



The Exile

Dramatization after Edward Everett Hale's famous short story

by Christian Lanciai (2017)

The characters:

Aaron Burr, third vice president of America
Young cadets and officers,
like George, James, Peter
among others and other higher officers.
Lieutenant Philip Nolan
a captain with guards
a colonel presiding as judge in a court martial
another judge
sergeant Marshall
young cadets on board
another captain
a steward
Mrs Graff
Junior
A quartermaster
Danworth
A ship's doctor

The action is in New Orleans 1807
and then on unknown ships up to 1863.

Act I scene 1. A barracks.

Aaron Don't worry, boys. It's just a natural development. The president has ditched us, so it's just for us to manage without the President.

George But what do you want to accomplish? What are your plans, Sir?

Aaron We can accomplish anything. The world is open to us in the west. There is an entire world to conquer and colonise, but we could start exploring it.

James Were we not supposed to conquer Mexico?

Aaron You said it, Jim. The Louisisana territory can wait, but Mexico is ready to fall, and many of us have already colonised large parts of Texas. It has to join the states sooner or later, and we just have to give it a hand.

Peter Do you intend to act without the knowledge and support of Washington?

Aaron Why not? The entire Spanish reign in Latin America is going down, it's a rotten fruit just waiting to fall, and all we really have to do is to shake the tree, and then it's most likely that Texas will fall straight into our hands.

James Are you worried that Washington will not let us take the initiative, Peter?

Peter I think they are worried about the development here if it is led by Aaron Burr. He is after all a power point who almost became president. Jefferson was elected but is probably afraid of his earlier vice president since he sacked him.

Aaron Let him be afraid. As I said, we can manage without him. At worst, we can manage without America.

Peter That could be seen as high treason.

Aaron It could be seen as high treason. What we do is really only to give America a push forward in the development, which is needed, as Washington is only getting slower with its bureaucracy and possessiveness. Most have already forgotten all about the war of independence and become snug and established.

(noise outside)

James I think someone is coming.

Aaron It's not just someone. It's a company.

George We are discovered! Someone must have squealed!

Aaron Take it easy, boys. With me around you have nothing to fear.

(Raid: an armed contingent with bayonets bursting in)

Captain Colonel Aaron Burr?

Aaron Yes, that's me.

Captain You are under arrest for suspicion of high treason.

Aaron I am not the one who has betrayed the state. The state has betrayed me.

Captain That's for the court to decide.

Aaron Civil or court martial?

Captain It could amount to court martial, and all your fellow officers here are also under arrest as suspected accomplices in a possible conspiracy.

Aaron It's cool, boys. We have not committed any armed action, and we have raised no weapons against the state. You have nothing to fear. There will only be some interrogation, and then you return to active service.

Captain I hope so, colonel Burr, for your own sake.

Aaron My conscience is clear.

Captain Your cadets here will not be able to testify for you, since each one has to be questioned separately. But if your conscience really is clear, you should have nothing to fear.

Aaron The last thing I did in my life was to show any fear of anything and least of all of death.

Captain I know. You fought in the war of independence, and your career and list of merits is at least as good as the President's, but still you have shown tendencies to break away from the states, and many young soldiers and officers have joined you.

Aaron I am certain that Texas will be American one day. I only wished to somewhat speed up the process. That's my only crime.

Captain It was a crime of insubordination.

Aaron I did not act as a general.

Captain But a part of the army followed you with many young green officers, who could be regarded as seduced by your enthusiasm. Enough said. You will continue your defence in the trial. Take care of them!

(The soldiers take care of the young officers and Aaron Burr and lead them out under arrest.)

Scene 2. The trial against Aaron Burr.

Colonel Are you aware of what you have done, colonel Burr?

Burr Absolutely. I have broken new grounds for America and the future.

Colonel What do you mean by that?

Burr I have tried to create a future for America which all power jealous dull minds of an established position in Washington have tried to obstruct.

Colonel Your initiative may have been heroic and admirable but was at the same time foolhardy and injudicious. Don't you understand that you have put the existence of our whole young nation at risk?

Burr No, that was done by those who kicked me out of Washington. I was in a position of high responsibility and did my best to manage it well, but when I was discharged I had to find other ways to make way for America's future.

Colonel Besides putting the nation at risk and almost launching it into a civil war, you have seduced an entire generation of young officers to renegade from the constitution to instead fall prey to your adventurous politics.

Burr There was nothing wrong with it. It would have carried success if it had been allowed.

Colonel What did you actually want to accomplish?

Burr I wished to bring Texas under the protection of the union.

Colonel By starting a war with Mexico?

Burr Sir, that war is unavoidable. My only crime is to have foreseen it and to have it settled at once.

Colonel You have been accused of trying to make yourself a lord of Texas as an independent state of its own and perhaps also of the Louisiana territory.

Burr Sir, if there was anything I learned in Washington, it was to never again have anything to do with any power politics. I wanted to liberate Texas, not rule it.

Colonel The consequences of your agitation are unsurveyable especially for all those officers who followed you and who now each one of them have to be court martialled just like you, but the court finds you not guilty of the accusations against you of conspiracy and secession from the United States of America. Our court can but acquit you, no matter how much harm you have done, and I can only sincerely hope that all your fellow accused will be acquitted as well without any harm having been inflicted on their army careers. I hope you share our hopeful expectations.

Burr What they have done is their business. My conscience is clear.

Colonel Good. The court is ajourned. *(strikes. The court is dissolved.)*

Scene 3. Another court martial.

Judge Well, young lieutenant Nolan, what have you got to say for your defence?

Nolan What have I to defend?

Judge Can you defend your course of action?

Nolan I only did what I thought was right.

Judge What did you think was right?

Nolan Everything that captain Burr ventured on.

Judge Including his conspiracies against the states, his effort to start a war, his intrigues to acquire power over the Louisiana territory and his high treason against his President?

