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THIRST

BY: EUGENE O'NEILL

CATEGORY: LITERATURE – THEATER AND PLAYS

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EUGENE O'NEILL

CHARACTERS— A GENTLEMAN
A DANCER
A WEST INDIAN MULATTO SAILOR

SCENE—*A steamer's life raft rising and falling slowly on the long ground-swell of a glassy tropic sea. The sky above is pitilessly clear, of a steel blue color merging into black shadow on the horizon's rim. The sun glares down from straight overhead like a great angry eye of God. The heat is terrific. Writhing, fantastic heat-waves rise from the white deck of the raft. Here and there on the still surface of the sea the fins of sharks may be seen slowly cutting the surface of the water in lazy circles.*

Two men and a woman are on the raft. Seated at one end is a West Indian mulatto dressed in the blue uniform of a sailor. Across his jersey may be seen the words "Union Mail Line" in red letters. He has on rough sailor shoes. His head is bare. When he speaks it is in drawling sing-song tones as if he were troubled by some strange impediment of speech. He croons a monotonous negro song to himself as his round eyes follow the shark fins in their everlasting circles.

At the other end of the raft sits a middle-aged white man in what wads once an evening dress; but sun and salt water have reduced it to the mere caricature of such a garment. His white shirt is stained and rumpled; his collar a formless pulp about his neck; his black tie a withered ribbon. Evidently he had been a firstclass passenger. Just now he cuts a sorry and pitiful figure as he sits staring stupidly at the water with unseeing eyes. His scanty black hair is disheveled, revealing a bald spot burnt crimson by the sun. A mustache droops over his lips, and some of the dye has run off it making a black line down the side of his lean face, blistered with sunburn, haggard with hunger and thirst. From time to time he licks his swollen lips with his blackened tongue.

Between the two men a young woman lies with arms outstretched, face downward on the raft. She is even a more bizarre figure than the man in evening clothes, for she is dressed in a complete short-skirted dancer's costume of black velvet covered with spangles. Her long blond hair streams down over her bare, unprotected shoulders. Her silk stockings are baggy and wrinkled and her dancing shoes swollen and misshapen. When she lifts her

head a diamond necklace can be seen glittering coldly on the protruding collar-bones of her emaciated shoulders. Continuous weeping has made a blurred smudge of her rouge and the black make-up of her eyes but one can still see that she must have been very beautiful before hunger and thirst had transformed her into a mocking spectre of a dancer. She is sobbing endlessly, hopelessly.

In the eyes of all three the light of a dawning madness is shining.

THE DANCER—*(raising herself to a sitting posture and turning piteously to the Gentleman)* My God! My God! This silence is driving me mad! Why do you not speak to me? Is there no ship in sight yet?

THE GENTLEMAN—*(dully)* No. I do not think so. At least I cannot see any. *(He tries to rise to his feet but finds himself too weak and sits down again with a groan.)* If I could only stand up I could tell better. I cannot see far from this position. I am so near the water. And then my eyes are like two balls of fire. They burn and burn until they feel as if they were boring into my brain.

THE DANCER—I know! I know! Everywhere I look I see great crimson spots. It is as if the sky were raining drops of blood. Do you see them too?

THE GENTLEMAN—Yesterday I did—or some day—I no longer remember days. But today everything is red. The very sea itself seems changed to blood. *(He licks his swollen, cracked lips—then laughs—the shrill cackle of madness.)* Perhaps it is the blood of all those who were drowned that night rising to the surface.

THE DANCER—Do not say such things. You are horrible. I do not care to listen to you. *(She turns away from him with a shudder.)*

THE GENTLEMAN—*(sulkily)* Very well. I will not speak. *(He covers his face with his hands.)* God! God! How my eyes ache! How my throat burns! *(He sobs heavily—there is a pause—suddenly he turns to the Dancer angrily.)* Why did you ask me to speak if you do not care to listen to me?

THE DANCER—I did not ask you to speak of blood. I did not ask you to mention that night.

THE GENTLEMAN—Well, I will say no more then. You may talk to him if you wish. *(He points to the Sailor with a sneer. The negro does not hear. He is crooning to himself and watching the sharks. There is a long pause. The raft slowly rises and falls on the long swells. The sun blazes down.)*

THE DANCER—*(almost shrieking)* Oh, this silence! I cannot bear this silence. Talk to me about anything you please but, for God sake, talk to me! I must not think! I must not think!

THE GENTLEMAN—*(remorsefully)* Your pardon, dear lady! I am afraid I spoke harshly. I am not myself. I think I am a little out of my head. There is so much sun and so much sea. Everything gets vague at times. I am very weak. We have not eaten in so long—we have not even had a drink of water in so long. *(then in tones of great anguish)* Oh, if we only had some water!

THE DANCER—*(flinging herself on the raft and beating it with clenched fists)* Please do not speak of water!

