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The Cannibal King

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Melissa Joy Harkness

June 2011

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
Acknowledgements

Thanks to my Mom for making me come here; thanks to Marian for making me stay.

Thanks to the first cast of The Cannibal King: Jared, Daniel, Evan. Edwin, and Francis for making me believe in this play again.
For my Mother and Mare
ACT I, SCENE I


An entrance to the upper deck can be seen with stairs leading up. A large cloth piece of a sail lies on the floor. A stool sits nearby.

MIDSHIPMAN JAMES LAWTON and MIDSHIPMAN GEORGE BILLINS enter carrying a body covered in a blanket, grunting under its weight. The blanket is stained with blood. A small notebook protrudes from the pocket of LAWTON’S britches.

LAWTON

On the sail.

The two men lay the body on the sail. BILLINS leans against the bars of the cell.

BILLINS

(winded)
Christ. Nearly took a fall down those stairs.

LAWTON nods and plods to the stool, takes a load off.

LAWTON

Why in the piss are we having to sew him in down here in the first place?

BILLINS

Captain said so.
LAWTON
But why’d he say it, Billins?

BILLINS collapses to the floor.

BILLINS
I can’t figure out why any of you above me do anything, Lawton.

LAWTON
You don’t think it’s strange he sends us down here instead of sewing him up on deck?

BILLINS
It’s odd, but what about this situation isn’t odd?

LAWTON
stands and goes to the body. He leans over, pulls the blanket up, and looks into the bloated face.

LAWTON
(to the corpse)
Shouldn’t’ve been you Japp. It wouldn’t have happened if I were running things.

BILLINS
He looks terrible don’t he?

LAWTON nods.

BILLINS
You think maybe Captain’s trying to hide him from the crew? Having us bring him down here?

LAWTON
(knowing)
That’s a right good thought Billins.

BILLINS
He is a gruesome sight.
LAWTON
That’s what happens when you starve to death with scurvy to boot. You get all bloated and twisted and gnarled up like a strangled puffer.

BILLINS
It’s odd ain’t it? I’d think when you starve you’d get thinner?

LAWTON
You do, but then you blow up like him.

BILLINS
Why haven’t we blown up yet then?

LAWTON
We’re not about to die yet.

BILLINS
What makes you know so much anyway?

LAWTON
I’ve seen people starve.

BILLINS
(scoffs)
Go on.

LAWTON strains, but holds back his anger.

LAWTON
The Captain’s trying to cover up a lot more than him.

LAWTON goes into the cell and pulls out a thin log book. He sits in the brig and rifles through it.

BILLINS hesitates, remains outside the bars.
BILLINS
You hide things in there?

LAWTON
Why not? It’s my duty to look after the brig. Come here.

BILLINS
I don’t like going in there.

LAWTON
The door’s unlocked Billins. Captain has the key.

BILLINS
Don’t like it.

LAWTON sighs, rises, and exits the cell.

LAWTON
That better for you?

BILLINS
I was always fine.

LAWTON
Ruddy baby, you are.

BILLINS scratches his head.

BILLINS
We should probably sew him in and get back topside.

LAWTON
Hold it a minute. I been looking at the logs you see?

BILLINS
Christ. Those are the logs? Captain’s logs?

LAWTON
Right and-
BILLINS
Where’d you get them?

LAWTON
Took them off his stand.

BILLINS
Christ. We’ll be flogged. I’ll be flogged just for talking to you.

LAWTON
Billins! Just look at these, all right? Just take a look.

BILLINS
Christ.

BILLINS’ curiosity gets the best of him. He looks at the logs.

BILLINS
What am I looking for?

LAWTON
Here. Look at this one. It’s two days ago when Japp spewed blood all over the deck-

BILLINS
You weren’t the one who had to clean it up. Had a rag to my face the whole time.

LAWTON
Just look at what Hammond wrote.

BILLINS
(reads)
“In the PM, had wind at 17 miles per hour. Four or five leagues off spotted a bird, white in color. Can’t be sure of it’s markings at that distance. 6 PM the men begin to question Hupti, our human specimen, about his travels in the islands—”

(breaks from reading)
Now why’s he writing—?
LAWTON
Why’s he writing about any of it? There’s no mention of Japp, no talk about the scrape we’re in, not piss about any of it.

BILLINS flips through the pages, examining several.

LAWTON
We’ve been lost out here for 50 entries worth of that thing and not one word that we’re days without food. Not one word that Japp’s sick.

BILLINS
Lots of words about the savage though.

LAWTON
That and the blasted rocks.

BILLINS
Listen to this here, “Hupti’s given us advice on how the wind is blowing so we’ve adapted our course accordingly—” you don’t figure he’s listening to the savage do you?

LAWTON
Shit, Billins. At this point, anything’s possible.

BILLINS
But he’s— He’s Charles Hammond, greatest Captain London has ever seen. He can’t be taking advice from some island boy.

LAWTON
It’s his writings.

BILLINS
He’s the whole reason I agreed to this boat, you know. I read his book when it first came out, sitting on a cargo ship off the coast of Calais.

LAWTON
“The Voyages of Captain Charles Hammond.”

BILLINS closes the logs, reflects.
BILLINS
He wasn’t at all what I thought he’d be.

LAWTON
No?

BILLINS
First time I met him, he nodded at me.

LAWTON
And?

BILLINS
Thought he’d shake my hand at least.

LAWTON
I’m not surprised.

BILLINS
He just followed Banks around like a ruddy guppy.

LAWTON
We’re going to die out here if he stays Captain.

BILLINS
No. No, he’s got to find us a way out. He’s got to. We’re headed-

LAWTON
He don’t know where. He don’t even seem to grasp that we’re in this bloody mess.

BILLINS
What do you suggest we do about it huh?

LAWTON
Seems to me like we could use a new Captain.

BILLINS
Daft.
LAWTON

Billins, he’s having us sew up Japp in the brig. We’re tossin’ him over later tonight. He doesn’t even think that maybe they’re might be a better use for the body.

BILLINS

What do you mean?

LAWTON

You know what I mean.

BILLINS

Not sure that I do.

LAWTON

We’re starving here and the answer’s right under our noses.

Pause. What LAWTON’S suggesting sinks in.

BILLINS

Captain would never allow it.

LAWTON

But don’t you think a Captain should be thinking like that eh? If I’m a Captain, I need to be adaptable. I need to be changing my course as problems come up.

BILLINS

You’re talking mutiny.

LAWTON

I’m talking a change in leadership.

BILLINS eyes the door to the upper deck.

BILLINS

Captain’d flog us both if he even heard you.

LAWTON

No Captain would flog us if we were Captain.
BILLINS considers.

LAWTON
What makes him so great? I’ve been at sea just as long.

BILLINS
He’s been Captain.

LAWTON
Only difference between him and us is that he wrote about it. We’ve been to the same places, fought with natives, dealt with rough weather. Hell, I’ve driven the ship probably three times as much as him.

BILLINS
(in agreement)
He don’t steer the ship.

LAWTON
I been at this since I was a boy, must be near a score of years.

BILLINS
Ten for me.

LAWTON
My father was a Captain, showed me all the ins and outs.

BILLINS
Your father wasn’t a Captain. He was a nobody.

LAWTON
He was a Captain, told me all kinds of stories. He knew the sea better than anyone, wore a uniform.

BILLINS
My father wore a uniform too, but he weren’t a Captain.

LAWTON
He was on a boat called The Crusader, told me a thousand times about his adventures on The Crusader, worked his way up through the ranks.
BILLINS
(incredulous)
Hmmm.

LAWTON
That chap Hammond, he can’t have been at it more than a fortnight. Wrote that book not two summers ago.

BILLINS
Barely even our age, already a Captain.

LAWTON
Exactly. And how do you figure that happened? We work just as hard. Been at it just as long. Hell, you’re scads better at tying knots.

BILLINS
He can barely tie one.

LAWTON
It’s cause he knew people. People like Banks who got more money than they got brains.

BILLINS
Well, they’ll starve just like we will. No money to save them from that.

LAWTON
But don’t you want to see your wife again? Don’t we deserve to see London again?

BILLINS
Nothing else I think about.

LAWTON
We can’t let them take our lives from us Billins. They’ve taken everything else.

BILLINS
You really know a way out of this?
LAWTON
I know where Hammond steered us wrong. I know the exact spot. I can get us back to England. My father was a Captain.

BILLINS
Show me.

LAWTON fumbles through some of the boxes, finds a rock and some twigs.

LAWTON
(holding up the rock)
This is our boat.

LAWTON kneels with BILLINS. LAWTON arranges some of the twigs.

LAWTON
This is the islands.

LAWTON arranges some other twigs.

LAWTON
And this is London.

BILLINS
Why do you have two rocks?

LAWTON
They’re the boats.

BILLINS
There’s only one boat.

LAWTON
This is the boat under Hammond. This is what the boat would’ve done under me.

A noise from above. Three men descend the stairs. HUPTI, a island man, first.
He is dressed in a strange amalgamation of English and South American garb. He cradles a DEATH MASK, vibrantly painted.

PERCIVAL BANKS, 21, second. He is upper class in every movement. It is very clear he does not belong on this boat. BANKS carries a notebook, which he scribbles in. BANKS is followed by CHARLES HAMMOND, 28, authoritative, wearing a Captain’s hat.