Nolan The President sacked him. He had no other choice than to leave Washington and find himself another career outside politics. He saw a possibility to break Texas out of Mexico and ventured on that enterprise. Was it wrong?

Judge Did he want to transform Texas into an independent state, or did he wish to bring it into the union?

Nolan We shall never know, since he was stopped.

Judge What did you expect of his plans? What good did you expect to come out of them?

Nolan He was no traitor but wanted to find his own way. He was disappointed with the states and wanted to create an alternative, which could have succeeded better by safeguarding freedom.

Judge Is there no freedom in the United States?

Nolan You have forfeited it by allowing the power to devolve into a bureaucratic machinery of capitalistic greed and establishment. Burr saw the freedom of America getting lost by the monopoly tendencies of the establishment. He saw freedom in another better future in the west and in Texas. You stopped him from realizing any of his visions, but visions is no crime. Idealism is no crime. On the contrary. It's a necessity. Without idealism man is lost.

Judge Was that the urge of senator Burr – idealism, and not opportunity and undisciplined ambitions?

Nolan Yes, and he could only realize it out of America.

Judge So you mean that he actually committed high treason for the sake of his idealism?

Nolan He considered America lost.

Judge Still he had sworn fidelity and adherence to the states, and so have you.

Nolan What is the worth of such vows when you trample them down?

Judge Does that justify characters like Aaron Burr and yourself to rise against America and trample down your oathsworn fidelity?

Nolan You don't understand what I am saying. You have forfeited your credibility by obstructing captain Burr's idealism.

Judge So you don't believe in America any more?

Nolan I regard it as a lost cause, a sensible union of states that could have become something great but which ruined itself by stupidity.

Judge Still you are an officer sworn under the star banner.

Nolan What else is the star banner than a nose-rag?

Judge I warn you. Your words could be interpreted as high treason.

Nolan I am not afraid. Captain Burr has been acquitted, and all of us who followed him acted in as good faith as he. It's only you and America that has broken your liability towards us.

Judge I warn you. This court has the authority to decide your life. We give you a fair chance to resume your loyalty as a soldier of the United States.

Nolan Don't you see how ridiculous and absurd you are? The states are a failure! Most of all I would wish to never hear about them any more!

Judge Do you realize what you are saying?

Nolan Or else I wouldn't have said it.

Judge You have yourself pronounced your sentence, and everyone here has witnessed it. The highest justice we can give you is to give you what you are asking for. You are hereby sentenced to never again hear anything about your motherland the United States.

Nolan (laughs) Are you joking? Don't you see yourselves that all this court procedure and your sentence is all a joke?

Judge The sentence will be executed in this way, that you here today will be escorted out to a ship that forever will stop you from ever again treading on American ground. You will never have permission to diverge from your exile at sea. Your commander on board will have written orders to make sure that you never will hear anything about America, and these orders he will forward to the next commander to whom you will be entrusted. You will retain your rank, but the United States of America will forever be excluded from your life.

Nolan (laughing) I am grateful for the honour.

Judge You will be pursued by that honour all your life. *(strikes)* Sentence is passed, and the proceedings of this court martial are concluded.

Nolan You make the states even more ridiculous than they already were in my opinion.

Judge You are young and don't realize what you have done, but with the years you will become aware of it. *(rises. All rise, and Nolan is taken care of by some guards.)*

Nolan I am ready, brothers. Take me out to freedom.
(Nolan is taken out under escort.)

Scene 4.

Nolan Nice of you to look me up, George, but there was no need.
George Do you realize what you have done?

Nolan Of course I am perfectly clear about it. I am a responsible human being. I just got fed up with the so called nation. Perhaps Burr's disappointment passed on to me.

George He was acquitted and may resume a normal respectable life.

Nolan Hasn't he gone to Europ e?

George Yes, but not in exile, just for some change and a holiday.

Nolan That's how I regard my journey as well. It's a liberation. I will never be bothered about politics any more. I will vanish out to freedom.

George But it's for life. You may never come home again.

Nolan I know. It will be a holiday for good, an escape to freedom for the rest of my life. What could have been better? I may never again go ashore, but I will get a free livelihood and be respectfully treated as an officer as long as I live. I haven't lost anything, only won everything.

George It's good that you take it that way.

Nolan And what will you do? You got acquitted as well, I trust.

George Everyone was acquitted except you. If they had any punishment, it was easy and momentary, but most of us got away with just a rebuke. You would have had no more as well if you hadn't been as honest as Burr.

Nolan I see that as my honour, which they want me to suffer for, but instead it will be the contrary.

George I think you will manage. It will probably be just for a few years. Then you will be pardoned.

Nolan (laughs) Pardoned? For what? For freedom? I deplore you, George, and all our comrades who return to the slavery and monotony of mechanical discipline of an absurd nation, which only will be capable of blunders. You don't see what you are missing, while I alone have become privileged like no one else.

George Good luck, Philip. That's all I can say. I hope we will meet again.

Nolan If you ever will serve the navy, the risk is great.

Marshall (enters) It's time, gentlemen. Lieutenant Nolan is to be taken to his ship.

Nolan That's good, Marshall. Before you leave, George, I want you to hear my laughable verdict. You do have the instructions for the captain concerning me, Marshall. Read them to my friend here, so that he will see there is nothing for me to fear.

Marshall (somewhat uneasy) As you wish, Sir. It's not against any rules. *(takes out the document and reads:)* "Sir, you are to receive Philip Nolan, former lieutenant of the United States army. At his court martial he swore that he never again wanted to hear about the United States of America. The court martial sentenced him to have his wish granted. You are commanded to keep the prisoner on board your ship. He is entitled to quarter, food and clothes as befits an officer of his former rank. He must not be exposed to humiliating or insulting treatment of any kind. Under no circumstances he must ever hear anything about his country or see any information about it. It's the intention of the authorities that he shall never again see the country he has denied."

