor It has at least taken control of him.

Larsen From the beginning.

Doctor I am willing to certify that.

Maud Is there no hope then for captain Larsen?

Doctor No, there never was. He is doomed like everyone sailing with him.

Larsen Is it that simple? What are we waiting for? An angel of death from heaven?

Doctor You believe you have defeated your brother and lured him away, but he is always there and will always come back. Your victory is just a short respite.

Maud What will happen to us?

Doctor Death Larsen will be back and sink us, because he has a cannon.
Larsen I sail faster than he. I can always delude him and abscond him.
Doctor It was only the fog that saved you, but the fog must dissolve.
Larsen Have some more whisky, doctor. It will do you good and keep you in good spirits. How are the others in your cabin?
Doctor They are all your victims.
Larsen So they are converted to our leadership.
Doctor They are all drowned in whisky and will never surface again.
Larsen That was the intention. As soon as they sober up they will gladly work for me, since I am a better captain than my brother, who is completely insensitive and cold like a psychopath. I have at least human feelings and sail better on an honest ship while he only drives on with his dirty steam engine.
Kerfoot The future belongs to the motorships.
Larsen Not my future.
Doctor You have no future.
Larsen What makes you so certain?
Doctor Captain Larsen, you are a monster of perfection. No one can compare with you and your physical resources. You are the greatest expert on fast sailing on the seas and can sail away from anyone especially motorships, but you are too superior. It has to backfire some day.
Larsen How?
Doctor We shall see. What about your attacks? Any recent headache? How is the damage in your head? You should actually have been trepanned and that at an early stage. Do you still have your fleeting fits of blindness?
Larsen Shut up!
Doctor You will not admit it, but you are gradually going blind by that damage in your head you suffered long ago. Each time you have a new attack it gets worse. Each time you have a new fit of temporary blindness it lasts a little longer. You are doomed, captain, and the fact that you refuse to admit it to yourself is if anything a vain escape from reality.
Larsen Shut up! I haven't had a fit for months now.
Doctor Then there will be one coming up any moment.

(Cannon shot)

Larsen (rushing up) Macedonia!
Kerfoot Here we are. *Macedonia* has found us out.
Larsen All hands on deck! We have to move out of reach!
Doctor (sits still and calm) Now the end begins. If you are wise, children, you will escape from the ship. It's not far to Japan.
Hump I know. 150 miles.
Doctor You can make it in six days.
Hump In good weather. The weather is never good at length.

Doctor It's worth a try. Take the opportunity while there is a bustle up there and everyone is busy with the battle against captain Death Larsen, the only one on the seven seas who is worse than Wolf-Larsen.

Hump What are his chances?

Doctor None of them has any chance in the long run, since none of them ever will give in until one of them is disposed of, and both are such that everyone who has anything to do with them will have every reason to see them dead.

Hump Come, Maud. We have planned this since long.

Maud Do you think it's time?

Hump I believe it's about high time.

Doctor Good luck, children. Never come back.

Hump Good luck yourself, doctor. I hope to see you again some time in a somewhat better condition.

Doctor No risk. I will myself never get off this ship alive. (*Maud and Hump walk out. Kerfoot and others in the cabin have disappeared long ago. Only the doctor is left.*)

Doctor Blessed bottle. You are everything I have left. (*drinks*)

Cook (who all the time has kept discreetly in the background but carefully observing everything) No, doctor, you also have me.

Doctor Have you heard everything that we have been saying?

Cook Of course. But trust me. I obey the same obligation of silence as you.

Doctor Was that meant as a joke?

Cook The captain is the joke. Now we've got him. We only have to wait for the next attack.

Doctor You are the evil genius of this cursed ship.

Cook Or conscience? Or nemesis? Have I not the right to avenge the loss of my foot?

Doctor It was an irrational animal that took it. It was not part of the program.

Cook But the captain is responsible!

Doctor Your ill will has turned you mad.

Cook And you are just a worthless alcoholic. You could never operate any more. Your hands are trembling like on a hundred year old man. You are finished. When we take the ship you will only be good for being thrown over board, like an overused squeezed out rag.

Doctor You sound like a worse edition and corrupted version of the captain.

Cook I have had too long a detention in his school of inhumanity.

Doctor We all have. Still I think he will survive us all.

Cook Over my dead body!

Doctor (thoughtfully) Yes, that will probably be the case.

Cook Drink, doctor, as long as you live, for one day death will force upon you the eternal sobriety!