LAWTON and BILLINS climb hastily to their feet as the three men enter.

BANKS
Gentlemen.

HUPTI walks straight to the body. BANKS observes his every move.

HAMMOND
I’m not sure this is entirely advisable, Mr. Banks.

BANKS
Nonsense, Captain, it’s fine.

HUPTI kneels before the body. He closes his eyes, mumbles to himself.

BANKS observes him carefully and records the behaviors in his notebook.

LAWTON
What’s he doing?

BILLINS
I don’t know.
BANKS
*He’s performing a burial ritual gentlemen.*

(to HAMMOND)
*Please explain to them, Captain. I’m occupied.*

LAWTON and BILLINS looks to HAMMOND, who is not in the mood to explain.

BILLINS
*Captain?*

HAMMOND
*He thinks he needs to do it for Japp’s soul.*

LAWTON
*No one needs to worry about Japp’s soul. Heart of gold.*

HAMMOND
*Yes. Well.*

BILLINS

(to LAWTON)
*If the savage does something to him, don’t you think he’ll be cursed?*

HAMMOND
*He’s not going to curse him.*

HUPTI bows to the corpse three times and then slowly puts on the death mask. BANKS records it all.

BILLINS
*Christ. What’s that thing?*

HAMMOND
*It’s a mask, Mr. Billins.*

LAWTON
*What’s he doing with it?*
HAMMOND
Puzzle it out for yourself, Lawton. I don’t have time for any of this.

(to BANKS)
Mr. Banks, I need to be back top. Ship to run and all that.

BANKS
It’ll only take a moment more Captain. I’ve studied other tribes and the mask portion is the end of the ritual.

HAMMOND reluctantly stays put.

HUPTI touches the body, whispering.

BILLINS
(to LAWTON)
A bit scary, eh?

LAWTON
Only if you believe in this piss.

BILLINS
I don’t. I don’t, but still a bit scary.

LAWTON
We’re all going to be on the ground, him chanting over us if something’s not done soon.

HUPTI stands and removes the mask.

HUPTI
End.

BANKS nods.

BANKS
Is that mask only used in death ceremonies Hupti or in others as well?

HUPTI
Death. Death of someone good. Someone bad, no.
BANKS
Ah, and what do you do to someone bad?

LAWTON
And what do you do when people are starving?

BANKS
Pardon?

LAWTON
I asked him what he does when people on his island are starving. If we’re going to the bloke for advice we might as well ask him something useful.

HAMMOND
Enough, Lawton.

BANKS
Captain Hammond, you have the most insubordinate crew.
(to LAWTON)
I’m well aware of the situation, and the Captain and I are handling it. He has assured me that we will be back at land within half a fortnight. None of us will starve.

LAWTON
One of us already has.

BANKS
There’s certainly no need to create a panic. I, myself, am not panicked, and it’s my first voyage. I should hardly think a seafaring man such as yourself would be frightened.

LAWTON stiffens.

BANKS
Now, we should we getting back topside, I believe.

HAMMOND
Yes.

BANKS
Hupti.
HUPTI gazes at LAWTON and BILLINS a moment before exiting with BANKS and HAMMOND.

LAWTON
Half a fortnight, you hear that?

BILLINS
It’s not possible.

LAWTON
That’s what he’s promising people. Half a fortnight. He must be insane.

BILLINS
He’s not right, that’s sure.

Pause.

BILLINS kneels, begins sewing JAPP into the shroud.

LAWTON paces.

BILLINS
It’s his fault, I’ll bet. He’s cursing the whole boat, I’ll bet.

LAWTON
The only thing cursing the boat is a bad Captain.

BILLINS
Maybe he’s got him under a spell, eh?

LAWTON
Billins, if that bloke knew how to cast a proper spell he’d be running the boat and we’d be the ones having to hitch a ride across the ocean.
BILLINS
Banks offered that boy all kinds of fancy stuff for coming along. Gonna be wealthier than the most of London. Imagine that, Hupti, wealthier than most of London.

LAWTON
(laughs)
They’ll get sick of him and then throw him in the stocks with all the rest.
(beat)
Besides, Billins, if we save this crew, we’ll be the heroes.

BILLINS
Heroes.

LAWTON
Imagine what your wife would think of that. We save the whole ship. Who could say piss to us after we did that?

BILLINS
Not a soul.

LAWTON
You’ll talk to the crew then?

BILLINS
Aye. I’ll feel them out.

LAWTON smiles. He kneels to help sew JAPP into the shroud.

Lights down.

ACT I, SCENE II

Lights up. LAWTON sits perusing the logs. A broom lies nearby. JAPP’S body remains, wrapped in the shroud.
LAWTON
Captain Hammond’s Voyages.

LAWTON scoffs, throws the logs on the ground. He paces, picks up a rock.

LAWTON
The Voyages of Percival James Lawton. Captain Percival James Lawton.

A noise from above. LAWTON snaps from his reverie and picks up the broom, begins sweeping the brig up.

BILLINS enters, out of breath.

BILLINS
He told me I should get you and the body.

LAWTON
Have you talked to the crew?

BILLINS
They’re with us for the most part. They’re afraid of dying. But they’re not sure why they should bet on you. Or me for that much.

LAWTON
You mention the experience.

BILLINS
Aye, and none of them gave a rat’s ass about it.

LAWTON
You tell them my father was a Captain?

BILLINS stares at him.

LAWTON goes behind one of the crates, retrieves two pistols.
LAWTON
I’ve got two pistols. All we have to do is get Banks and Hammond into the brig. The men will go along with us from there.

BILLINS
And what if they don’t?

LAWTON
They will. Especially when I get them back to land.

BILLINS
They trust him. They know he’s a shit, but they think he’s the best one to slog through this.

LAWTON
Take a pistol.

BILLINS
You’re not hearing me. I’m not going along with it. I’m not going to be flogged for mutiny on the hope that you can take control. No one on this boat’s going to trust either of us-

HUPTI enters, carrying a small charm. BILLINS stops short.

BILLINS
Christ. Where’d you come from? How long you been there?

HUPTI
I come to put this on body. Helps spirit.

LAWTON attempts to hide the pistols, but isn’t quick enough.

HUPTI
You shoot someone?

LAWTON
No. Just cleaning them.

HUPTI stares at the guns.

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HUPTI
Look clean.

LAWTON
Just put the charm on him and go on.

HUPTI kneels before the body, does a short ritual.

BILLINS and LAWTON converse silently. BILLINS is clearly worried that HUPTI has heard them.

HUPTI stands, catches sight of the log book.

HUPTI
This book. Is the Captain’s no?

LAWTON
No. It just looks like it, mate, all right? Head on back upstairs. You probably shouldn’t even be down here without Banks-

HUPTI
He eats.

LAWTON
What do you mean he eats?

HUPTI is preoccupied with the body.

HUPTI
You throw him over tonight, yes?

BILLINS
After the second bell.

HUPTI
I want to see.
BILLINS

Christ.

LAWTON

Wait a minute, what the hell do you mean he eats?

HUPTI stares at the two men, makes a motion as though eating like an Englishman.

HUPTI

Eats. Not right word?

LAWTON

What’s he eating?

BILLINS

You’re saying Banks is eating?

HUPTI

Yes. He eats.

LAWTON

There’s not any food left on the boat though, Hupti. No food left.

HUPTI

He and the Captain. They have little food.

BILLINS

They been giving you some too then? That the deal?

HUPTI shakes his head.

HUPTI

I see all. They do not know I see.

BILLINS and LAWTON are horrified.

BILLINS

Christ, they’ve been keeping stores for themselves.
LAWTON

We’ve got to go now.

LAWTON tosses him a pistol.

BILLINS

You sure we can trust him?

LAWTON

It makes sense, don’t it? Banks is a schoolboy, and he’s not even the least panicked that we’re out here. He’s telling us to be calm?

BILLINS

You’re right. Christ.

BILLINS readies his gun.

LAWTON

If we find them eating like he said, we may need to use these to keep the crew from murdering them both.

BILLINS

You may have to keep me from murdering them both.

BILLINS nods his head at HUPTI. The sound of bells from above.

BILLINS

What do we do about him?

LAWTON

Let him stay with the body.

A noise from the stairs.

BILLINS

Shit. What do we do?

LAWTON

Hide them. We don’t have the advantage.
LAWTON and BILLINS scramble to hide the guns. LAWTON forgets to hide the logbook.

HAMMOND and BANKS enter.

HAMMOND
Ah Billins. Good. You can help me get the body upstairs.

BANKS
Hupti, I’ve been looking all about the ship for you.

HAMMOND goes to one end of the shrouded body.

BILLINS and LAWTON remain frozen in place.

HAMMOND
Billins! Get the other end of the body. Lawton you might help as well.

HAMMOND gestures to his end of the body.

HAMMOND
You can carry my end.

BILLINS hesitates but goes to the body’s feet and prepares to lift. LAWTON stays in place.

HAMMOND
Lawton.

LAWTON
I-

HAMMOND
An honor I would think to carry your dead brother to his last.
LAWTON
I don’t believe we should throw him over sir.

HAMMOND
We’ve heard your opinion on the matter, Lawton.

LAWTON
I’m working under the thought sir, that there’s no food left on the boat. That is right, Captain?