Nolan Well, what do you think, George? Isn't it funny? Luxury holiday for life free of charge with every comfort you can get on board the best ships in the world,

and you even will never again be bothered about or hear of those authorities that ruined our lives. Could it be better?

George I don't know if it could have been better, but it certainly could have been worse.

Nolan That's good, George. (*pats his arm*) Take care! – I am ready, Marshall, for my longed for and voluntary exile.

Marshall Good. This way, Sir. (*shows Nolan the way out*)

George (looks after them) A strange fate, and a remarkable sentence, but what will it lead to? Laughing he leaves for an encounter with destiny which could be more precarious than just a scaffold.

Act II scene 1. On board.

Cadet With all respect, Sir, but lieutenant Nolan is a very lonesome man. When we are lying for months in a harbour he is not allowed to go ashore, and he is not allowed to read books or journals printed in America. English and foreign papers are censored for him, so that everything concerning America is cut out.

Captain What is your point?

Cadet We are a group with literary interests on board, and we read loud to each other. We thought it could do Philip Nolan some good if he could join us.

Captain Of course it is all right, as long as you don't read American literature.

Cadet We are almost only reading English poetry.

Captain Nothing is more innocent or better than that. Of course Nolan may join you.

Cadet Thank you, Sir. That was all. I hope it will make him feel less lonesome.

Captain I hope so too. Good luck.

Scene 2. Reading session on deck.

Cadet Here is Walter Scott's latest, a completely new collection of poems by him.

Another Has it got any title?

Cadet "The Lay of the Last Minstrel".

2 That sounds melancholy.

Cadet It is purely romantic and poetic but abundant with beautiful sentiment.

3 It sounds like something for Nolan. Perhaps it could make him open up a little.

Cadet Are you with us, Nolan?

Nolan I have nothing against poetry, and it is completely harmless and uncontroversial.

2 Nolan has been with us before. He reads well with empathy and has an agreeable voice. He knows how to give life to poetry.

3 And Scott is the best poet we have.
 4 What about the songs of Ossian then?
 3 They were also from Scotland.
 2 Would you like to read for us out of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel", Nolan?
Nolan I would love to. Do I have to start from the beginning?
Cadet Not at all. You can read whatever you will.
 2 Open the book at random and see what you happen to find. It could be
 an interesting experience.
Nolan You know that I may not read just anything.
 4 Scott has never shown any interest for our part of the world. The last
 thing he would write would be anything transatlantic.
 3 The only certain thing about the book is that it will be about Scotland.
 2 And that it is pure poetry, beautiful texts and lovely words of romance
 and love and at best some dramatic pathetic death.
Nolan I will do as you suggest. I open the book at random, and then we'll see
 what it offers. Perhaps there will be some relevant revelation.
Cadet We are bursting with excitement.
Nolan (opens the book at random) I seem to have landed at the sixth song.
 3 Read it!

Nolan (reads, aloud with good diction and empathy)

"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
 Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own, my native land!

(Nolan grows pale, almost breaks it off, the others exchange looks and hold their breaths.)

Nolan continues:)

Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
 As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
 From wandering on a foreign strand!

*(He is obviously touched and almost begins to stammer but forces himself to go on,
 almost like challenging destiny:)*

If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
 For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
 High though his titles, proud his name,
 Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
 Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
 The wretch, concentred all in self,
 Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
 And, doubly dying, shall go down
 To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
 Unwept, unhonor'd, and unsung."

*(Nolan breaks it off, throws some dark looks around, regards his fellows almost with fury,
 then rushes to the railing at the centre and throws the book with all his might far into the sea.
 Then he rushes almost blindly away from there.)*

3 We hit a mine.
4 It was nobody's fault.
2 It was destiny.
Cadet Poor Nolan.
4 Will he ever show his face to us again?
Cadet We must report what has happened to the captain.
3 Yes, Nolan and his case is entirely his responsibility.
2 It was an accident.
4 Yes, it was an accident.

(They consider the situation with its gloom and then disperse in different directions.)

Scene 3. The cabin.

Captain You are quite right. It was an accident. What happened was nobody's fault. None of you had even read the book yet. Pity about a good book, that it had to disappear into the sea, but you can buy another copy in the next harbour.

Cadet Our concern is for Nolan.

Captain It was a phenomenon of destiny. Something like that was bound to happen sooner or later, and it will surely happen again. His destiny is like devised as a Via Crucis of pitfalls. All we can do is to take all possible precautions. The other day I had to forbid his access to "The Tempest", since some officer thought Bermuda belonged to America.

Cadet It doesn't. It's a British colony.

Captain I pointed that out to him, but then he suggested that Bermuda still ought to belong to America, so I had to put away "The Tempest".

Cadet It's almost a shame.

Captain It is a shame, my friend. Such a sentence should never have been passed. Six months in prison would have chastened his proud arrogance well enough, and he could have carried on as a good officer. Now the path of his destiny will inevitably be marked by constant humiliations reminding him of his dishonour, like the incident of your reading session, which never will be interrupted until he gets pardoned.

Cadet Will a pardon ever be possible?

Captain It must be. It cannot go on like this. It's an absurd and outrageously unlawful situation. So Nolan hasn't appeared since then?

Cadet Least of all to us.

Captain I understand him. He has begun to understand his destiny and discovered its abyss. Thanks for your concern. *(pats the cadet, who leaves)*

Soon I will have to hand over the man without a country to another captain on another ship, and the only information I may give him concerning the prisoner's fate is my written instructions from the admiralty. It is heavy, and it feels completely wrong not to be able to set him ashore.

Act III scene 1.

Captain It has taken him two months to dare to show himself again, and his appearance now is like that of a broken man. We must do something to cheer him up.

Steward What about giving a ball on board? We will soon anchor at Naples, city of great festivals, a famous court and a sparkling social life, and many of the loveliest ladies of the city would gladly attend a ball with a party on board.