THE SAILOR—*(stopping his song abruptly and turning quickly around)* Water? Who's got water? *(His swollen tongue shows between his dry lips.)*

THE GENTLEMAN—(*turning to the Sailor*) You know no one here has any water. You stole the last drop we had yourself (*irritably*) Why do you ask such questions? (*The Sailor turns his back again and watches the shark fins. He does not answer nor does he sing any longer. There is a silence, profound and breathless.*)

THE DANCER—(*creeping over to the Gentleman and seizing his arm*) Do you not notice how deep the silence is? The world seems emptier than ever. I am afraid. Tell me why it is.

THE GENTLEMAN—I, too, notice it. But I do not know why it is.

THE DANCER—Ah! I know now. He is silent. Do you not remember he was singing? A queer monotonous song it was—more of a dirge than a song. I have heard many songs in many languages in the places I have played, but never a song like that before. Why did he stop, do you think? Maybe something frightened him.

THE GENTLEMAN—I do not know. But I will ask him. (*to the Sailor*) Why have you stopped singing? (*The Sailor looks at him with a strange expression in his eyes. He does not answer but turns to the circling fins again and takes up his song, dully, droningly, as if from some place he had left off* *The Dancer and the Gentleman listen in attitudes of strained attention for a long time.*)

THE DANCER—(*laughing hysterically*) What a song! There is no tune to it and I can understand no words. I wonder what it means.

THE GENTLEMAN—Who knows? It is doubtless some folk song of his people which he is singing.

THE DANCER—But I wish to find out. Sailor! Will you tell me what it means—that song you are singing? (*The negro stares at her uneasily for a moment.*)

THE SAILOR—(*drawlingly*) It is a song of my people.

THE DANCER—Yes. But what do the words mean?

THE SAILOR—(*pointing to the shark fins*) I am singing to them. It is a charm. I have been told it is very strong. If I sing long enough they will not eat us.

THE DANCER—(*terrified*) Eat us? What will eat us?

THE GENTLEMAN—(*pointing to the moving fins in the still water*) He means the sharks. Those pointed black things you see moving through the water are their fins. Have you not noticed them before?

THE DANCER—Yes, yes. I have seen them. But I did not know they were sharks. (*sobbing*) Oh it is horrible, all this!

THE GENTLEMAN—(*to the negro, harshly*) Why do you tell her such things? Do you not know you will frighten her?

THE SAILOR—(*dully*) She asked me what I was singing.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*trying to comfort the Dancer who is still sobbing*) At least tell her the truth about the sharks. That is all a children's tale about them eating people. (*raising his voice*) You know they never eat anyone. And I know it. (*The negro looks at him and his lips contract grotesquely. Perhaps he is trying to smile.*)

THE DANCER—(*raising her head and drying her eyes*) You are sure of what you say?

THE GENTLEMAN—(*confused by the negro's stare*) Of course I am sure. Everyone knows that sharks are afraid to touch a person. They are all cowards. (*to the negro*) You were just trying to frighten the lady, were you not? (*The negro turns away from them and*

stares at the sea. He commences to sing again.)

THE DANCER—I no longer like his song. It makes me dream of horrible things. Tell him to stop.

THE GENTLEMAN—Bah! You are nervous. Anything is better than dead silence.

THE DANCER—Yes. Anything is better than silence—even a song like that.

THE GENTLEMAN—He is strange—that sailor. I do not know what to think of him.

THE DANCER—It is a strange song he sings.

THE GENTLEMAN—He does not seem to want to speak to us.

THE DANCER—I have noticed that, too. When I asked him about the song he did not want to answer at all.

THE GENTLEMAN—Yet he speaks good English. It cannot be that he does not understand us.

THE DANCER—When he does speak it is as if he had some impediment in his throat.

THE GENTLEMAN—Perhaps he has. If so, he is much to be pitied and we are wrong to speak of him so.

THE DANCER—I do not pity him. I am afraid of him.

THE GENTLEMAN—That is foolish. It is the sun which beats down so fiercely which makes you have such thoughts. I, also, have been afraid of him at times, but I know now that I had been gazing at the sea too long and listening to the great silence. Such things distort your brain.

THE DANCER—Then you no longer fear him?

THE GENTLEMAN—I no longer fear him now that I am quite sane. It clears my brain to talk to you. We must talk to each other all the time.

THE DANCER—Yes, we must talk to each other. I do not dream when I talk to you.

THE GENTLEMAN—I think at one time I was going mad. I dreamed he had a knife in his hand and looked at me. But it was all madness; I can see that now. He is only a poor negro sailor—our companion in misfortune. God knows we are all in the same pitiful plight. We should not grow suspicious of one another.

THE DANCER—All the same, I am afraid of him. There is something in his eyes when he looks at me, which makes me tremble.

THE GENTLEMAN—There is nothing I tell you. It is all your imagination. *(There is a long pause.)*

THE DANCER—Good God! Is there no ship in sight yet?

THE GENTLEMAN—*(attempting to rise but falling back weakly)* I can see none. And I cannot stand to get a wider view.