HAMMOND
I think everyone on this boat knows that there is nothing to eat, Mr. Lawton.

LAWTON
And there won’t be for at least another week in which one of us could wind up just like Japp?

HAMMOND
I’m projecting a week. At least.

BANKS
At least?

BANKS is watching HUPTI who has begun to put on a show for him.
BANKS paces around the body, nearing the logbook.

LAWTON
If there isn’t any food, then why shouldn’t we keep his body, take a vote?

HAMMOND
That’s not an option, Mr. Lawton.

LAWTON
It would seem to me to be the only option. Unless the Captain knows something I don’t.

BANKS’ foot hits the logbook. He picks it up.
HAMMOND
I know many things you don’t, Lawton. And I don’t have anywhere near the time to divulge all of them. Now, carry the body up top.

BANKS
Hammond, isn’t this your logbook?

HAMMOND looks at the book. His face changes.

HAMMOND
How did this get down here?

Everyone is silent. HAMMOND pulls a club from his belt.

HAMMOND
Which one of you took this?

LAWTON looks at BILLINS, steps forward.

LAWTON
I did.

HAMMOND
I should’ve known.

LAWTON
I think it’s every man’s right to see what’s being said about this wreck of a voyage. Course you wouldn’t know it to look at those logs. You’d think we were at a tea party.

HAMMOND
In the brig.

LAWTON
I’m not going in the brig. You should’ve been taken from being Captain a long time ago, you-
HAMMOND is quick. He clubs LAWTON over the head. LAWTON crumples to the ground.

HAMMOND turns to BILLINS.

HAMMOND
Help me put him in the brig. Then we’ll toss the body overboard.

BILLINS stays still.

HAMMOND
I trust you don’t object, Billins.

BILLINS shakes his head.

BILLINS
No, sir.

HAMMOND
Good.

BILLINS and HAMMOND pick up LAWTON’S body and shut him in the brig.

They pick up JAPP and carry him off. BILLINS gives one last look to LAWTON as lights go down.

ACT I, SCENE III

LAWTON sits in the cell, contemplating his shoe. He takes it off. He feels around in his back pocket, pulls out a knife. He seems surprised to find it there. LAWTON cuts a piece of the leather from the shoe.
LAWTON stares at the leather a moment, gulps and then attempts to eat it. He chews on it a moment and then spits it out, revulsed.

LAWTON

God.

He puts the shoe back on his foot and hangs his head, flipping the knife around in his hands.

BILLINS creeps in with a cup of water.

BILLINS (sotto voce)

Lawton.

LAWTON does not raise his head.

BILLINS

Lawton.

LAWTON looks up.

BILLINS

I brought you some water.

BILLINS sets the cup in front of the bars. LAWTON makes no move towards it.

BILLINS

I’m sorry, mate. What could I do, huh? What would you want me to do? Wouldn’t have helped. I’d just be in there with you.

LAWTON sighs and retrieves the water.

BILLINS

I’ve got something else for you.
BILLINS holds up a roll of tack, sailor’s bread.

LAWTON
Piss it all, Billins. So it’s true.

BILLINS
I told Banks I’d tell the whole crew if he didn’t give us something to eat. So he did. Gave me one this morning.

LAWTON
And you ate it.

BILLINS
Course I ate it. I look daft to you.

LAWTON picks up the roll, examines it carefully, weighs it in both hands.

LAWTON
Billins, I can’t eat this.

BILLINS
You crazy? Give it here then. I’ll eat it.

LAWTON
No. It’s not right. Look, he tell you how much he had left?

BILLINS
No. Can’t be too much I suppose.

LAWTON
Exactly. And we’re not the same as them. We can’t be the same as them. Whatever’s left should be split among the crew.

BILLINS
Right. I know you’re right.

LAWTON
Under their new Captain.
LAWTON sets the roll back outside the bars, but keeps his hand on it.

BILLINS
How’re we going to take control with you behind those bars?

LAWTON holds up the roll.

LAWTON
With this. You go and show the crew this, tell them I discovered it— that’s why he’s put me behind bars, that’s why he won’t allow anyone to see me. They won’t stand for it.

BILLINS
Christ.

BILLINS picks up the roll, paces.

BILLINS
You think it’ll work?

LAWTON
When they see proof, they’ll be raving mad.

BILLINS
Right.

BILLINS starts towards the stairs.

LAWTON
Billins.

BILLINS
Huh?

LAWTON
You know where the key is? To the brig? Have they moved it?

BILLINS
I dunno.
LAWTON
Find it as soon as you can. I’d like to be there when Banks and Hammond are given what they deserve.

BILLINS
Aye.

LAWTON
Oh and Billins.

BILLINS
Yes?

LAWTON
I’ll get you home, mate. James Lawton will get you home.

BILLINS
Here’s to hoping, eh? We’re sure to do a better job then Hammond.

BILLINS exits laughing.

LAWTON
Yes. We.

Lights down.

ACT I. SCENE III

Lights up.

HAMMOND and BANKS sit locked in the cell. BANKS is in a panicked frenzy. HAMMOND remains bitterly calm, leaning against the bars.

BANKS
Where can they be? They have to tell us what’s happening at some time? Don’t they? Don’t they?
HAMMOND
They don’t have to tell us anything.

BANKS
I thought you had control of this situation. They can’t do this to us! You’re the Captain. I’m Percival Banks. My father owns these damn boats. He’s the reason this whole thing is even happening. They can’t do this to someone like me-

HAMMOND
None of that matters to them, Mr. Banks.

BANKS
I should’ve known you didn’t have control when we ran out of food, when we couldn’t find any land-

HAMMOND
I still had control-

BANKS
My father will hear about this. You’ll never run another expedition. Your name is through.

(panicking)
They have to tell us something! YOU HAVE TO TELL US SOMETHING!

HAMMOND
No one’s going to hear you or care, Mr. Banks.

BANKS
This is all your fault, Captain. I-I’ve held my tongue, but you were supposed to know what you were doing. You were supposed to know.

HAMMOND
I do know what I’m doing Mr. Banks.

BANKS
You haven’t known anything since the storm. It blew us off and you didn’t know how to get back on. I didn’t want to believe it. I didn’t want to believe it. I didn’t- I didn’t want to-
HAMMOND

Banks! Pull it together!

A sound from above.

LAWTON and BILLINS enter. HAMMOND is instantly on his feet and at the bars. LAWTON carries the Captain’s hat. LAWTON puts the hat on in full view of HAMMOND.

LAWTON

Gentlemen.

HAMMOND

Lawton, if you come to your senses and release us this instant, I give you my word I won’t have you murdered for treason when we get back to London.

LAWTON

Captain.

HAMMOND

Pardon?

LAWTON

It’s Captain Lawton. When addressing me, you should call me Captain.

HAMMOND

I’ll never call you Captain.

LAWTON

That’s a pity. Billins, what do you think of that?

BILLINS

A pity.

BANKS

Look, you insolent fool, do you know who my father is?
LAWTON
I’d like to think I have an idea.

BANKS
He owns The Red Asphodel. He built it. He named it. He owns the whole damn fleet-

LAWTON
Come now. I don’t think he built it. That was men like me and Billins here-

BANKS
He owns London. He’ll have your heads-

LAWTON
He won’t be able to touch me if I save his only son now will he? If I come back into London having saved the whole voyage. If Billins and I save the whole lot of you? If the whole crew testifies that you two were running us into the ground, hoarding food for yourselves? Won’t look very noble at all will it?

HAMMOND
Come off it Lawton. I’m the Captain.

LAWTON
And that gives you the right to food when we have none? I suggest Japp might be useful, you call me an animal.

HAMMOND
It was an animal thing to suggest.

HUPTI enters, out of breath.

HUPTI
Mr. Bill, he say that he finds nothing.

LAWTON
Nothing more?
LAWTON turns to BANKS and HAMMOND.

LAWTON
Where is the rest of it?

BANKS
There is no more— we were running out too—

HAMMOND stops him.

HAMMOND
What’ll you do for us?

LAWTON
(laughs)
Good try Hammond, but your boy’s a squealer.

HAMMOND
He doesn’t know where the rest of it is.

BANKS
What the devil do you mean?

HAMMOND
Only me.

BANKS
You’ve been concealing something from me Hammond? I’ll have you tarred and feathered—

LAWTON
Quiet.

LAWTON comes towards the bars.

LAWTON
You’re full of piss Hammond. I don’t believe a word of it. You forget— there’s not a place on this boat that we can’t go now. If you were hiding something, we’d find it soon enough. Billins - go get the instruments if you would. Time to set our course.
BILLINS hesitates, decides against arguing, and goes to get the equipment.

HAMMOND
That what it’s come to? Making decisions in the brig?

LAWTON
Have to keep an eye on the prisoners. I know how these things start.

HUPTI
I help, yes?

LAWTON
Help?

HUPTI
I know way to go. The stars, I see them. They tell me which way is the island.

LAWTON
Thanks, mate, but we don’t want to go back to the island.

BILLINS enters with several charts and an ivory Sextant. He spreads the charts out on the ground and begins fiddling with the sextant.

LAWTON begins to peruse the charts.

HAMMOND
How pray tell are you going to navigate better than I could?

LAWTON
Shows how little you know about your crew. My father was a Captain. Taught me everything about how to navigate.