Captain A brilliant idea. Then Nolan would meet new people and get other things to think about than his loneliness. But how shall we avoid that he gets into any conversation of our homeland?

Cadet We just have to keep him as well entertained as possible the whole evening.

Steward He should have the opportunity to dance with ladies.

Captain Absolutely. It's my duty and my responsibility to make sure he doesn't get depressed. We will have to take the risk. Get going, steward, and start making plans for the ball. I give you free hands.

Steward Thank you. I am sure it will be an uplifting experience for all of us.

Scene 2. The ball.

Party galore, with ladies shining in splendour and very dandy gentlemen.

Nolan Isn't it Miss Rutledge from Philadelphia? Do you remember me? I am Philip Nolan, who studied with your brother.

Graff Of course, I remember you very well, Philip. But I am not Miss Rutledge any longer. I am married Mrs Graff, and my husband is here with me on board.

Nolan What do you think of our little party?

Graff You have really made something of it. For a warship, you have really succeeded in transforming a sinister environment into its contrary, almost into a ballroom.

Nolan We have worked on it and really exerted ourselves to make it as inviting and festive as possible.

Graff You sure have succeeded.

Nolan What is your husband doing?

Graff He is a diplomat and now attached to the embassy here in Naples. That's why we are here.

Nolan How do you make it in Italy?

Graff Splendidly, especially here in Naples, which appears to be the centre of Europe or at least its greatest city.

Nolan I thought Paris was the greatest.

Graff Paris was completely ruined by the revolution. It has really declined, and then there were all the consequent wars on top of that. They say France has a great surplus of ladies, since Napoleon brought all their men with him into his wars.

Nolan It will pass. In good time Paris will once more be the most beautiful city of Europe and its centre.

Graff It will take many years for France to recover after Napoleon.

Nolan So you don't suffer at all from being so far away from home?

Graff Not at all. I feel it as a holiday of release.

Nolan Can you follow what is happening at home?

Graff To a certain extent, but it doesn't really interest me at all.

Nolan It's been two years since I last heard anything from home.

Graff Do you miss it?

Nolan Atrociously. I would give anything to know everything that has happened there since I left New Orleans.

Graff That surprises me, lieutenant Nolan. I thought you were the man who never wanted to hear anything more about your homeland. Pardon me, I think I must join my husband. *(leaves him)*

Nolan (wants to sink down under the earth) What a bitch! How heartless can a woman be? How could she turn so completely a blind eye to my obvious pain? *(turns away, walks off to the farthest railing and faces the sea with his back turned on the party, which goes on behind him with cheerful joy and all possible festive splendour – the ball is a success, only he is not.)*

Scene 3. Under deck, in darkness. The dins of war and thunder of cannons.

Nolan So there is a war going on. Why not? Let the first best cannon ball hit me by all means. I was after all an artillery officer. Perhaps I could teach the marines a thing or two. *(walks up on deck just as the enemy gets a perfect hit)*

Cannoneer 1 The cannon is wrecked!

2 We are lost!

3 Nuts, they just happened to get a momentary smash hit.

4 But they swept clean the deck!

1 Here is Nolan.

Nolan Do you need some help?

2 The cannon fodder is served, and that's us.

Nolan Not at all, boys. It's just for you to reload and fire back.

3 You seem to have been fired at before.

Nolan I have been an artillery officer and know something about handling cannons.

4 How could we get this cannon to work?

1 Can we use it at all any more?

Nolan Of course. Let it just cool off a moment. Let it recover. You are rather washed up after a discharge and a smash hit at that.

1 You had better take over here. You don't seem to be afraid.

Nolan Just take it easy, keep your head cool, just pretend it's raining, and don't bother about what the enemy is doing. Just shoot sharply yourselves to put all hell on fire. First of all take aim. Everything must be done with meticulous calculation. You must not press on and fumble.

2 They are constantly bombarding us. You are in the fire target.

Nolan That's the point. Let them miss as much as they want. If they aim at me they will not hit under the water line, and then their fire is worthless. Let me just dress their shots, until they tire of missing.

1 Now we have loaded the cannon.

Nolan Good! Now take aim with careful precision. Try to hit just under the water line. Then you will cause the greatest damage. Don't bother about the circumstances and the firing. It's of no concern of ours. We have our work to perform, and it's just to take the right aim, fire off and carry on.

2 How do you make the cannon balls stop rolling?

Nolan You arrange them in a pyramid, like this. *(shows them how to do it)*

4 Now let's fire!

Nolan Right! *(The cannon is fired in a powerful explosion.)*

3 A hit! I think we returned their fire with a vengeance!

Nolan I think so too. Now we must let the cannon cool off. What will we do in the meantime. Play cards? Has anyone got a deck of cards? *(sits down at ease on top of the cannon)*

3 Now you are dressing shots again.

Nolan That's on purpose. Let them aim at me, and they will miss everything vital. You can never get a person by a cannon shot anyway, and if you do it's a mistake and pure chance, for you have aimed wrong.

1 You do know how to keep it up in the middle of the battle.

Nolan You are a soldier and an officer at that, so you have to give a good example. Attention, now we can reload and fire off again. If we could keep it up at this pace, we could win the entire battle.

Captain (passing by) You really make a good example, lieutenant Nolan. Your firing is more efficient than anyone else's on board.

Nolan Thank you, Sir.

Captain No, we are to thank you. Your good fighting spirit is spreading all around the deck.

Nolan We are just doing our job and try to make hits at the same time.

Captain I will not forget this. Just keep it going and your spirits up.

Nolan You can count on me, Sir.

Captain (walks on, to himself:) We must get him pardoned! His situation is just a constant awkwardness for every ship he has to sail with, while he still remains a paragon officer of the highest quality.