THE DANCER—*(pointing to the negro)* Ask him. He is stronger than we are. He may be able to see one.

THE GENTLEMAN—Sailor! *(The negro ceases his chant and turns to him with expressionless eyes.)* You are stronger than we are and can see farther. Stand up and tell me if there is any ship in sight.

THE SAILOR—*(rising slowly to his feet and looking at all points of the horizon)* No. There is none. *(He sits down again and croons his dreary melody.)*

THE DANCER—*(weeping hopelessly)* My God, this is horrible. To wait and wait for something that never comes.

THE GENTLEMAN—It is indeed horrible. But it is to be expected.

THE DANCER—Why do you say it is to be expected? Have you no hopes, then, of being rescued?

THE GENTLEMAN—(*wearily*) I have hoped for many things in my life. Always I have hoped in vain. We are far out of the beaten track of steamers. I know little of navigation, yet I heard those on board say that we were following a course but little used. Why we did so, I do not know. I suppose the Captain wished to make a quicker passage. He alone knows what was in his mind and he will probably never tell.

THE DANCER—No, he will never tell.

THE GENTLEMAN—Why do you speak so decidedly? He might have been among those who escaped in the boats.

THE DANCER—He did not escape. He is dead!

THE GENTLEMAN—Dead?

THE DANCER—Yes. He was on the bridge. I can remember seeing his face as he stood in under a lamp. It was pale and drawn like the face of a dead man. His eyes, too, seemed dead. He shouted some orders in a thin trembling voice. No one paid any attention to him. And then he shot himself. I saw the flash, and heard the report above all the screams of the drowning. Some one grasped me by the arm and I heard a hoarse voice shouting in my ear. Then I fainted.

THE GENTLEMAN—Poor Captain! It is evident, then, that he felt himself guilty—since he killed himself. It must be terrible to hear the screams of the dying and know oneself to blame. I do not wonder that he killed himself.

THE DANCER—He was so kind and good-natured—the Captain. It was only that afternoon on the promenade deck that he stopped beside my chair. “I hear you are to entertain us this evening” he said. “That will be delightful, and it is very kind of you. I had promised myself the pleasure of seeing you in New York, but you have forestalled me.” (*after a pause*) How handsome and broad-shouldered he was—the Captain.

THE GENTLEMAN—I would have liked to have seen his soul.

THE DANCER—You would have found it no better and no worse than the souls of other men. If he was guilty he has paid with his life.

THE GENTLEMAN—No. He has avoided payment by taking his life. The dead do not pay.

THE DANCER—And the dead cannot answer when we speak evil of them. All we can know is that he is dead. Let us talk of other things. (*There is a pause.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*fumbles in the inside pocket of his dress coat and pulls out a black object that looks like a large card case. He opens it and stares at it with perplexed eyes. Then, giving a hollow laugh, he holds it over for the Dancer to see.*) Oh, the damned irony of it!

THE DANCER—What is it? I cannot read very well. My eyes ache so.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*still laughing mockingly*) Bend closer! Bend closer! It is worth while understanding—the joke that has been played on me.

THE DANCER—(*reading slowly, her face almost touching the case*) United States Club of Buenos Aires! I do not understand what the joke is.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*impatiently snatching the case from her hand*) I will explain the joke to you then. Listen! M-e-n-u—menu. That is the joke. This is a souvenir menu of a

banquet given in my honor by this Club. (*reading*) “Martini cocktails, soup, sherry, fish, Burgundy, chicken, champagne”—and here we are dying for a crust of bread, for a drink of water! (*His mad laughter suddenly ceases and in a frenzy of rage he shakes his fist at the sky and screams*) God! God! What a joke to play on us! (*After this outburst he sinks back dejectedly, his trembling hand still clutching the menu.*)

THE DANCER—(*sobbing*) This is too horrible. What have we done that we should suffer so? It is as if one misfortune after another happened to make our agony more terrible. Throw that thing away! The very sight of it is a mockery. (*The Gentleman throws the menu into the sea where it floats, a black spot on the glassy water.*) How do you happen to have that thing with you? It is ghastly for you to torment me by reading it.

THE GENTLEMAN—I am sorry to have hurt you. The jest was so grotesque I could not keep it to myself. You ask how I happen to have it with me? I will tell you. It gives the joke an even bitterer flavor. You remember when the crash came? We were all in the salon. You were singing—a Cockney song I think?

THE DANCER—Yes. It is one I first sang at the Palace in London.

THE GENTLEMAN—It was in the salon. You were singing. You were very beautiful. I remember a woman on my right saying: “How pretty she is! I wonder if she is married?” Strange how some idiotic remark like that will stick in one’s brain when all else is vague and confused. A tragedy happens—we are in the midst of it—and one of our clearest remembrances afterwards is a remark that might have been overheard in any subway train.