BANKS
(scornful)
Your father? A Captain?
BANKS laughs. HAMMOND says nothing.

LAWTON
That’s right. He was. And don’t talk like you know different.

BANKS
I know that if you were the legitimate son of a Captain you wouldn’t be midshipman. That much I know. My father promotes sons of Captains. Hammond here is the son of a Captain—

HAMMOND
That’s not—

LAWTON
Yeah, well, I’m not midshipman anymore am I?

LAWTON approaches the bars.

LAWTON
And you better watch what you say.

BILLINS
Right so this has us bearing southeast right now, which would make sense if the storm blew us northward.

LAWTON
See, the storm was a—

HUPTI
Is wrong- the storm blew us to the Hatchi Star, then we started sailing with the wind—

BANKS
You should be writing this down—

BANKS frantically searches for some way to record what HUPTI is saying.

BILLINS
What do you know about it?
BANKS
He was a shaman in his tribe. He told them when to—

BILLINS
His tribe ain’t nothing out here.

HUPTI
I know the sea.

BANKS
You should be writing down what he says! This is a scientific expedition— you have to observe—

LAWTON and BILLINS ignore BANKS.

BILLINS
Christ. He knows the sea.

LAWTON
It’s all right Billins.
   (to HUPTI)
Get back up top and see what you can figure when it comes to direction. Let us know what you come to.

LAWTON salutes HUPTI. He nods to HUPTI to do it back. HUPTI repeats the salute, and exits.

BANKS
Don’t do that to him! You’re polluting him— we have to know—

LAWTON
I thought that was the point— make him like us and all that—

BANKS shakes his head.

BANKS
I don’t know what we’re to do now that you’re at the head of this boat.

LAWTON
We need to sail northeast.
BILLINS
So a change of course due north.

HAMMOND
It’s wrong— we’re heading towards land— I know it. You’re going to take us smack in the wrong direction.

LAWTON
Northeast. Give Knowles the bearing.

BILLINS
Right.

BILLINS heads towards the stairs, stops before leaving.

BILLINS
Captain—I— Lawton, if we find no more rations, what do we intend to do for food?

LAWTON
We’ll have to draw straws.

BILLINS
Aye.

BILLINS exits.

HAMMOND
So it’s come to that?

BANKS
What? It’s come to what?

LAWTON
We’re going to draw straws, Mr. Banks. You know what that is?

BANKS
It’s a child’s game.
LAWTON
In this case, we all draw a straw and the one who gets the short end is the sacrifice.

BANKS
Sacrifice?

LAWTON
Like I said Japp would be. We give him a gun, and he shoots himself, and then the rest of us, we- profit from his death.

BANKS
You’re a savage, worse than the Hupti’s people.

LAWTON
I assure you, it’s all very British. Ain’t that right, Hammond?

HAMMOND
It’s a custom.

LAWTON
We’ll draw straws. And one will die for the many.

HAMMOND
You’ll get us all killed Lawton.

LAWTON
Captain. Captain Lawton.

Lights down.

ACT I, SCENE IV

Night. Lights up on LAWTON, sitting in the stool, cradling a small notebook. HAMMOND and BANKS sleep in the brig.

The charts and sextant remain on the floor. The brig is cluttered.

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Rocks, plants, various island weaponry, masks, and all kinds of island artifacts lie all over the floor.

LAWTON

LAWTON
The Adventures of Captain James Lawton of the Red Asphodel.

LAWTON reconsiders it.

Unbeknownst to LAWTON, HAMMOND wakes up. HAMMOND remains silent, watching and listening to LAWTON.

LAWTON
The Voyage of Captain James Lawton of the Red Asphodel. Island Voyage.

LAWTON gazes at it, satisfied.

LAWTON
Day 1. I, James Lawton, son of Captain R.-

LAWTON thinks a moment. HAMMOND is all ears. LAWTON shrugs and continues to write.

LAWTON
Lawton, have taken-

LAWTON scratches this out.

LAWTON
Seized control of The Red Asphodel as Captain Hammond proved...unfit for leadership. My first order of business was to take a look around of the boat, see what’s what. There’s nothing here but shit-

LAWTON crosses this out.
LAWTON
Artifacts from the island. As Captain Hammond didn’t tell it straight, I will write it here. We are lost at sea, days without food. We have been off course since a storm damaged our mast and blew us into uncharted waters. Hammond and Banks both grew greedy and concealed food from the rest of us. Now there is none left. I can only assume that they are going mad because no proper British-

HAMMOND begins to howl with laughter. LAWTON shuts the book and stands.

HAMMOND
Going mad?

HAMMOND continues to laugh.

LAWTON
I wouldn’t brag about being sane while you did what you did. I read your logs. Bunch of piss about rocks and Hupti. You wrote about moss the day Japp died. You never even mention it. That’s mad.

HAMMOND
What do you think all of this is for?

LAWTON
What?

HAMMOND
The Asphodel, all of it.

LAWTON
It’s a scientific expedition.

HAMMOND
That’s what they’re calling it. You have no clue what it means do you?
LAWTON
Means we explore, pick up shit and come back. People put it in a museum, you get a book made, your name’s all over England like a plague.

HAMMOND
Yes. Well. It was.

LAWTON
(scornful)
The Great Captain Hammond.

HAMMOND
You think I want to write about moss? It’s my job to make sure this goes smoothly. It’s my job to make sure no one dies, no one mutinies, no one says a word out of line. I write the truth, and I never go on another expedition in my life.

(pointing to BANKS)
That one’s father doesn’t want to hear that things fall apart and get ugly sometimes. He just wants to be at the head of the curve, make his money, find new land, new profit. None of it’s about science. Don’t kid yourself. That’s the lie they tell to the boys, to the people. That’s the lie that keeps them from being called monsters.

LAWTON
Bullshit. Don’t pretend that you’ve been taken in. I know better.

HAMMOND
My father was a Captain too, you know.

LAWTON
I’ve heard.

HAMMOND
Captain Richard Hammond.

Pause.
HAMMOND
What was your father’s name?

LAWTON
Why would you want to know?

HAMMOND
I’ve got nothing else to think about in here.

LAWTON
Captain Lawton.

HAMMOND
What was his first name?

LAWTON
I-

HAMMOND
You don’t know his first name?

LAWTON
My mother called him Eagle, I know that. But no, I’m not sure of his first name.

HAMMOND
Why’d she call him eagle?

LAWTON
He had a tattoo of an eagle on his calf. He taught me how to sail.

Pause.

HAMMOND
Lawton really his last name?

LAWTON
It’s no secret I’m a bastard, Hammond. Have all the fun you’d like. I’m still in control of this ship.
HAMMOND

So it wasn’t his last name?

LAWTON

Leave it alone, will you?

HAMMOND

Fine.

BANKS snores a bit in his sleep, breaking the tension. HAMMOND and LAWTON both laugh. LAWTON catches himself.

LAWTON

(gruffly)

What’s he doing on this boat anyway? Can’t he shove money at it from afar?

HAMMOND

His father hates him.

LAWTON

That right?

HAMMOND

Thinks he’s weak.

LAWTON

He’s not far wrong.

A noise on the stairs. LAWTON stands. BILLINS enters, nervous.

HAMMOND shoves BANKS over and sits down. BANKS awakes and rises, groggy.

BILLINS

Uh-Captain.
Yes, Billins.

I’ve spoken with the men, and we’ve all agreed it’s time.

Right. Do you have the straws?

I’ve cut them.

Good.

What about Banks and Hammond? Do they draw as well?

Hammond will draw. Not Banks.

Why not?

Because he’s not on board with it. And he’s not a sailor. Besides, we can’t sail into England having killed the son of the ship’s owner. We’d all be shot on sight.

(a bit delirious)

What? What are they saying about me?

They’re saying you’re not going to die.

Oh. That’s nice.

And what about the native?
LAWTON
He can draw with the rest of us.

BILLINS
I don’t think it’s a good plan.

LAWTON
Why?

BILLINS
They’ve got disease. My father knew a whole slew of them. They’d infect anything they touched.

HAMMOND
Your father didn’t know anyone from the islands.

BILLINS
He knew plenty of dark people. You don’t know.

How?

LAWTON
In prison.

BILLINS

HAMMOND
Grand.

LAWTON
Fine. Don’t include Hupti.

BANKS
You can’t kill Hupti. He’s the whole reason we’re here.

LAWTON
We’re not going to kill him, Mr. Banks.

BANKS
(mumbles)
He’s the reason we’re here.
LAWTON

That all, Billins?

BILLINS

Should be it.

LAWTON

Then start at will.

BILLINS nods and exits.

HAMMOND

I wonder what you’ll write about this.

LAWTON

Quiet.

HAMMOND

Take my advice. Start writing about the rocks.

BANKS begins to moan, grips his stomach.

BANKS

I shouldn’t be here. I’m not supposed to be here. God, it hurts.

LAWTON

You’ve been without food not two days and already moaning.

HAMMOND

The pain will pass.

BANKS

It won’t. It won’t.

LAWTON

Piss it all. Every one of you rich blokes. Weak. All of you. No stomach.

BANKS rises slowly, stops moaning.

Anger has filled him.
BANKS
Don’t call me weak.

LAWTON
It’s what you are, eh? Don’t fret over it. Some of us just weren’t meant to be men.

BANKS
Don’t call me weak.