Nolan (to himself) The boys are doing well. Now we will win the battle. It's just to show them how stupid it is to mind the danger. Either you get hit and fall on your post as a man of honour, or you are victorious. There is nothing else, but probably no one else knows that I would rather have been shot and died when I had the chance, for I don't think the authorities at home ever will bother about me any more. War is for those who wish to die, that's why I became a soldier, but I may not die, for my destiny will not let me go. I may not even become cannon fodder or an invalid, no matter how much I adorn the cannon. The boys at least like my spirits. It's just to keep it and not allow the bitter irony and my longing for death to shine through by revealing myself as the first of all mocking adversaries to war.

Scene 4. After the battle, in the cabin.

Captain I asked you particularly to come down here to express my gratitude.

Nolan For what? I did not win the battle. Your men did.

Captain But your good fighting spirit and splendid humour were of some consequence.

Nolan The last thing a soldier must show is fear. His job and duty is to challenge destiny and death.

Captain We will contact Washington and try to get you pardoned. Until then I want you to accept my own sabre as a sign of my high regard and appreciation.
(offers his own sword as a gift)

Nolan But it is your own sword, Sir.

Captain Exactly. That's why I want you to have it.

Nolan I haven't worn a sword since my sentence at the court martial.

Captain Then it's about time. You certainly did deserve it.

Nolan Do you really think Washington could pardon me?

Captain Whoever studies your case would not be able to do anything else. The thing is just to gain the attention of the war ministry to your case.

Nolan I am just an individual and a total outsider to the system.

Captain Nothing is more important in the world than the individual. If his case is not considered, the entire humanity is lost.

Nolan Thank you, Sir. *(accepts the sabre with some emotion)*

Captain That's right, Nolan. Go to your cabin and cry now, where no one can see you but Shakespeare and the Bible, but everything will pass, and so will your sorrow. Only the sea has no end.

Nolan And that endlessness with its perspective of unfathomable possibilities, Sir, is my greatest daily comfort. *(salutes and leaves)*

Captain A man of honour if any, and the perfect subject for an admiral to be, if only he could be released.

Act IV scene 1. The admiralty.

Admiral But you must understand, young man, that we can't ignore and overrun justice just like that.

Cadet But it's not an issue of justice. It's about injustice.

Admiral Lieutenant Nolan had a mild and fair sentence for high treason and evaded execution and has instead received a comfortable lifetime holiday at sea at the cost of the state. He hasn't even lost his rank.

Cadet But he has long ago atoned for his crime, if it was a crime. All he did was to lose his temper at an unnecessary and humiliating trial. All his fellow officers who were brought to trial with him were acquitted.

Admiral He was the only one of them who persisted in his treason and refused to repent.

Cadet He was provoked into expressing himself as he did.

Admiral He cursed America and asked himself to never again hear anything about it. He got what he wanted and nothing worse than that.

Cadet But many years have passed since then. He has excelled in war and done his country great service. He made considerable contributions both in the war with England and in the operations at Nukuhiva, and he continues to serve his country on board as a curator and ship's doctor. When I met him now I didn't at first recognize him. I thought he was some kind of preacher or quaker.

Admiral He may have turned into a better man, and in that case his fate has done him some good, which gives us even less reason to alter his sentence.

Cadet But he was then just an eighteen-year old stripling when it happened. You can hardly charge him with any serious criminal offence at that age for a provoked expression at the face of the predominating supremacy of a hard pressing and totally unnecessary court trial.

Admiral I am sorry, my son, but there is nothing we can do. Only the President may pardon him, and the President doesn't know who he is.

Cadet That's the tragic problem. He is allowed to be forgotten and disappear. The more years that pass, the less his chances grow for him to be able to return to reality.

Admiral I am aware of this. Also for that reason it is best for him to continue his life on board. He appears to have regular routines and enjoy regular activities. He suffers no harm.

Cadet But he is a man without a country, and the country which he now loves more every day has denied and forsaken him.

Amiralen No, he did it himself.

Cadet In a moment of carelessness.

Admiral None the less, that's what he did. He has to take the consequences. So must every soldier who commits a mistake.

Cadet But it is hard and unfair. He deserves a pardon after so many years for the crime of not knowing what he said.

Admiral But he said it, and he knew then what he was saying. Or else he would not have said it.

Cadet So you don't want to help him?

Admiral We must follow the rule of the law. The law doesn't make exceptions.

Cadet It's not the law. He was sentenced without reference to the law. That's bureaucratic sloth in not wanting to do anything about it. He has got stuck in a machinery deadlock, and no one wants to fix it.

Admiral You could see it that way, but it's worse than that. No one *can* do anything about it.

Cadet (rising) I had hoped for some humanity on your side.

Admiral My friend, we are all subject to the law, and as such we are powerless to the fact that justice is blind.

Cadet No, Sir. It's the duty of justice to see things clearly. It's injustice that is blind. *(rises upset and leaves.)*

Admiral He is right. But the case is so deeply buried in forgotten documents that it would be next to impossible to dig it up again.

Scene 2.

(Nolan comes on board another ship, arrives with escort across the railing.)

Captain Thanks for being able to come. What a godsend luck that you know Portuguese! We have liberated these slaves, but they don't understand what we are saying. They are overjoyed and exhilarated beyond reason, but we don't understand them either.

Nolan With whom may I speak?

Captain This man appears to be their chief of some sort.

(Nolan is made to speak with one of the leading liberated slaves.

They get hysterical of joy and start jumping and dancing around.)

Captain Obviously they have got the message.

Nolan What more do you wish me to tell them?

Captain Tell them, that we are sailing for Cape Palmas, where they may disembark as free men. *(Nolan communicates this to the liberated, which is not received well.)*

What's the matter? Don't they understand that they no longer are slaves, that we have taken their slave ship, put their commanders in iron and liberated them? Aren't they grateful?

(Nolan has discussed with the leader, who has told him a long story. Nolan turns to the captain with a troubled mind.)