THE DANCER—It is so with me. There was a fat, bald-headed, little man. It was on deck after the crash. Everywhere they were fighting to get into the boats. This poor little man stood by himself. His moon face was convulsed with rage. He kept repeating in loud angry tones: “I shall be late. I must cable! I can never make it!” He was still bewailing his broken appointment when a rush of the crowd swept him off his feet and into the sea. I can see him now. He is the only person besides the Captain I remember clearly.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*continuing his story in a dead voice*) You were very beautiful. I was looking at you and wondering what kind of a woman you were. You know I had never met you personally—only seen you in my walks around the deck. Then came the crash—that horrible dull crash. We were all thrown forward on the floor of the salon; then screams, oaths, fainting women, the hollow boom of a bulkhead giving way. I vaguely remember rushing to my stateroom and picking up my wallet. It must have been that menu that I took instead. Then I was on deck fighting in the midst of the crowd. Somehow I got into a boat—but it was overloaded and was swamped immediately. I swam to another boat. They beat me off with the oars. That boat too was swamped a moment later. And then the gurgling, choking cries of the drowning! Something huge rushed by me in the water leaving a gleaming trail of phosphorescence. A woman near me with a life belt around her gave a cry of agony and disappeared—then I realized—sharks! I became frenzied with terror. I swam. I beat the water with my hands. The ship had gone down. I swam and swam with but one idea—to put all that horror behind me. I saw something white on the water before me. I clutched it—climbed on it. It was this raft. You and he were on it. I fainted. The whole thing is a horrible nightmare in my brain—but I remember clearly that idiotic remark of the woman in the salon. What pitiful creatures we are!

THE DANCER—When the crash came I also rushed to my stateroom. I took this, (*pointing to the diamond necklace*) clasped it round my neck and ran on deck; the rest I have told you.

THE GENTLEMAN—Do you not remember how you came on this raft? It is strange that you and he should be on a raft alone when so many died for lack of a place. Were there ever any others on the raft with you?

THE DANCER—No, I am sure there were not. Everything in my memory is blurred. But I feel sure we were always the only ones—until you came. I was afraid of you—your face was livid with fear. You were moaning to yourself.

THE GENTLEMAN—It was the sharks. Until they came I kept a half-control over myself. But when I saw them even my soul quivered with terror.

THE DANCER—(*horror-stricken, looking at the circling fins*) Sharks! Why they are all around us now. (*frenziedly*) You lied to me. You said they would not touch us. Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid! (*She covers her face with her hands.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—If I lied to you it was because I wished to spare you. Be brave! We are safe from them as long as we stay on the raft. These things must be faced. (*then in tones of utter despondency*) Besides, what does it matter?—sharks or no sharks—the end is the same.

THE DANCER—(*taking her hands away from her eyes and looking dully at the water*) You are right. What does it matter?

THE GENTLEMAN—God! How still the sea is! How still the sky is! One would say the world was dead. I think the accursed humming of that nigger only makes one feel the silence more keenly. There is nothing—but the sharks—that seems to live.

THE DANCER—How the sun burns into me! (*piteously*) My poor skin that I was once so proud of!

THE GENTLEMAN—(*rousing himself with an effort*) Come! Let us not think about it. It is madness to think about it so. How do you account for your being on the raft alone with this nigger? You have not yet told me.

THE DANCER—How can I tell? The last thing I remember was that harsh voice in my ear shouting something—what, I cannot recollect.

THE GENTLEMAN—There was nothing else?

THE DANCER—Nothing. (*pause*) Stop! Yes, there was something I had forgotten. I think that someone kissed me. Yes, I am sure that someone kissed me. But no, I am not sure. It may have all been a dream I dreamed. I have had so many dreams during these awful days and nights—so many mad, mad dreams. (*Her eyes begin to glaze, her lips to twitch. She murmurs to herself*) Mad, mad dreams.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*reaching over and shaking her by the shoulder*) Come! You said someone kissed you. You must be mistaken. I surely did not, and it could hardly have been that sailor.

THE DANCER—Yet I am sure someone did. It was not since I have been on this raft. It was on the deck of the ship just as I was fainting.

THE GENTLEMAN—Who could it have been, do you think?

THE DANCER—I hardly dare to say what I think. I might be wrong. You remember the Second Officer—the young Englishman with the great dark eyes who was so tall and handsome? All the women loved him. I, too, I loved him—a little bit. He loved me—very much—so he said. Yes, I know he loved me very much. I think it was he who kissed me. I am almost sure it was he.

THE GENTLEMAN—Yes, he must have been the one. That would explain it all. He must

have sent away the raft when only you and this sailor were on it. He probably did not let the others know of the existence of this raft. Indeed he must have loved you to disregard his duty so. I will ask the sailor about it. Maybe he can clear away our doubts. (*to the negro*) Sailor! (*The negro stops singing and looks at them with wide, bloodshot eyes.*) Did the Second Officer order you to take this lady away from the ship?

THE SAILOR—(*sullenly*) I do not know.