LAWTON
That right.

BANKS
You don’t get to call me weak. Not you. I came on this voyage to prove him wrong.

LAWTON
Well, you’re doing a hell of a job.

HAMMOND
Mr. Banks, it’s all right. We’re all going to be fine-

LAWTON
Don’t coddle him. He wants to be a man, right? You know Banks, the truth of it is, we all might starve to death before we find anything. You’re skinny, don’t have a lot of will, you’ll probably go quick.

HAMMOND
Stop, Lawton.

LAWTON
I’ve lived through a famine once before you know. And when men tough as Japp are dropping off, how in the hell do you think you’re going to last? Hell, you’re squeamish at the thought of eating another person.

BANKS
It’s barbaric.
LAWTON
It’s surviving. What’s more proper and British than surviving.

HUPTI enters, a perplexed look on his face.

HUPTI
I see Billins with straws. What does this mean?

LAWTON
It’s like a game Hupti. Only the person who loses has to die for the good of the rest of the crew.

HUPTI
Good?

BANKS
It’s evil, Hupti. It’s what your tribe does to enemies.

HUPTI looks at LAWTON.

LAWTON
That’s not it at all, mate. He doesn’t know piss about it. We’re all starving see? And this man, the one who dies, he’s going to be noble and kill himself so we won’t die.

HUPTI
Ah. You eat him?

LAWTON
Yes.

HUPTI
I see this before.

LAWTON
No, you haven’t seen it before.

HUPTI
So you do not eat him?
LAWTON
It’s civilized so it’s different.

HUPTI
The man, he says I do not draw.

LAWTON
No.

HUPTI
Is good, yes?

LAWTON
It means you’re not going to die.

BANKS
It means they think you’re a disease Hupti. You can’t trust them.

LAWTON
Quiet Banks. Hammond knock some sense into him.

HAMMOND
Seems like he’s talking sense to me.

BILLINS reenters, three straws left in his hands.

LAWTON
Ah. Billins. Has someone been selected?

BILLINS
(hesitant)
No. Not yet.

Pause.

LAWTON
No one’s gotten the short straw?

BILLINS shakes his head. HAMMOND hangs his.
LAWTON
Right, then. Well. May as well get it over with eh?

BILLINS nods.

BILLINS
Would you like to go first then?

Pause.

LAWTON
What do you mean?

BILLINS
Do you want to draw first? You are leading this boat after all. At least navigating it.

LAWTON
You want me to draw?

BILLINS
Or I could go first. Or Hammond.

HAMMOND
I don’t think “Captain” Lawton expected to draw at all.

BILLINS
What’s he mean?

LAWTON
You called me Captain.

BILLINS
Is what he’s saying true?

LAWTON
No. Course not.

HAMMOND is skeptical.

HAMMOND
Then draw, “Captain.”
LAWTON
I believe since Hammond’s so cheeky, he should have to draw first.

BILLINS nods and slowly walks to the cell.

HAMMOND reaches out and draws a straw. It is long. He breathes a visible sigh of relief.

BANKS
What’s it mean?

HAMMOND
It’s all right, Mr. Banks. It means no one in this cell is dying.

BILLINS strides towards LAWTON.

HUPTI begins to search through some of the crates quietly.

BILLINS
Captain.

LAWTON
It’s one of us then.

BILLINS
(nervous)
Would you like me to have a go or-

LAWTON
No. I’ll draw.

BILLINS holds out the straws. LAWTON reaches out and selects one.

BILLINS holds up his straw, which is long.
LAWTON holds the short straw. He stares at it, shocked and horrified.

HUPTI pulls his death mask out of the crate, blows the dust off of it.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE I

Lights up on LAWTON alone. He sits on the stool, his logbook in his lap, writing. The brig, cluttered worse than before remains dimly lit.

LAWTON’S gun is beside the stool.

LAWTON

It seems I will have to call this “the voyage” of Captain Lawton. One voyage. Not even a whole voyage really. A few days of a voyage. A few rings of the bell.

LAWTON picks up the gun with his free hand and examines it.

LAWTON

In case you Londoners don’t know who this works, I have been set alone in a room with a gun. I’m supposed to be dead before the morning bell sounds.

LAWTON puts the logbook aside, holds the gun up to his temple. He holds it there a beat, then puts it back down.

LAWTON picks up the logbook again.
LAWTON
Gunshot. Shoot myself in the head. The head is the least edible you see.

HUPTI enters in the shadows, wearing the DEATH MASK.

TRIBAL DRUMS are heard at any point when HUPTI wears the DEATH MASK. He moves as though possessed by the mask, no longer himself.

LAWTON hears him, grabs the gun slowly but does not turn.

LAWTON
Who is it? Can’t a man have a moment’s peace before he dies?

HUPTI steps further into the room. LAWTON turns with the gun, shocked by the what he sees.

LAWTON
Stay away. Stay away from me.

LAWTON squints into the darkness; he slowly lowers the gun.

LAWTON
Hupti?

HUPTI cocks his head.

LAWTON
What the hell’re you doing in that thing? Take it off.

HUPTI shakes the head.

LAWTON
You scared the piss out of me. Take the damn thing off.
HUPTI shakes his head. LAWTON raises the pistol again.

    LAWTON

TAKE IT OFF!

HUPTI stands motionless.

LAWTON runs forward and jerks the mask off of HUPTI’S face.

LAWTON throws the mask down and crushes it underfoot.

    LAWTON

OUT! OUT! GET OUT!

HUPTI stares at the mask a moment, then turns and exits.

    LAWTON

You’re not going to get me!

LAWTON returns to his notebook.

    LAWTON

(to himself)

It’s not going to get me.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE II

Lights up.

BILLINS sits on the stool, studying the charts, fiddling with the sextant, his brow furrowed. The remnants of the mask remain scattered on the floor.
BANKS lies in the brig, shivering, but awake muttering to himself at intervals. HAMMOND stands beside BANKS, watching BILLINS.

HAMMOND
Beginning to doubt that we’re headed in the right direction, Billins?

BILLINS stares at him, refuses to answer.

HAMMOND
Or are you just starving and going out of your head like Banks here?

BILLINS heaves a sigh, puts the sextant down, scratches his head.

HAMMOND
It’s been two days.

BILLINS
You want to talk about something Hammond? Out with it.

HAMMOND
Shouldn’t he have-

BILLINS
It’s a hard thing for a man to face. Wouldn’t expect you to understand.

HAMMOND
I drew a straw.

BILLINS
It’s different. You’ve got a book, haven’t you? He ain’t got nothing to leave behind of himself.

HAMMOND
You’ll be made Captain, I suppose.
BILLINS
I was already part Captain, just didn’t choose to call myself it.

HAMMOND
And if he doesn’t kill himself?

BILLINS
He’ll do it. We’ve given him til second bell tonight. Said I could shoot him myself if it’s not done by then. He’s a good man, honorable.

HAMMOND
Hmm.

BILLINS picks up the sextant, begins to fiddle with it again.

HAMMOND
You’re not holding it correctly.

BILLINS immediately puts the sextant down.

HAMMOND
You even know how to read that thing?

BILLINS
Course I do. Been on a boat for years.

HAMMOND
Then you’ll know how to take our sight with the horizon and the north star.

BILLINS
I don’t have to prove anything to you.

HAMMOND
I was wrong. Lawton’s not going to kill us all. You are.

BILLINS
Quiet.
HAMMOND
You have a wife, don’t you Billins?

BILLINS
What do you know about it?

HAMMOND
You probably want to get home to her don’t you? Probably don’t want her thinking that you’re just the rotten no good son of a prison inmate who mutinied and killed the whole crew.

BILLINS
She would never think that-

HAMMOND
She will if you kill all of us.

BILLINS
You’re not fooling me, Hammond. She’ll just think the ship was lost. No one would even be alive to tell her otherwise.

HAMMOND
I could get you back to her though. No one would have to die. All you have to do is let me out.

BILLINS
Quiet. It’s just sad.

BANKS moans.

BANKS
I’m not weak, boy. You can see me in the trees. I can swim through the trees.

HAMMOND kneels beside him, examines him.

HAMMOND
Banks?
BANKS
Starving with scurvy. Just like Japp.

HAMMOND
Banks.

BANKS does not respond to him, continues mumbling to himself.

BILLINS
Didn’t last a week did he?

HAMMOND stares at BILLINS.

LAWTON enters, disheveled, holding the gun. HAMMOND stands, comes to the bars.

HAMMOND
Banks is sick.

LAWTON looks at HAMMOND, does not respond.

LAWTON
Billins. The left sail has a tear in it. The men need you to assist.

BILLINS
I’ll head topside, then.

BILLINS heads towards the stairs.

LAWTON
And Billins?

BILLINS
Yes?

LAWTON
Don’t come down until it’s time.
BILLINS

Aye.

BILLINS hesitates.

BILLINS
It’s been an honor, Lawton.

LAWTON does not respond. BILLINS, unsure of what else to do, exits.

LAWTON strolls over to the stool, picks up his log.

HAMMOND
You’re going to shoot yourself in the brig? In front of me and Banks?

LAWTON moves to the island artifacts on the floor, picks up the half ruined death mask.

LAWTON
You ever wonder why they wear these things?

HAMMOND
What?