Nolan They don't wish to be set ashore at Cape Palmas. They want to get home to their own land. They haven't seen their families for a long time. They want to get home to their kin, and our friend here wants to take care of his old man, who is at an advanced age. He hasn't seen his family for six months. They want to go nowhere

but home. They don't care about their freedom or the whole world, if they may just come home to their own.

Captain (understands Nolan's concern) I understand. Tell them that we are sailing straight home with them and will not stop anywhere on the way.

(takes Nolan aside) Sorry to have exposed you to this. I know well your situation but couldn't guess, that our liberation of this slave ship would lead to such emotions and such a trial for you.

Nolan It's no danger, captain. I am used to it, but thanks for your accomodating concern. Not a day passes without the wound of my heart being reopened again. There is always something to remind me of what I may not be reminded of, as if its enforced absence only made it the more present and importunate.

Captain You may now go back to your ship. Thanks for your invaluable assistance here.

Nolan I was always interested in languages, and fortunately I knew some Portuguese.

Captain That was our great luck today and your sore trial.

Nolan Forget it.

Captain Here is your escort.

Junior Are you ready to be brought back?

Nolan Yes, my friend.

Junior What really happened here on board? Pardon me for asking.

Nolan I am the man without a country. I was sentenced to a life of an outlawed outsider in a kind of exile for life for having in a moment of weakness, which happened to be at court, rejected the United States of America. I was sentenced to never again hear anything about them. No one may speak with me about home. But the reminders are constantly importuning, and nothing can stop them. There are always turning up new ones along the most unexpected and suprising ways, like here today, when these liberated slaves talked so heartrending about their homes and their longing for home, a feeling that for me is forbidden. But that makes it only worse. There is no stronger feeling in man than his feeling for his home. The origin is everything, he will never do without his roots, which is his only life, and if he cuts them, which I did by mistake, he will unceasingly have to pay for it for the rest of his life by a black hole of creeping, gnawing and consuming suffering which never ends but only constantly increases.

Junior But such a verdict is absurd. You can't take such a sentence for serious. An appeal must be possible.

Nolan Several of my friends have tried but without result. I am forgotten, I am lost in the documents, as if I never had existed. I denied America, and therefore America seems to have deleted me.

Junior But you are a fine and honest man, invaluable as a curator and source of knowledge on board, you are innocent and incapable of any evil, and if you once made an offence you must have atoned for it many times since then.

Nolan What help is that when the bureaucracy once and for all has decided that my case is closed? – Come, my friend, we must get back to our ship.

(They cross the railing to return. The captain salutes them with the crew.)

Scene 3. The admiralty.

Junior But I assure you, that he has atoned for his crime many times, if there even was a crime, as it rather was the thoughtlessness of a young man. There is no truer and more loyal American than he, and he has served his country more than well during his entire exile with personal contributions in the second war against the English and at Nukuhiva, of which there are testimonies.

Ministern No, there are not.

Junior What do you mean?

Ministern My good man, at your special request I have made careful investigations and research about the man you will have pardoned, but he does not exist. There is no report about him, and if he really lives, as you say, in permanent exile on board American ships that constantly bring him away on new cruises as far away from America as possible, then he lives in absolute incognito, and such a person we cannot handle.

Junior But he has soon lived for thirty years in exile for the sake of an offence of inconsideration. You can't seriously mean that he cannot be pardoned?

Ministern He cannot be pardoned, since there is no such man to pardon.

Junior But all who know him can testify to his existence! Hundreds of sailors, officers and commanders have got to know him on his eternal voyages. He can't be made more real than he is!

Ministern That doesn't help if there are no documents about him. Does he even have any document about himself? Get some written certification from some captain of his, who can endorse his identity, but I doubt that even such a document can be produced if he now, as you say, has been sailing for thirty years in exile. He probably no longer has any papers, and then nothing can be proved.

Junior You are just messing with me.

Ministern Not at all, my young man. I just state the facts as they are. You can't get away from reality, which demands evidence and documentation if anything is to be done by law.

Junior Can nothing save him then, so that he at last could return home?

Ministern Does he even have any home to return to? Has he any family? Any relatives? Any friends, except such special seafaring individuals as you, who immediately vanish out at sea again? I am sorry, my friend, but without a certification of his existence nothing in the world could get him ashore again and least of all our judicial system.

Junior In that case, your honour, you make him right, when he in his youth condemned America as lost and ruined by its established bureaucracy.

Ministern That could be correct, but America is far from alone. Every country suffers from a hopeless bureaucracy which makes it paralysed in almost all matters of sincerely urgent personal affairs.

Junior (resigns) Pardon me for having disturbed you.

Ministern No problem. Welcome back, if you meet him again, and he has succeeded in producing a written document to prove his existence and some identification.

Junior So you actually never heard about Philip Nolan?

Ministern According to the navy and the army and the department of justice the man has never existed. (*Junior leaves in fury without another word.*)

Alas, the world is full of lost people who lost their way in blind alleys by just some unfortunate mistake somewhere, which turned their lives into one way only out to nothing. If Philip Nolan really exists and has happened to what this young officer has told me, he will at least leave some story behind.

Scene 4. In the gunroom at the table after a meal.

1 Yes, there can't be any more glorious animal than the horse.

2 I think we all could subscribe to that.

3 I have often found horses more human and sensitive than human beings. You can for example make better friends with a horse than with a dog or even a man.

2 How do you explain it?

3 If you make friends with a horse you know that you can always trust that horse. But you can never trust a man in the same way – he will always be at risk of unreliability.