THE GENTLEMAN—Did he tell you to take no one else with you but this lady—and perhaps himself afterwards?

THE SAILOR—(*angrily*) I do not know. (*He turns away again and commences to sing.*)

THE DANCER—Do not speak to him any more. He is angry at something. He will not answer.

THE GENTLEMAN—He is going mad I think. However it seems certain that it was the Second Officer who kissed you and saved your life.

THE DANCER—He was kind and brave to me. He meant well. Yet I wish now he had let me die. I would have been way down in the cold green water. I would have been sleeping, coldly sleeping. While now my brain is scorched with sun-fire and dream-fire. And I am going mad. We are all going mad. Your eyes shine with a wild flame at times—and that Sailor's are horrible with strangeness—and mine see great drops of blood that dance upon the sea. Yes we are all mad. (*pause*) God! Oh God! Must this be the end of all? I was coming home, home after years of struggling, home to success and fame and money. And I must die out here on a raft like a mad dog. (*She weeps despairingly.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—Be still! You must not despair so. I, too, might whine a prayer of protest: "Oh God, God! After twenty years of incessant grind, day after weary day, I started on my first vacation. I was going home. And here I sit dying by slow degrees, desolate and forsaken. Is this the meaning of all my years of labor? Is this the end, oh God?" So I might wail with equal justice. But the blind sky will not answer your appeals or mine. Nor will the cruel sea grow merciful for any prayer of ours.

THE DANCER—Have you no hope that one of the ship's boats may have reached land and reported the disaster. They would surely send steamers out to search for the other survivors.

THE GENTLEMAN—We have drifted far, very far, in these long weary days. I am afraid no steamer would find us.

THE DANCER—We are lost then! (*She falls face downward on the raft. A great sob shakes her thin bare shoulders.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—I have not given up hope. These seas, I have heard, are full of coral islands and we surely ought to drift near one of them soon. It was probably an uncharted coral reef that our steamer hit. I heard someone say "derelict" but I saw no sign of one in the water. With us it is only a question of whether we can hold out until we sight land. (*His voice quivers; he licks his blackened lips. His eyes have grown very mad and he is shaking spasmodically from head to foot.*) Water would save us—just a little water—even a few drops would be enough. (*intensely*) God, if we only had a little water!

THE DANCER—Perhaps there will be water on the island. Look; look hard! An island or a ship may have come in sight while we were talking. (*There is a pause. Suddenly she rises to her knees and pointing straight in front of her shouts*) See! An island!

THE GENTLEMAN—(*shading his eyes with a trembling hand and peering wildly around*

him) I see nothing—nothing but a red sea and a red sky.

THE DANCER—(*still looking at some point far out over the water, speaks in disappointed tones*) It is gone. Yet I am quite sure I saw one. It was right out there quite near to us. It was all green and clean looking with a clear stream that ran into the sea. I could hear the water running over the stones. You do not believe me. You, Sailor, you must have seen it too, did you not? (*The negro does not answer.*) I cannot see it any more. Yet I must see it. I will see it!

THE GENTLEMAN—(*shaking her by the shoulder*) What you say is nonsense. There is no island there I tell you. There is nothing but sun and sky and sea around us. There are no green trees. There is no water. (*The Sailor has stopped singing and turns and looks at them.*)

THE DANCER—(*angrily*) Do you mean to tell me I lie? Can I not believe my own eyes, then? I tell you I saw it— cool clear water. I heard it bubbling over the stones. But now I hear nothing, nothing at all. (*turning suddenly to the Sailor*) Why have you stopped singing? Is not everything awful enough already that you should make it worse?

THE SAILOR—(*sticking out his swollen tongue and pointing to it with a long, brown finger*) Water! I want water! Give me some water and I will sing.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*furiously*) We have no water, fool! It is your fault we have none. Why did you drink all that was left in the cask when you thought we were asleep? I would not give you any even if we had some. You deserve to suffer, you pig! If anyone of the three of us has any water it is you who have hidden some out of what you stole. (*with a laugh of mad cunning*) But you will get no chance to drink it, I promise you that. I am watching you. (*The negro sullenly turns away from them.*)

THE DANCER—(*taking hold of the Gentleman's arm and almost hissing into his ear. She is terribly excited and he is still chuckling crazily to himself*) Do you really think he has some?

THE GENTLEMAN—(*chuckling*) He may have. He may have.

THE DANCER—Why do you say that?

THE GENTLEMAN—He has been acting strangely. He has looked as if he wished to hide something. I was wondering what it could be. Then suddenly I thought to myself: "What if it should be some of the water?" Then I knew I had found him out. I will not let him get the best of me. I will watch him. He will not drink while I am watching him. I will watch him as long as I can see.

THE DANCER—What could he have put the water in? He has nothing that I can discover. (*She is rapidly falling in with this mad fixed idea of his.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—Who knows? He may have a flask hidden in under his jersey. But he has something, that I am sure of. Why is it he is so much stronger than we are? He can stand up without effort and we can scarcely move. Why is that, I ask you?