LAWTON
I thought about it for hours, just sitting with my notebook. Why spend so long carving this thing? And then wear it. It’s got no purpose.

LAWTON puts the piece of the mask up to his face, turns to HAMMOND.

LAWTON
And then I realized. It’s because they want to be Gods. They want to believe they could be a god. For one instant, while they are wearing these things, no one can see the human. They are someone else, and they can do all the things that the human could never do. They can be Death.
LAWTON puts the mask up to his face.

BANKS moans.

HAMMOND

He’s sick.

LAWTON

The problem is there’s the person who makes the mask. And then there’s the person who gets to wear it.

HAMMOND eyes LAWTON who seems unaware of the reality around him.

HAMMOND

Lawton.

LAWTON

And then there’s the poor chap who is being whipped in the forest cutting the wood to make the mask.

HAMMOND

Lawton you need to move Banks.

LAWTON

And who gets to decide who wears the mask?

HAMMOND

He needs air.

LAWTON

Fate. It’s just fate.

HAMMOND

Lawton!

HAMMOND bangs the floor with his foot. LAWTON snaps his head towards the cell.
HAMMOND
Banks. You need to move Banks.

LAWTON
You love it don’t you? You’re on top of the world.

LAWTON goes to the stool, kneels searching the ground. He stands holding the key. LAWTON dashes to the cell, gun in hand. He attempts to open the door, but the key won’t work. LAWTON shoots the door open, and then aims the pistol at HAMMOND.

LAWTON
Out.

BANKS
(groggy)
What’s happening?

LAWTON
Just cleaning house, Mr. Banks.

LAWTON points at HAMMOND.

Out.

HAMMOND
What are you-

LAWTON
OUT!

HAMMOND walks out slowly. LAWTON gestures with the gun to the floor.

LAWTON
On your knees.
HAMMOND

No.

LAWTON

(slowly)

Get on your knees.

HAMMOND bends down to his knees.
LAWTON aims the pistol at his head.

HAMMOND

What are you doing?

LAWTON

If Japp was still around, I wouldn’t be in this mess. You know that?

HAMMOND

Japp-

LAWTON

It should’ve been you.

HAMMOND

Don’t do this.

LAWTON

Why? Why not?

HAMMOND

You don’t want to be this man.

LAWTON

You don’t know what kind of man I want to be.

HAMMOND

Lawton.

LAWTON

You know more about this rock than you know about me.
HAMMOND

It’s not-

LAWTON

You know more about the rock than you do about any man on this boat.

HAMMOND

Lawton.

LAWTON

You think these men have even the slightest chance with Billins in charge?

HAMMOND

I-

LAWTON

Or were you planning to take back the Asphodel for yourself?

HAMMOND

is silent.

LAWTON

Piss it all. Get me out of the way and then take it back. Billins is easy enough to sway.

LAWTON presses the gun to HAMMOND’S temple.

LAWTON

I’m not going to let it happen. We’re finishing this here.

LAWTON cocks the pistol.

HAMMOND

Lawton = don’t!

LAWTON

Why?

HAMMOND

I’m your brother.
LAWTON can’t help but laugh.

LAWTON
Who the piss do you think I am?

HAMMOND
Lawton.

LAWTON
It’s a funny joke, mate, but it’s not going to save you.

HAMMOND
Your father’s name wasn’t Lawton.

LAWTON
That don’t make you my brother.

HAMMOND
His name was Hammond.

LAWTON
I got that far when you said you were my brother.

HAMMOND
Your mother’s name was Marguerite.

This gives LAWTON pause.

LAWTON
Every whore on the South end of Westminster is named Marguerite and they all lodge at St. Giles.

HAMMOND
But your mother was named Marguerite.

LAWTON doesn’t respond.

HAMMOND
And your father was a large man, mustache, tattoo on his calf—

LAWTON
I told you that part.
HAMMOND
Captain of a boat called the-

LAWTON
Quiet! I don’t want to hear what you’ve heard about me, memorized from some book-

HAMMOND
What book-

LAWTON
Quiet!

Pause.

HAMMOND
He told me about you. When he turned ill. He told me about a son he had with a prostitute. He said to look after you.

LAWTON is trying to put all of the pieces together in disbelief.

HAMMOND
How do you think you got on this boat? This is a comfortable position, James. Not everyone gets on a boat like this. Most of the time, someone like you, he’s sent straight into the lower deck on some naval ship.

LAWTON
I-

HAMMOND
But I called in a favor or two, got you assigned under me. Imagine my surprise when you turned on me-

LAWTON
I got put here because I know about the sea. Because my father was a -

HAMMOND
Captain.
LAWTON weakens his position in his confusion, the gun no longer trained on HAMMOND.

HUPTI enters, a small star shaped shell in his hands. He drops it on seeing LAWTON with the gun.

HAMMOND
Hupti, go and get Billins. Tell him Lawton here is trying to-

BANKS rises weakly at HUPTI’S name.

BANKS
Hupti-

LAWTON
Shut up!

LAWTON points the gun at HUPTI. HUPTI does not move, but does not flinch either.

LAWTON
Out.

BANKS slowly gets to his feet.

BANKS
You can’t kill him-

LAWTON
Stay where you are Banks and no one is dying.

BANKS stays still.

LAWTON
Hupti, take Banks up top to Mr. Billins. He’s ill.

HUPTI stares at LAWTON.
LAWTON
You’ll have to help him up. Go on.

HUPTI walks to BANKS and lifts him, supports his weight.

BANKS
(rambling)
Hupti. What are you doing down here? You shouldn’t be down here. They’re animals down here-

BANKS stops HUPTI, looks sick to his stomach.

BANKS
I can’t- I can’t.

LAWTON
Hupti, get him out of here.

HUPTI forces BANKS towards the stairs and heaves him up.

HAMMOND
Banks! Banks don’t leave me here with him-

But BANKS is gone.

LAWTON
You almost had me.

HAMMOND
Lawton-

LAWTON aims the pistol.

Gunshot.

Lights down.
ACT II, SCENE III

Lights up.

LAWTON sits writing in his logbook, blood on his shirt, spattered on his face.

Several bloody cloths lay on the floor beside him.

LAWTON
Banks is not well. His health has been going down over the past few days. We have moved him to the Captain’s quarters- I have stayed in the brig nights as a result. The lock on the door is broken so it’s not fit for prisoners anymore.

LAWTON pauses.

LAWTON
Mr. Hammond, our former Captain, has gone mad-

LAWTON scratches this out.

LAWTON
Began to lose his mind.

LAWTON scratches it out.

LAWTON
Began to show symptoms of losing his mind after the mutiny.

LAWTON searches his mind.

LAWTON
He began to make up relationships, talk about fictional people and times, and -

LAWTON thinks hard.
LAWTON
Even attacked Banks after he refused to cooperate with one of Hammond’s insane requests. He was even saying, at the end, that he was my brother, that my father was Captain Hammond.

LAWTON pauses, wipes his forehead. He is transfixed with the blood on his hand.

He snaps himself out of the trance and grabs a rag to wipe the blood off.

LAWTON
While we were moving Banks, Hammond tried to escape, attacking a crew member as he went. I was forced to shoot him in the head. We...

LAWTON pauses, stares at the bloody rag, dabs a bit at his mouth.

LAWTON
(writing)
Buried him at sea.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE IV

Lights up.

LAWTON sits asleep in his stool. Logbooks surround him. HUPTI sits in his mask watching LAWTON’S every move.

BILLINS enters. He waves HUPTI away. HUPTI moves to the broken cell. BILLINS gently shakes LAWTON.
BILLINS
Lawton.

LAWTON jerks awake.

LAWTON
Billins.

LAWTON straightens himself up.

News?

BILLSINs
No sighting.

None?

BILLINS shakes his head. LAWTON hangs his head.

LAWTON
We should be getting closer. We should’ve seen something by now.

BILLINS kicks at the logbooks.

BILLINS
What’s all this then?

LAWTON
I’ve been— reading Hammond’s logs, seeing if there’s anything useful in them about where we are.

BILLINS
And?

LAWTON
He knew piss about where we are.
HUPTI
You go wrong way.

LAWTON ignores him.

BILLINS
The men are asking questions too-

LAWTON
About what?

BILLINS
About Hammond, about why it was him who-

LAWTON
I told you. He tried to escape. What else was I to do, eh, Billins? What would you have done?

BILLINS
They’re just asking is all-

LAWTON
We should be seeing land.

BILLINS
The point I was trying to make is they’re asking to draw again.

LAWTON is silent.

BILLINS
They’re wondering if we even have to draw since you were chose the first time and-

LAWTON
Of course we have to draw. You start all over again, that’s the way it works. They should give me more time. A few more days and maybe-

HUPTI
YOU GO WRONG WAY!
LAWTON

Shut up!

LAWTON turns toward HUPTI. He is horrified by what he sees.

LAWTON

Where did you get that?

LAWTON circles HUPTI not wanting to approach him.

LAWTON

How many of those things do you have huh? Take it off.

BILLINS stares at LAWTON strangely.

BILLINS

What’s the matter with you? Just ignore him. He don’t talk sense.

HUPTI

I read stars, yes? We go wrong way.

LAWTON

Take it off!

BILLINS

You don’t know what you’re talking about. Just leave it alone—

LAWTON attempts to attack HUPTI. HUPTI dodges.