1 I am inclined to agree.

Nolan I remember in my youth in Texas how we used to tame wild horses. They were utterly uncooperative to begin with and tried any means to throw you off, but when we finally had succeeded in making it understand that we only wished it well and wanted to cooperate, it became more faithful and compliant than a lamb. Horses have their own language, which it takes a long time to learn, but when you finally have learned to interpret the way horses express themselves, you can have him for a better friend than a man. I wonder how it is in Texas nowadays. It was years since I read any news from there. I had hoped it would be independent when Mexico broke away from Spain, it is the Italy of North America and had the most promising future prospects of the continent, but it must be ten years since I last heard anything new from there.

(*Some gloom. 1 clears his throat almost demonstratively, 2 rises and starts working with the lamp, 3 has a violent fit of coughing and has to leave the table, and two others look at each other in silence.*)

Quartermaster Texas is gone from the map, Mr Nolan.

Nolan (*wants to go down to earth, starts rising*) I understand. Excuse me. I should have understood, but I never noticed that Texas had been removed from my maps.

Quartermaster No, please remain, Mr Nolan. It is not your fault. It is our fault, who suffer under something like an enforced superstition when we never may speak about our homeland with you, while it is just an absurd prohibition that must be regarded as inhuman. (*Some of the officers want to protest, but Q. Strikes the table with his fist.*) No! I don't want to be part of this hypocrisy any more! It's a bloody shame!

1 We all obey the same directions which is the law. If we transgress the obligation of silence we make ourselves guilty of insubordination.

Q But there must be a limit to how far indecency and inhumanity can be enforced!

2 Hasn't Nolan's sentence been appealed again and again? What has been the response from the admiralty?

3 I can answer that. I have brought the issue to the war minister himself. I have presented the fact, that every captain who has been charged with Nolan has desired to let him go and at last reach the shore and home. No one has been able to do this, since he would immediately be brought to trial for breaking the order of 1807, which could have led to execution, since the sentence for high treason was on parole. But the verdict has never been updated and must since very long be regarded as outdated and anachronistic.

2 What had the war minister to say himself?

3 He renounced all responsibility and had no special orders to give. Everyone who gets the care of Nolan must act according to his own judgement. Since constant appeals have been under treatment, patience has been observed, and no one has been willing to take the law into his own hands.

Quartermaster And in the meantime nothing happens, and Nolan is continuously exposed to his shameful treatment of being kidnapped and imprisoned year after year, decade after decade.

Nolan Gentlemen, please don't get upset. Let me also have some word in this, for it is after all my concern. I am not complaining. I have never complained. I have taken the responsibility for my own destiny and reconciled myself with my sentence by regarding it as fair even if it would be for life. We all have our own destiny to learn something of, and I have learned to make the best of it. I never wished to complicate the situation for anyone who got the care of me but was always eager to cooperate and make it easier, and my reward for this has been the appreciation of almost all my shipmates. This reward I will carry with me into the zone of eternity, and the obligation to have to live without time, without future and without past, without responsibility and without duties except to my own spiritual welfare, I have more and more learned to view as a privilege. I appreciate your efforts to make the admiralty see the reason of an absurd case of anachronism, and you are to go on with that, but whether it leads somewhere or not, I am satisfied as it is anyway. My life's journey without a country has been a journey into eternity, which I actually learned

to enjoy more every year. Thank you, gentlemen, and pardon me for unintentionally having made you upset about it. (*makes a short bow and leaves.*)

1 (*after a moment's silence and afterthought*) He has plenty to teach us.

2 Darn it, it's a privilege to sail with him and to have him on board.

3 I guess we all think so.

Quartermaster Pardon me, gentlemen, for rising in anger and daring to break a tabu.

1 It was quite appropriate. It was about time that someone did it at last.

2 Absolutely. Quite right.

3 Many thanks for that.

Quartermaster I think we need another round. Can't we bring Nolan back with a jug of rum?

3 (*rising*) I will go and fetch him immediately. (*leaves*)

2 He has travelled further than any of us but at the same time somehow come closer and reached closer to home than any of us.

1 Yes, that's how it is.

Quartermaster (*rising*) A toast for Philip Nolan, gentlemen.

2 Yes, an extra toast for him, until he comes. (*They toast for Nolan.*)

Act V scene 1. Nolan's cabin.

Danworth enters and finds Nolan in his berth in bed and aged.

Nolan A visitor? How kind of you to drop in.

Danworth The doctor told me you were not quite well.

Nolan Nonsense. I have never felt better. I am just getting weak, like all are who reach this age.

Danworth So there is nothing wrong with you?

Nolan Absolutely nothing, as far as I know. But come closer, and let me look at you. (*Danworth comes closer, and Nolan gets an attack of coughing.*)

Danworth That doesn't sound very good.

Nolan It's just a small cold. It will pass like everything else.

Danworth You appear strangely harmonic for having lived so long under the terms of a gross injustice.

Nolan Do you call it injustice? No, my friend, no one ever deserved any good treatment by my country less than I, which has taught me to love my country better than anyone else. I call that the justice of destiny.

Danworth I don't know how many who during the years have tried to procure your pardon but who only were answered by bureaucratic indifference and total inhuman stonecold callousness.

Nolan I don't mind. My country has never succeeded in rejecting me, and no one has ever been able to stop me from loving my country.

Danworth What do you mean?

Nolan Look around. What do you see?

Danworth (looks around. The light and his eyes fall on the American coat of arms with the eagle, that decorates the wall, a provisional painting. *Danworth* is astounded.)

Nolan There you are. I have a country. (*points at a map at his feet*) Take it and study it. (*Danworth* takes the map and studies it with some wonder.) I have tried to make my own map of the United States as I think they appear today. I have seen that the Star Banner today has 34 stars. I figured out some of the new states, like Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio, but many are missing. Would you mind completing the map for me?

Danworth Shall I take it to my cabin and fill in the new states?

Nolan No. Please do it here, and tell me. (*Danworth* hesitates.)

I know it is forbidden, but is it then so serious a crime to satisfy an old man's curiosity about the development of his country? Can anyone prosecute you for that?

Danworth Where shall I begin?