Doctor O horror! Worse than any hell!

Cook Worse than life on board of the *Ghost*?

Doctor You are right, Cookie. No hell could be worse than that. Still I have learned to make myself at home here.

Cook It will pass, doctor.

Doctor No, it will never pass. All hells are made never to pass, so you might as well get used to them. A toast to hell, Cookie! (*empties the rest of the whisky bottle in one draft, then goes under the table.*)

Cook It would be best for him to never wake up any more. But there will be some awakenings here! (*leaves. From the outside a din of fighting, gunshots and an occasional cannon shot.*)

Act IV scene 1. On deck.

Larsen Is it true?

Kerfoot Yes. Hump and the girl are gone, and a boat is missing.

Larsen They got away cheaply. Damn it! He was developing into a reliable mate! Who will now navigate us to hell?

Kerfoot The entire crew.

Larsen I believe you. They are good for nothing else. But we must get out of reach.

Kerfoot We are well on our way. He can just miss anyway.

Larsen So often as he keeps missing, he must some time make a hit. (*grasps his front and protects his eyes*)

Kerfoot What is the matter?

Larsen It will pass.

Kerfoot Are you not feeling well?

Larsen I never felt better, but the headache is raging again.

Kerfoot You had better go down to the doctor.

Larsen He is drunk.

Kerfoot He is never more sober than when he is drunk.

Larsen You can lead me there.

Kerfoot I am needed here on deck. Cookie, lead the captain down to the doctor's cabin.

Cook Is he not well?

Kerfoot He is just a little dizzy. Headache.

Cook Can't he get down by himself?

Kerfoot Lead him down, Cookie. It's an order.

Cook Come, captain Larsen. I will make sure that you will not stumble. (*takes Larsen by the arm and leads him. Larsen sees nothing but tries to conceal it.*)

Larsen Yes, Cookie, lead me to hell, like you always wanted to.

Cook No, captain Larsen, we are not going to have that much fun yet. (*leads him away*)

Ralph (*to Kerfoot*) We are out of range now. What's the matter with captain Larsen?

Kerfoot An attack.

Ralph His old migraine? Is it so bad that the cook has to lead him?

Kerfoot It will pass. He will soon be up here again. Say nothing to the others now when we are under fire of Death Larsen.

Ralph If it is as bad as I think, mate, neither Larsen nor the cook will come up any more.

Kerfoot What do you mean?

Ralph I have seen it coming. I never wanted to divulge what I suspected, but the captain is ill, mortally ill. It's his old damage in his head. It's not just headache. His entire nervous system is affected and especially his senses and his sight.

Kerfoot Do you mean to say that he is going blind?

Ralph Perhaps he already is. We shall see.

A cry Death Larsen is attacking!

Kerfoot Let him attack. If Wolf-Larsen is not on deck we will surrender ourselves to him.

Ralph That's how simple it is.

Kerfoot Yes, that's how simple it is.

Scene 2. The cabin.

Larsen (in a pitiable condition) What is happening up there, doctor?

Doctor I don't know.

Larsen I can hear that my brother has caught up with us and attacked us. Why haven't we sailed away from him?

Doctor Because you are not there to give the order.

Larsen I have given the order from here.

Doctor They know that you are blind.

Larsen I gave my order to Kerfoot.

Doctor He fears your crew more than you nowadays.

Larsen Who has told them that I am blind? You haven't.

Doctor The cook.

Larsen Of course, the insidious snake, the coward hyena, the scumbag of dishonour!

Cook (coming down) Are you coming up, doctor?

Larsen Come down here, Cookie, so that I may hug you to death!

Cook Never in my life. No one is afraid of you any more, captain Larsen! Everybody knows you are blind! I have told them all about it! You are now the most worthless man on board! No one gives a damn about you any more! Everybody is abandoning the ship to join your death enemy your brother! Doesn't it feel marvellous?

Larsen You infernal death worm of shit, let me just get hold of you, and I will tear you apart limb by limb!

Cook You'll never get me! The game is over, captain Larsen! Don't imagine that we'll take the risk to remain on board until you recover your sight! Now is our opportunity, and so much hated as you are, no one will lose it! The only ones who

could have helped you have escaped! Are you coming, doctor? Or will you remain to go under with the captain?

Doctor What will you do with the ship?

Cook Abandon it. Death Larsen is waiting for us with open arms.