BILLINS takes hold of LAWTON.

BILLINS

Lawton!

LAWTON

Tell him to take it off!
BILLINS

What?

LAWTON

The mask! Tell him to take it off!

BILLINS pauses and looks at HUPTI. LAWTON paces breathing heavily.

BILLINS

Lawton, there’s no mask.

LAWTON

What?

BILLINS

He’s not wearing a mask.

LAWTON stares at BILLINS.

LAWTON

What the hell do you mean? I’m looking right at him.

BILLINS

What kind of a mask?

LAWTON

It’s right in front of your face, Billins.

BILLINS

And I’m telling you I don’t see it.

LAWTON

Is this a plan between the two of you then?

BILLINS

What?

LAWTON

You want to be Captain huh, is that it?
BILLINS
I-

LAWTON
That why you’re making plans with this savage?

BILLINS
I don’t make plans with savages.

HUPTI
I know the way.

LAWTON
Make him take it off.

BILLINS
He’s not wearing one! I don’t know what you think I am, but I
don’t do nothing with his kind.

LAWTON studies BILLINS, recomposes himself, though he still is offput by HUPTI.

LAWTON
I apologize Billins.

BILLINS is silent, watching him.

LAWTON
I- wasn’t fully awake yet. Dreams still fogging my brain up.

BILLINS
Comes from sleeping down here I suppose. You shouldn’t have let Banks have your room.

LAWTON
He’s ill.

BILLINS
And getting worse no less. Threw up blood, just like Japp.
LAWTON
What do you think it is?

BILLINS
I don’t know, but if it’s anything like Japp=

LAWTON
Then why’re you even bothering me about drawing?

BILLINS
Because we can’t with him. If he’s sick. Everyone’ll catch it.

HUPTI
He will die.

BILLINS
What do you know about it?

LAWTON
We get back to London without him, we don’t stand a chance.

BILLINS
(to HUPTI)
You better hope he lives, chap, else I’ll throw you overboard myself. Causing the whole damn boat to go under.

HUPTI
He is sick.

LAWTON
Do you know what he has?

BILLINS
What do you mean?

LAWTON
Quiet Billins. Do you know what he has?

HUPTI
I see before.
LAWTON
Can you do something for it?

HUPTI hesitates.

HUPTI
Yes.

LAWTON
Billins, take him up to where Banks is.

BILLINS
You’re not serious?

LAWTON
Take him.

BILLINS
You’re going to trust this bloke?

LAWTON
We have to.

BILLINS
No. We could let him die just like they all let Japp die.

LAWTON
He’s important Billins. We come back without him and Hammond, it’s going to look like we’re a boat full of pirates. We’ll be hanged-

BILLINS
Never seemed to worry you before.

LAWTON
I thought we’d all be alive before.

BILLINS
(to HUPTI)
Come on.
HUPTI
And- you go wrong way.

LAWTON
You cure Banks and maybe I’ll listen to you on the “wrong way.”

HUPTI exits.

LAWTON
Billins, we’ll have to draw again. Soon.

BILLINS
When?

LAWTON
Tomorrow.

BILLINS nods and exits.

LAWTON picks up HAMMOND’S logs and searches.

LAWTON
Rocks and nothing else.

He tosses HAMMOND’S log down.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE V

Lights up. LAWTON alone with his log.

LAWTON
We drew straws again-

LAWTON scratches it out.

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LAWTON
We will have to resort to extraordinary measures again soon—

LAWTON scratches it out.

LAWTON
Hupti has managed to cure Banks. It looks as though he will make a steady recovery. Still no land however and—

LAWTON scratches this out.

LAWTON
We are all—

LAWTON thinks hard then tosses the book down. He stands up.

Lights up on the cell. HUPTI stands within, the death mask on his face. LAWTON stares at him, but does not acknowledge his presence.

LAWTON snaps his gaze away from HUPTI and returns to the log. He rips out the page he has written and crumples it.

LAWTON stands and slowly approaches one of the rocks scattered on the floor. He picks it up and contemplates it.

LAWTON sits down. He begins to write, cradling the rock in his free hand.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE VI

Lights up.
LAWTON sits watching BILLINS cutting thin strips of wood.

HUPTI sits tinkering with the instruments and charts.

HUPTI
I know it. I know the way.

LAWTON
Billins.

BILLINS
What?

HUPTI
I know the way.

BILLINS
You don’t know anything.

LAWTON
Cut two less straws.

BILLINS
What do you mean?

HUPTI
The stars. I know. Turn the boat. These things—

He throws down the instruments.

HUPTI
No work. The stars. They tell you.

LAWTON
We don’t need to be in on this Billins. We’re the leaders. None of the rest of these men know how to lead a boat.

BILLINS
Wouldn’t be right.
LAWTON
But it is right. They can’t lead themselves. They’d be lost without us.

BILLINS
You haven’t led them anywhere. We went the way you wanted to go. We’re probably even more lost than before.

LAWTON
I just need more time Billins.

BILLINS
That right? And what’re you going to do with more time?

LAWTON
I’ll find the way. I promised you didn’t I?

BILLINS
I’m not even sure you’re right in the head.

LAWTON
What the hell do you mean?

BILLINS
Seeing things that ain’t there.

LAWTON
You doubting my leadership?

BILLINS doesn’t respond.

LAWTON
I could have you thrown in the brig. Be no trouble at all.

BILLINS
Brig’s busted.

LAWTON
I’d figure it out.
BILLINS studies LAWTON. LAWTON looks as though he would figure it out.

BILLINS

I’m not doubting you.

LAWTON

Good. No need to cut those two extra straws then.

BILLINS

No.

LAWTON

You’re saving yourself Billins. You’re saving this boat.

BILLINS

Aye.

BILLINS collects the straws together.

LAWTON

Let me know who’s been chosen.

BILLINS stands and exits, straws in hand.

LAWTON

You ever eat someone Hupti? Before this boat?

HUPTI

No.

LAWTON

On your island? Not a one?

HUPTI

I see it. And I use the bones. The bones are power.

LAWTON

The bones.
HUPTI
Yes. Burn the bones.

LAWTON
Which way do you think we should go Hupti?

HUPTI
Yes?

LAWTON
On the boat. Which way should the boat turn?

HUPTI
I show.

LAWTON
No. Show me down here. I can’t have them knowing I’m listening to you.

LAWTON picks up the charts, motions for HUPTI to take them.

LAWTON
Which way?

HUPTI shoves them away.

HUPTI
I no know these.

HUPTI furrows his brow.

HUPTI
Stars. Go to big star, long line-

HUPTI kneels on the floor. LAWTON kneels with him.

BILLINS enters quietly, the straws still in hand. HUPTI and LAWTON do not notice him.
HUPTI draws the shape of the stars on the floor with his finger.

HUPTI

Then like this.

He draws a square.

LAWTON

Right, right-

BILLINS

Taking lessons from him now?

LAWTON is shocked.

LAWTON

Hupti, leave us.

HUPTI is torn, not understanding what the problem is.

LAWTON

Go.

HUPTI exits.

LAWTON

You’re supposed to be having the men draw straws.

BILLINS

I came back to ask you-

LAWTON

I give you one simple task-

BILLINS

Since when do you give me tasks?

LAWTON

I’m the Captain of the ship.
BILLINS
So you been saying! Seems to me Hupti’s the real Captain of the ship.

LAWTON
I was hearing him out.

BILLINS
We were supposed to be over this boat together you and I.

LAWTON
We are.

BILLINS
The only job you really had was to get us home. I have the brains you said.

LAWTON
And I do.

BILLINS
What the hell you listening to a native for then?

LAWTON
He knows about the stars-

BILLINS
The stars- Britain’s got the best boats in the world. Floating on palm leaves they are.

LAWTON
I was hearing him out. I’m allowed to do that, aren’t I?

BILLINS
It may be time for you to step down.

LAWTON laughs.

BILLINS
You’re insane.
LAWTON
Thinking you can take this boat from me is what’s insane.

BILLINS heads to the stairs.

LAWTON
(panicked)
Where are you going?

BILLINS
To have the men draw straws.

LAWTON
You won’t be Captain, Billins.

BILLINS
stares him down.

BILLINS
I’ll be back when it’s finished.

LAWTON
pulls his gun out.

LAWTON
Stop.

BILLINS
turns.

BILLINS
What are you doing?

LAWTON
I don’t believe you.

BILLINS
I’m doing what you wanted-

LAWTON
No. I know just what you’re doing.

BILLINS
What-
LAWTON
Take me home to my wife. What a load of piss you are, Billins.

BILLINS
Jim.

LAWTON
What?

BILLINS
I’m not going to take the boat from you. I just want a say is all.

LAWTON
You’ve had your say.

BILLINS
I don’t think we should be listening to a savage.

LAWTON
Treason to say I would be.

A noise from above. BANKS limps down the stairs, covered in a thin blanket.

LAWTON
Banks- what’re you doing down here?

BILLINS
May I go?

LAWTON stares at him, nods. BILLINS exits.

LAWTON helps BANKS to the stool. BANKS sits, coughs heavily.

LAWTON
What’s got into you? Coming down here.
LAWTON goes towards the stairs.

BANKS (weakly)
Don’t.

LAWTON
Going to get a man to take you back up.

BANKS
I don’t-

BANKS grips his stomach.