Nolan Start with telling me who is the President today.

Danworth His name is Abraham Lincoln from Kentucky.

Nolan Could it be the son of old general Benjamin Lincoln?

Danworth No, Abe Lincoln comes from a poor family of settlers.

Nolan It gives me joy that such can become presidents. I was always afraid that a hierarchy of rich tycoons would acquire a power monopoly of the states by helping each other to form cartells by mutual admiration, since there always was such a danger. Is he a good president?

Danworth He is the perfect president for a country in danger.

Nolan Are the states in danger? Are we at war again?

Danworth That was the last thing I wished to tell you, but we are actually fighting a civil war.

Nolan How come?

Danworth The President and his party wanted to abolish slavery. The southern states are partly dependent on slavery for their economy, so they wanted to leave the union. The northern states refused to accept this, and so we had a civil war.

Nolan Has it been going on for long?

Danworth It's the third year now.

Nolan Then it could take long. The north states have industries and are rich, while the south states mainly live on agriculture, but people in the south are stubborn and don't give in easily. I met Aaron Burr once more many years later. He happened to come on board a ship where I was at the time. We recognized each other immediately, but it was not a happy reunion.

Danworth Did you reproach him?

Nolan Not at all. He had managed well and taken a long time out in Europe to then start practising as a lawyer in New York. He had nothing to complain of, and all his bitterness and disappointment were gone.

Danworth He felt no guilt in your case?

Nolan He told me: "Let's have it, Nolan, if you feel any bitterness against me. I know that my agitation ruined your life, and I am sorry for it, but I never had such an intention."

"Sir," I answered, "what happened was an accident at work. The accident was that I forever was alienated from my country, but that was not your fault. It wasn't my fault either, because anyone can get upset and lose his temper when he is put to trial for having done what he thought was right. I thought you were right against the states, you had been treated wrongly and been exiled from Washington, and I couldn't retract on that, so I stood up for it, and for that I was condemned by my own word being used against me. That's how the system works. If you are taken to court your destiny will be that everything you say will be used against you. The wrong was that we were put to trial at all. We should all have been pardoned on parole like you."

He patted my arm and apologised for anyway feeling responsible for my fall, but he had no reason to. Thus we parted, and I never saw him again.

Danworth "Accident at work." Is that how you view your life?

Nolan It was my destiny, and I have learned much of my destiny. I have learned to make the best of it even under the most abominable circumstances, like war, for example. I have become a philosopher, and the ship has become my university, since I could pursue my studies on board and undisturbed during my entire long life. At home I would never have become anything and not even a war hero. Here during a long life of freedom by exile I have been able to realize myself.

Danworth So you are content?

Nolan Utterly. I have been given a long and privileged life for nothing, which hasn't been given anyone else.

Danworth And you have become something of a legend as well.

Nolan Am I spoken of?

Danworth The very fact that the admiralty denies your existence makes this a living legend. Everyone who meets you can testify that you actually exist and that the system that denied you and scrapped you was all wrong. The stupidity is there with the authorities. The truth and knowledge is with you, which you have turned into wisdom.

Nolan That was nicely put. Perhaps there is something in it.

Danworth Anything else I can do for you? Anything you need? Whiskey? Any book from the ship's library?

Nolan No thank you, my friend, I think I would just like to go to sleep. I am tired now but grateful for your visit.

Danworth Then I shall leave you in peace.

Nolan (smiles) Welcome back. Let me press your hand. (*takes his hand and keeps it long in his own.*) If anything should happen to me, I have left some instructions in my Bible. If you open it you will find it at once.

Danworth Does the doctor know?

Nolan Of course. You don't have to worry, neither you nor the doctor. (*let's go of his hand and closes his eyes.*) Now I am satisfied. You can put out all lights as you leave.

(*Danworth puts out the lights, the cabin is left in darkness, and Danworth leaves.*)

Danworth (*outside*) I think my visit did some good. He is probably sleeping well now. (*leaves all behind.*)

Scene 2. Next morning, on deck.

Doctor I was with Nolan this morning. He has passed away during the night.

Danworth (*astonished*) Has he turned in?

Doctor Yes, he has fallen into his final sleep with a smile on his lips.

Danworth (*struck with wonder*) How very strange. I never thought that. He was so alive when I was with him yesterday.

Doctor Did you know about his will?

Danworth He told me about it, but I didn't see it.

Doctor It was in his Bible. I have it here. Would you like to hear it?

Danworth I would love to.

Doctor (*reads*) "My last wish is to come home by being buried in the sea, which is my only home, which I have been on my way to through all my life and which was a truer home to me than any homeland on earth can be. On the sea I was always free, while my sentence liberated me from all that lack of freedom which a life on land means. Let me just disappear like another wave on the sea, for more than that I learned that it could never be worth becoming, since merging in the great wholeness, the vast universal freedom, the omnipresence of universal life, like a wave on the sea, is the highest consummation any man can reach. May I in all my imperfection end in humbly merging into the universal perfection." (*lifts his eyes from the paper*) That's all. There was nothing more than that.

Danworth It's enough. In his own way he found a greater perfection than anyone else can find, by coming home as far from home as anyone could get.

Doctor You understood him.

Danworth I tried to. I didn't get any further than at the beginning. And now he will remain forever out of reach.

Doctor Shall I throw his letter into the sea?

Danworth No, give it to me. I will procure for him a monument by his own old military school, and I know what to write on it.

Doctor What will it be?

Danworth His own words. "He loved his country as no other man has loved it, but no one deserved less its love."

Doktorn Is it true?

Danworth It is true in the way, that actually no one deserves his country's love, since a country can't love its children, since only the contrary is possible: that the

children love their country, which they can do illimitably, and I don't think anyone could do it more than the way Philip Nolan finally did it.

Doctor I think you are right.

(They both turn away across the railing to contemplate the horizon of the sea.)

The End.

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