THE DANCER—It is true. He stood up and looked for a ship as easily as if he had never known hunger and thirst. You are right. He must have something hidden—food or water.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*with mad eagerness to prove his fixed idea*) No, he has no food. There has never been any food. But there has been water. There was a whole small cask full of it on the raft when I came. On the second or third night, I do not remember which, I awoke and saw him draining the cask. When I reached it, it was empty. (*furiously shaking his fist at the negro's back*) Oh you pig! You rotten pig! (*The negro does not seem to*

hear.)

THE DANCER—That water would have saved our lives. He is no better than a murderer.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*with insane shrewdness*) Listen. I think he must have poured some of the water into his flask. There was quite a little there. He could not have drunk it all. Oh, he is a cunning one! That song of his—it was only a blind. He drinks when we are not looking. But he will drink no more for I will watch him. I will watch him!

THE DANCER—You will watch him? And what good will that do either of us? Will we die any the less soon for your watching? No! Let us get the water away from him in some way. That is the only thing to do.

THE GENTLEMAN—He will not give it to us.

THE DANCER—We will steal it while he sleeps.

THE GENTLEMAN—I do not think he sleeps. I have never seen him sleep. Besides we should wake him.

THE DANCER—(*violently*) We will kill him then. He deserves to be killed.

THE GENTLEMAN—He is stronger than we are—and he has a knife. No, we cannot do that. I would willingly kill him. As you say, he deserves it. But I cannot even stand. I have no strength left. I have no weapons. He would laugh at me.

THE DANCER—There must be some way. You would think even the most heartless savage would share at a time like this. We must get that water. it is horrible to be dying of thirst with water so near. Think! Think! Is there no way?

THE GENTLEMAN—You might buy it from him with that necklace of yours. I have heard his people are very fond of such things.

THE DANCER—This necklace? It is worth a thousand pounds. An English duke gave it to me. I will not part with it. Do you think I am a fool?

THE GENTLEMAN—Think of a drink of water! (*They both lick their dry lips feverishly.*) If we do not drink soon we will die. (*laughing harshly*) You will take your necklace to the sharks with you? Very well then, I will say no more. For my part, I would sell my soul for a drop of water.

THE DANCER—(*Shuddering with horror she glances instinctively at the moving shark fins.*) You are horrible. I had almost forgotten those monsters. It is not kind of you to be always bringing them back to my memory.

THE GENTLEMAN—It is well that you should not forget them. You will value your Duke's present less when you look at them. (*impatiently pounding the deck with one boney hand*) Come, come, we shall both die of thirst while you are dreaming. Offer it to him! Offer it to him!

THE DANCER—(*She takes off the necklace and, musing vacantly, turns it over in her hands watching it sparkle in the sun.*) It is beautiful, is it not? I hate to part with it. He was very much in love with me—the old Duke. I think he would even have married me in the end. I did not like him. He was old, very old. Something came up—I forget what. I never saw him again. This is the only gift of his that I have left.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*in a frenzy of impatience—the vision of the water clear before his glaring eyes*) Damn it, why are you chattering so? Think of the water he has got. Offer it to him! Offer it to him!

THE DANCER—Yes, yes, my throat is burning up; my eyes are on fire. I must have the water. (*She drags herself on hands and knees across the raft to where the negro is sitting.*

He does not notice her approach. She reaches out a trembling hand and touches him on the back. He turns slowly and looks at her, his round, animal eyes dull and lusterless. She holds the necklace out in her right hand before his face and speaks hurriedly in a husky voice.) Look, you have stolen our water. You deserve to be killed. We will forget all that. Look at this necklace. It was given to me by an English Duke—a nobleman. It is worth a thousand pounds—five thousand dollars. It will provide for you for the rest of your life. You need not be a sailor any more. You need never work at all any more. Do you understand what that means? *(The negro does not answer. The Dancer hurries on however, her words pouring out in a sing-song jumble.)* That water that you stole—well, I will give you this necklace—they are all real diamonds, you know—five thousand dollars—for that water. You need not give me all of it. I am not unreasonable. You may keep some for yourself. I would not have you die. I want just enough for myself and my friend—to keep us alive until we reach some island. My lips are cracked with heat! My head is bursting! Here, take the necklace. It is yours. *(She tries to force it into his hand. He pushes her hand away and the necklace falls to the deck of the raft where it lies glittering among the heat waves.)*

THE DANCER—*(her voice raised stridently)* Give me the water! I have given you the necklace. Give me the water!

THE GENTLEMAN—*(who has been watching her with anxious eyes, also cries)* Yes. Give her the water!

THE SAILOR—*(his voice drawling and without expression)* I have no water.

THE DANCER—Oh, you are cruel! Why do you lie? You see me suffering so and yet you lie to me. I have given you the necklace. It is worth five thousand dollars, do you understand? Surely for five thousand dollars you will give me a drink of water!