LAWTON
Not going to last long down here.

BANKS
I have to- speak to you.

LAWTON waits.

BANKS
I would like to offer myself up.

LAWTON
Meaning?

BANKS
No need to draw straws this time around.

LAWTON
Christ.

BANKS
As penance. For what I’ve done.

LAWTON
Did Hupti see you?

BANKS
I’m beyond his help.
BANKS picks up an artifact from the floor.

LAWTON
You need your rest. Go back-

BANKS
Please. You can tell my father. Write it in your log. Call it my great act of kindness.

LAWTON
You’re not dying. You’re going home to England. Your father’s going to be so happy to see you, he’ll give me a fleet. I’ll be Admiral Lawton.

BANKS shakes his head wearily.

BANKS
This was supposed to be my boat you know, one day. He called it the Red Asphodel. Do you know what Asphodel is, Mr. Lawton?

LAWTON
Can’t say that I do.

BANKS
It’s the place in the underworld where people who weren’t good or evil go. People who lived their lives being neutral, people who couldn’t make a choice. He’d tell me, that’s where you belong Percy. Asphodel, where the weaklings go.

LAWTON
Mr. Banks.

BANKS
He’s right. I’m not strong enough to be bad. So let me do something good.

LAWTON
You’re going to make it.
BANKS
I’m not. You can say that forever, but I’m not.

LAWTON
I’m not going to let you die.

BANKS
Hammond died. You certainly didn’t stop that.

LAWTON
Yes, well..

BANKS
He liked you too you know. Thought you were a great lad. Had us take you on special for this mission.

This hits LAWTON.

LAWTON
What do you mean?

BANKS
(weakly)
He picked you special, insisted on you being here. My father usually handpicks the crew, but Hammond insisted on having you-

BILLINS enters. LAWTON’S attention snaps away from BANKS.

BANKS slumps over, curls into a ball at the foot of the stool.

BILLINS
It’s done.

LAWTON
Who?

BILLINS
Colby.
LAWTON hands a pistol to BILLINS.

LAWTON
Make sure it gets done.

BILLINS takes the gun, nods, and exits.

LAWTON
Mr. Banks, did he ever say anything about-

LAWTON notices BANKS has fallen, rushes to his side.

LAWTON
Mr. Banks? Banks! Banks!

BANKS does not move.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE VII

Lights up.

LAWTON sits alone with his log, BANKS still lying at his feet. LAWTON has a rock balanced on his knee. Straws lie on the ground beside the body.

HUPTI sits in the brig, locked inside. He wears the Death Mask.

LAWTON
I am unsure how long it’s been. Despite our new course, there has been no sight of land. Most of the men are dead or dying now. It will be a small party that returns to England. Small, but brave.
LAWTON takes the rock from his knee and studies it.

LAWTON
The moss is still flourishing on the rocks, however, still growing green. They do seem to love the sea air.

LAWTON puts the rock down beside BANKS.

LAWTON
You were right to gather all these things, Mr. Banks.

LAWTON waits for a response, hears it though there is not one and nods.

LAWTON
The native attempted to leave the ship in one of the smaller boats - we had to shut him in the brig.

BILLINS enters, interrupting LAWTON’S reverie.

BILLINS
What’re you doing in here?

LAWTON
Mr. Banks is resting. I am keeping him company.

BILLINS stares at BANKS, walks over to him, checks for life.

BILLINS
He’s dead.

LAWTON
He is not dead. He’s resting. Aren’t you, Banks?

LAWTON looks to the body.
BILLINS sits down, puts his head in his hands.

BILLINS
What’s he doing in the brig?

LAWTON
He tried to make a run for it, had to shut him up.

BILLINS
The damn thing doesn’t work. You shot the lock out.

BILLINS
I haven’t bothered to look.

LAWTON
Piss it all, Billins. It’s your shift. Very few people left on this ship I can depend on. Go and look.

BILLINS does not move.

LAWTON
I’ll go look myself then.

BILLINS
Let me save you the trouble. There’s no land. There’s no birds. There’s just the smell.

LAWTON
I’ll go and check for myself.
LAWTON turns and sees HUPTI in the mask. LAWTON is transfixed.

BILLINS
We’re not getting back to England.

LAWTON
Who gave him the mask?

BILLINS starts laughing.

LAWTON
It was you, wasn’t it? You’re all against me. I’ve got no one. I’ve always had no one really. A by-blown of a great Captain. A bastard raised by his whore mother. The only family I had I-

LAWTON looks at HUPTI.

LAWTON
(to HUPTI)
You know don’t you? You led us all astray. You led me astray.

HUPTI
I do not know-

LAWTON
Oh you know. You know.

BILLINS
We’re going to die out here. And no one will know.

LAWTON
You won’t get me.

LAWTON rushes to the cell and opens it with ease.

BILLINS
Lawton!
LAWTON

Get off my boat! Off!

LAWTON throws HUPTI from the cell.

LAWTON

You were right, Billins. We should’ve rid the ship of this
demon from the very start. Come on. We’ll throw him
overboard.

BILLINS

I haven’t the strength.

HUPTI

I help you. I tell you way to go.

LAWTON

You led us astray. You want to kill us all.

HUPTI

I want home.

LAWTON

Hell’s your home. And I intend to see you back there.

HUPTI

I tell by the stars. I show you the way.

BILLINS

You listened to him. It’s your fault.

LAWTON

He tricked me. Put me under a spell. He’s a demon.

HUPTI

No spell.

LAWTON

Same way you’re making me see things that aren’t there.

BILLINS

Just shoot him and be done with it.
LAWTON
You can’t shoot their kind. They don’t die. They’re savages. Kill their own—brothers.

LAWTON falters. HUPTI seizes his chance, breaks from LAWTON and runs from the brig. LAWTON chases him off.

BILLINS picks up LAWTON’S log, reads a moment.

Yelling and a splash from offstage. LAWTON reenters.

LAWTON
What’re you doing with that?

BILLINS
I see you’re writing about the rocks.

LAWTON runs and jerks the log from his hands.

LAWTON
You should be cutting straws.

BILLINS
I’m not drawing again, Lawton.

LAWTON
Captain.

BILLINS
There’s no Captains anymore. Not on this boat.

LAWTON
I am the Captain.

BILLINS
I should’ve put you down long ago. She’d be ashamed of me, I know she would. Ashamed.
LAWTON strides beside the body, picks up two straws, a short and a long. He puts them in his fist.

LAWTON
Did you have a hard time getting on this boat Billins?

BILLINS
Christ.

LAWTON
Did you? Was it difficult?

BILLINS
They told me I got it. I didn’t have to beg or nothing.

LAWTON
Did you ask for it though?

BILLINS
Yes, I asked for it.

(laughs)
I asked for it.

LAWTON
I didn’t ask. I wanted it when it came. But I didn’t ask. They gave it to me. I thought it was because they finally knew who my father was. But nobody knew. You didn’t know.

BILLINS
Christ. That’s right. Your father the great Captain. And my wife’s the queen.

LAWTON stands and holds the straws out to BILLINS.

LAWTON
Draw.

BILLINS
There’s a dead body right shit in front of you! If you want to do anything, do it to him.
LAWTON
Mr. Banks will not be drawing. His father’s going to give me a fleet.

BILLINS
I’ve seen what you do when you come up short.

LAWTON
Draw or you’ll be tried for treason.

BILLINS
Treason?

LAWTON
Draw.

BILLINS
We’re not going to make it back.

LAWTON thrusts his fist forward.

BILLINS
You think his father was ever going to give you a fleet. You’re nobody.

LAWTON
When I bring this ship in, everyone will know. They’ll all know who I am.

BILLINS
What ship? You won’t have saved anyone.

LAWTON
If you’re chosen, I’ll tell your wife you died bravely.

BILLINS
Don’t talk about my wife.

LAWTON
I’ll say you were a hero.
BILLINS
Say I died while trying to mutiny. Because the Captain was a shit.

LAWTON

Draw.

BILLINS sighs and reaches for a straw.

Lights down.

ACT II, SCENE VIII

Lights up on LAWTON alone in the cell writing in his notebook, visibly weak.

The stage is bare.

LAWTON
(rambling)
I saw a bird yesterday. In the brightest part of the sky. An English starling. The sun was shining on his coat. Dark blue. Reminded me of the sea. Have I told you the story of how the great Captain Lawton came to the sea?

LAWTON looks at his surroundings, takes the paper and pen, and stumbles out from the cell.

He kneels on the floor, drops the paper and pen, speaks to the ceiling.

LAWTON
My mother told me that if I worked hard, I could be a Captain like my father and conquer the great blue sea. She’s out there you know, wide as you please, and no one has conquered her. I knew I could if I just had the chance. Other men tried, but I could. Other men were handed the chance.
But those same men would tell stories about me for ages to come. James Lawton. He conquered the sea. He conquered the islands. He conquered it all. I would live forever. My only death would be on their lips.

HUPTI enters, holding the death mask in his hands.

LAWTON does not turn towards him.

LAWTON
I saw a bird yesterday. In the night sky. But it didn’t see me.

HUPTI stands behind LAWTON.

LAWTON
You’ll have to tell them. Tell them I meant to conquer the sea.

HUPTI places the death mask over LAWTON’S face. LAWTON cannot fight it, stops breathing.

Lights down.

END