Larsen You are lost! If I was difficult, he is the ultimate death trap!

Cook We'll take any risks just to get away from you. Make your choice, doctor. Give life a chance, or go under.

Doctor (to Larsen) They appear to be ready to leave you in peace. The ship will bring you where it pleases.

Larsen With your help we could navigate.

Cook Don't think for a moment that you will get away, captain Larsen! We are cutting off all sheets and ropes! We will not leave you before we have made your ship unnavigable.

Larsen (to the doctor) Listen to him, doctor. And do you still want to make me believe that there was a single one in my whole crew with any kind of human dignity? They will all sail to hell with Death Larsen and perish and vanish out to nowhere, while I yet brought them somewhere.

Doctor I will go up and view the situation.

Larsen If you do, you will never come down again, doctor. They will kill you.

Doctor Honestly speaking, captain Larsen, I don't care. I am to die anyway, and the sooner, the better. I have thought so for many years, and now at last I might get my chance.

Larsen Doctor, all these drunk crew members have no chance, and neither have you, if you follow them.

Doctor I wasted my last chances long ago. I am sorry, captain, but I am tired of my own dishonour. If this now will be the end of me, so let it. I am coming up with you, Cookie, if you promise to leave captain Larsen in peace here on board.

Cook (laughs) We had no other intention. He may stay here on board in his loneliness and blindness as much as he pleases to slowly go to rot. It will be a long and agonizing death in a constantly more insufferable slow motion that never will come to an end. You are welcome, captain Larsen! You will have the same fate that you condemned the shark to which took my leg! It's only fair! *(leaves laughing in malicious joy up again, and the doctor follows him.)*

Larsen I warn you, doctor. I am getting away, but you will not.

Doctor We shall see. Here I will not get away from you. If I follow them I will anyway at last get away from you. *(disappears going up)*

Larsen Death and damnation to all of them! May all the storms of the Pacific persecute them and my brother! I should have killed him long ago! I should never have spared him nor any single man! All my conclusions about the baseness of man have been verified. She is just an animal and the worst of all parasites on the goodness of nature. *(raises his fist, like against heaven)* Welcome, darkness! Replenish me with your enlightenment, so that I can have a clearer sight than any seeing moron! I will survive them all just to spite them and my destiny! I will chase them all down to hell

with my curses and preside over them myself, like a Lucifer! To hell with all humanity! I will carry on persecuting them long after I am dead! (*hits a bottle on the table by mistake, picks it up and observes that it isn't empty, and breaks it against the floor.*) Who needs whisky any longer? My rage is a better intoxication than all delirium in the history of man! It shall never leave them in peace! (*threatens the sky with his fist and finally hits the table, so that the entire table collapses and falls apart.*) If I only could annihilate all humanity in the same way! But my rage is blind and vain. Calm down, Larsen, and wait in patient peace for your sight to return. It always returns, and if not, I will simply have to learn to penetrate the supreme darkness.

Act V scene 1. Two weeks later.

On deck. Everything is in total disorder, fallen masts and yards, sheets and ropes cut off, everything just a chaotic mess. The sound of seagulls.

Larsen (coming up slowly and gradually, suddenly considerably aged, extremely tired and almost like an old man.)

What is this land we have drifted into? I hear the noise of gulls and the barking of seals. This must be the seal colony I was always searching for. So have I then found at last the eldorado of the seal hunter and his promised gold mine and cannot take possession of it. All the world is mocking me. I am richest in the world but alone with all my riches that I cannot touch.

Is this what I have lived for? To reach this ultimate irony, the universal scorn of who was the perfect man and superior in everything, a blind invalid who hardly even can totter to his kitchen to make his last supper? The cook was right. It will be the slowest and most insufferable of all ways to die, a torture of loneliness without end, a slow constantly prolonged agonizing starvation, while the gulls and the seals joyously triumph and bark at me with their hearts' content. I may have been a blasphemer all my life, but I never succeeded in mocking God so infernally as now the entire universe is mocking and scorning me, the divinely gifted, perfect superman. But quiet! There are strangers coming on board. (*grows quite still and listens*)

Hump (coming up over the rail) Everything is abandoned. It's obvious that the last man has abandoned the ship. What could have happened? Shipwreck or mutiny or both?

Larsen Welcome back on board, Hump. (*Not until now Hump notices him.*) It was neither. My brother just promised all my men a higher share of the profit. He bought them, and they caught on. They will suffer for it, he will drive them more surely to death than I, but they got better paid, and greed always wins over sense.