THE SAILOR—I have no water, I tell you. *(He turns his back to her. She crawls over to the Gentleman and lies beside him, sobbing brokenly.)*

THE GENTLEMAN—*(his face convulsed with rage, shaking both fists in the air)* The pig! The pig! The black dog!

THE DANCER—*(sitting up and wiping her eyes)* Well, you have heard him. He will not give it to us. Maybe he only has a little and is afraid to share it. What shall we do now? What can we do?

THE GENTLEMAN—*(despondently)* Nothing. He is stronger than we are. There is no wind. We will never reach an island. We can die, that is all. *(He sinks back and buries his head in his hands. A great dry sob shakes his shoulders.)*

THE DANCER—*(her eyes flaming with a sudden resolution)* Ah, who is the coward now? You have given up hope, it seems. Well, I have not. I have still one chance. It has never failed me yet.

THE GENTLEMAN—*(raising his head and looking at her in amazement)* You are going to offer him more money?

THE DANCER—*(With a strange smile)* No. Not that. I will offer more than money. We shall get our water. *(She tears a piece of crumpled lace off the front of her costume and carefully wipes her face with it as if she were using a powder-puff)*

THE GENTLEMAN—*(watching her stupidly)* I do not understand.

THE DANCER—*(She pulls up her stockings—tries to smooth the wrinkles out of her dress—then takes her long hair and having braided it, winds it into a coil around her head. She*

pinches her cheeks, already crimson with sunburn. Then turning coquettishly to the Gentleman, she says) There! Do I not look better? How do I look?

THE GENTLEMAN—(*bursting into a mad guffaw*) You look terrible! You are hideous!

THE DANCER—You lie! I am beautiful. Everyone knows I am beautiful. You yourself have said so. It is you who are hideous. You are jealous of me. I will not give you any water.

THE GENTLEMAN—You will get no water. You are frightful. What is it you would do—dance for him? (*mockingly*) Dance! Dance Salome! I will be the orchestra. He will be the gallery. We will both applaud you madly. (*He leans on one elbow and watches her, chuckling to himself*)

THE DANCER—(*turning from him furiously and crawling on her knees over to the Sailor, calls in her most seductive voice*) Sailor! Sailor! (*He does not seem to hear—she takes his arm and shakes it gently—he turns around and stares wonderingly at her.*) Listen to me, Sailor. What is your name—your first name? (*She smiles enticingly at him. He does not answer.*) You will not tell me then? You are angry at me, are you not? I cannot blame you. I have called you bad names. I am sorry, very sorry. (*indicating the Gentleman who has ceased to notice them and is staring at the horizon with blinking eyes*) It was he who put such ideas into my head. He does not like you. Neither did I, but I see now that you are the better of the two. I hate him! He has said dreadful things which I cannot forgive. (*Putting her hand on his shoulder she bends forward with her golden hair almost in his lap and smiles up into his face.*) I like you, Sailor. You are big and strong. We are going to be great friends, are we not? (*The negro is hardly looking at her. He is watching the sharks.*) Surely you will not refuse me a little sip of your water?

THE SAILOR—I have no water.

THE DANCER—Oh, why will you keep up this subterfuge? Am I not offering you price enough? (*putting her arm around his neck and half whispering in his ear*) Do you not understand? I will love you, Sailor! Noblemen and millionaires and all degrees of gentleman have loved me, have fought for me. I have never loved any of them as I will love you. Look in my eyes, Sailor, look in my eyes! (*Compelled in spite of himself by something in her voice, the negro gazes deep into her eyes. For a second his nostrils dilate—he draws in his breath with a hissing sound—his body grows tense and it seems as if he is about to sweep her into his arms. Then his expression grows apathetic again. He turns to the sharks.*)

THE DANCER—Oh, will you never understand? Are you so stupid that you do not know what I mean? Look! I am offering myself to you! I am kneeling before you—I who always had men kneel to me! I am offering my body to you—my body that men have called so beautiful. I have promised to love *you*—a negro sailor—if you will give me one small drink of water. Is that not humiliation enough that you must keep me waiting so? (*raising her voice*) Answer me! Answer me! Will you give me that water?

THE SAILOR—(*without even turning to look at her*) I have no water.

THE DANCER—(*shaking with fury*) Great God, have I abased myself for this? Have I humbled myself before this black animal only to be spurned like a wench of the streets. It is too much! You lie, you dirty slave! You have water. You have stolen my share of the water. (*In a frenzy she clutches the Sailor about the throat with both hands.*) Give it to me! Give it to me!