Hump Are you then left alone on board?

Larsen Alone with you. How is Maud? Is she alive?

Hump We have lived here shipwrecked for two weeks, until a strange providence sent your ship drifting ashore in front of our camp.

Larsen That providence has provided me with the untouched seal colony I always dreamed about, but I can't touch a single seal.

Hump The seals thank you for that.

Larsen You don't have to be afraid of me any more. I can't touch you either.

Hump You seem tired and worn out. Are you hurt?

Larsen You could say that again. I am stone blind.

Hump The headache and the attacks?

Larsen Yes. The doctor said it would come, and he was right. When it couldn't be concealed any more to the crew, they sent word to Death Larsen about the situation, and he come on board himself one night and bought every one of them. Next day they were all gone. I heard myself how he came on board and persuaded them. It wasn't even a mutiny. It was the ratter of Hamelin who lured away all the children.

Hump And the doctor?

Larsen He followed them. I would have become a troublesome patient for him if he had remained.

Hump What will you do?

Larsen What can I do? Nothing. I can sit here and listen to the gulls and the seals, how they bark and are happy about no one coming to hunt them, while the greatest seal hunter of the Pacific is sitting here as a stranded wreck.

Hump Have you given up?

Larsen Don't be ridiculous. There is nothing for me to give up. I am finished and have done my job. It's a matter of fact. I can never sail any more, and I can never hunt another seal, while my brother has taken over my crew, which he will drive unto death with much greater efficiency than I. One stroke has already hit me, and all I have to do is to wait for the next one.

Hump You are at least on board of your own ship.

Larsen What ship? I am glad that I cannot even see it any more. She was scuttled alive, the finest and fastest schooner of the Pacific, subject to the most heinous sacrilege and rape in naval history! But there is only one thing I regret, Hump.

Hump What?

Larsen That I can't see that lovely girl any more.

Hump Maud?

Larsen I actually fell in love with her. When I tried to express it she got hysterical and decided to escape from the *Ghost* by any means, which she did. She escaped with you, didn't she?

Hump We never reached Japan. The winds were wrong.

Larsen Sooner or later you will be found and collected here, but then I will be gone.

Hump Don't be too sure. There are many hunters around. One ship could pass here any day. It's high season, and this is an inviting bay.

Larsen It is as if the *Ghost* herself found her final anchorage. Still there is one thing I would like to ask of you, Hump.

Hump Well?

Larsen Try to put her in order when I am dead, and to sail her for your salvation. Then when you meet a schooner, which can carry you on, you can abandon my ship with me left as its only ballast. That's my life's last wish.

Hump There was always something of the Flying Dutchman about you. Is that what you wish to become?

Larsen A flattering career. I admit that his destiny was always a temptation to me.

Hump I will gladly start making your ship seaworthy at once.

Larsen That's the first thing in all my life that has awakened some gratitude in me. Now I beg your permission to retire. It was a pleasure to meet you again. I never thought you would come back. No one else did.

Hump Perchance you might even get your sight back, so that you could set your eyes on Maud again.

Larsen Don't expect too much. I have myself no more illusions or expectations. I know when my last voyage has reached its end, and I am glad that my last home harbour was found as far outside and away from the human world as possible. (*rises in weariness and finds his own way down the stairs to his cabin again. Hump looks after him and then returns back over the rail.*)

Hump He always remained a captain anyway and never lost his ship.
(*climbs back over board.*)

The End.

*Gothenburg 27 february 2015,
translated in July 2021.*

Afterword

I would never have entered the idea of dramatizing Jack London's greatest novel, if I hadn't come across the film version of 1941 with Edward G. Robinson in an interesting interpretation of the main character, which appeared much more human than Jack London's Nietzschean captain. The possibilities of nuancing of the role appealed to me, and I couldn't resist attacking the issue. In the film directed by Michael Curtiz (of 'Casablanca' and many other classics) there was also the doctor, who is not in the novel, while Ida Lupino made a captivating Maud Brewster and Alexander Knox a deeper Humphrey van Weyden. Barry Fitzgerald as the cook took the prize, though, and that character can never be made better on stage. Captain Ulv Larsen remains though the central figure, and the main interest for me in the dramatization of this unequalled sea novel has been to try to reach his humanity, which still had to be there somewhere, even if it was unreachable to Jack London.