THE SAILOR—(*takes her hands from his neck and pushes her roughly away. She falls face downward in the middle of the raft.*) Let me alone! I have no water.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*aroused from the stupor he has been in*) What is it? I was dreaming I was sitting before great tumblers of ice-water. They were just beyond my reach. I tried and tried to get one of them. It was horrible. But what has happened here? What is the matter? (*No one answers him. The negro is watching the sharks again. The Dancer is lying in a huddled heap, moaning to herself Suddenly she jumps to her feet. All her former weakness seems quite gone. She stands swaying a little with the roll of the raft. Her eyes have a terrible glare in them. They seem bursting out of her head. She mutters incoherently to herself The last string has snapped. She is mad.*)

THE DANCER—(*smoothing her dress over her hips and looking before her as if in a mirror*) Quick, Marie! You are so slow tonight. I will be late. Did you not hear the bell? I am the next on. Did he send any flowers tonight, Marie? Good, he will be in a stage box. I will smile at him, the poor old fool. He will marry me some day and I will be a Duchess. Think of that Marie—a real Duchess! Yes, yes I am coming! You need not hold the curtain. (*She drops her head on her breast and mutters to herself The Gentleman has been watching her, at first in astonishment, then in a sort of crazy appreciation. When she stops talking he claps his hands.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—Go on! Go on! It is as good as a play. (*He bursts into cackling laughter.*)

THE DANCER—They are laughing. It cannot be at me. How hot it is! How the footlights glare! I shall be glad to get away tonight. I am very thirsty. (*passing her hand across her eyes*) There he is in the box—the poor, old duke. I will wave to him. (*She waves her hand in the air.*) He is kind to me. It is a pity he is so old. What song is it I am to sing? Oh yes. (*She sings the last few lines of some music hall ballad in a harsh cracked voice. The negro turns and looks at her wonderingly. The Gentleman daps his hands.*) They are applauding. I must dance for them! (*She commences to dance on the swaying surface of the raft, half-stumbling every now and then. Her hair falls down. She is like some ghastly marionette jerked by invisible wires. She dances faster and faster. Her arms and legs fly grotesquely around as if beyond control.*) Oh, how hot it is! (*She grasps the front of her bodice in both hands and rips it over her shoulders. It hangs down in back. She is almost naked to the waist. Her breasts are withered and shrunk by starvation. She kicks first one foot and then the other frenziedly in the air.*) Oh it is hot! I am stifling. Bring me a drink of water! I am choking! (*She falls back on the raft. A shudder runs over her whole body. A little crimson foam appears on her lips. Her eyes glaze. The wild stare leaves them. She is dead.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*laughing insanely and clapping his hands*) Bravo! Bravo! Give us some more! (*There is no answer. A great stillness hangs over everything. The heat waves rising from the raft near the woman's body seem like her soul departing into the great unknown. A look of fear appears on the Gentleman's face. The negro wears a strange expression. One might say he looked relieved, even glad, as if some perplexing problem has been solved for him.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—She does not answer me. She must be sick. (*He crawls over to her.*) She has fainted. (*He puts his hand on her left breast—then bends and rests his ear over her heart. His face grows livid in spite of the sunburn.*) My God! She is dead! Poor girl! Poor Girl! (*He whimpers weakly to himself mechanically running her long golden hair*

through his fingers with a caressing gesture. He is startled when he hears the negro's voice.)

THE SAILOR—Is she dead?

THE GENTLEMAN—Yes. She is dead, poor girl. Her heart no longer beats.

THE SAILOR—She is better off. She does not suffer now. One of us had to die. (*after a pause*) It is lucky for us she is dead.

THE GENTLEMAN—What do you mean? What good can her death do us?

THE SAILOR—We will live now. (*He takes his sailor's knife from its sheath and sharpens it on the sole of his shoe. While he is doing this he sings—a happy negro melody that mocks the great silence.*)

THE GENTLEMAN—(*in hushed, frightened tones*) I do not understand.

THE SAILOR—(*his swollen lips parting in a grin as he points with his knife to the body of the Dancer*) We shall eat. We shall drink.

THE GENTLEMAN—(*for a moment struck dumb with loathing—then in tones of anguished horror*) No! No! No! Good God, not that! (*With a swift movement he grasps the Dancer's body with both hands and making a tremendous effort, pushes it into the water. There is a swift rush of waiting fins. The sea near the raft is churned into foam. The Dancer's body disappears in a swirling eddy; then all is quiet again. A black stain appears on the surface of the water.*)

The Sailor, who has jumped forward to save the body, gives a harsh cry of disappointed rage and, knife in hand, springs on the Gentleman and drives the knife in his breast. The Gentleman rises to his feet with a shriek of agony. As he falls backward into the sea, one of his clutching hands fastens itself in the neck of the Sailor's jersey. The Sailor tries to force the hand away, stumbles, loses his balance, and plunges headlong after him. There is a great splash. The waiting fins rush in. The water is lashed into foam. The Sailor's black head appears for a moment, his features distorted with terror, his lips torn with a howl of despair. Then he is drawn under.

The black stain on the water widens. The fins circle no longer. The raft floats in the midst of a vast silence. The sun glares down like a great angry eye of God. The eerie heat waves float upward in the still air like the souls of the drowned. On the raft a diamond necklace lies glittering in the blazing sunshine.

(Curtain)

