

# **THE RIGHT OF THE CAPTAIN OF THE R.M.S. CARPATHIA**

a tragedy

by Maksym Kurochkin

Translated by John J. Hanlon  
© 2010

For publication and production rights, contact Mr. Hanlon by calling 203-558-2636, or by e-mail at [john.hanlon@aya.yale.edu](mailto:john.hanlon@aya.yale.edu).

Hosted by Iowa Research Online: [http://ir.uiowa.edu/iwp\\_alumni/](http://ir.uiowa.edu/iwp_alumni/)

*dedicated to my little sister Masha*

“Their blind faith in their own success seduces even the most inveterate skeptics, in spite of the fact that sometimes this faith has such unstable, such infantile foundations that an outsider is astonished that they follow them. However, the main thing is that they are leading the way, and that they lead entirely unafraid.”

- F. M. Dostoyevsky

List of Characters (in order of appearance)  
[6m, 2w + extras]

The Youth  
Young Woman  
The Captain  
The Antagonist  
Two Customs Agents  
Old Man  
Servant  
Woman with child  
Japanese Man  
Naval infantrymen/Sailors  
Angels of death

**ACT ONE**  
*Scene One*

*The deck of a pirate ship. On the bow of the ship stands an iron statue of a bull with a gold star on its forehead. The Young Woman is cleaning the deck. The Youth holds a book in his hand.*

**Youth.** You know, nothing has happened yet, absolutely nothing has transpired. It's only been one day, but I'm already thinking about how we will recollect all this. Do you understand? I'm already longing to come back here.

**Young Woman.** You're really not scared?

**Youth.** I'm very scared. I'm so scared that I can't even understand how I used to live without this.

**Young Woman.** Hm, that's very similar to what I'm feeling. And at the same time I'm not at all afraid of dying. I'm afraid of something else. I'm afraid that once again they'll promise to give me a daddy, but I'll get a lousy pink rabbit instead.

**Youth.** They promise a little machine with twenty moveable parts, but they give you pajamas. Yes, we went through all that. Where are you from?

**Young Woman.** Where are you from?

**Youth.** I asked you first. And what do you mean – where am I from? Where I was living, what school I went to, how my mother gave birth to me?

**Young Woman.** How did you wind up here?

**Youth.** Same as you. I was waiting at the stop – I'd read the advertisement. I woke up here, with you, on the deck. Don't leave.

**Young Woman.** I need to get water.

**Youth.** Get it here.

**Young Woman.** I can't.

**Youth.** Why not?

**Young Woman.** You'll help me.

**Youth.** No I won't.

**Young Woman.** Honest?

**Youth.** Of course.

**Young Woman.** If you trick me, I'll push you overboard.

**Youth.** Oh! I'm scared.

**Young Woman.** You don't believe me?

**Youth.** I do, you've got brains enough to do it.

**Young Woman.** This infuriates me, you know? If I weren't here, and someone else was – you would be purring at her exactly like you are with me now. "It's only been one day, and I'm already getting misty-eyed – How will we recollect this?" I don't know if I'll recollect this. If there will be anyone to recollect it to. I'm not connected to any of this. Not at all. I'll forget everything. But I already regret... Are you just going to stand there, like a birch tree? Help me.

**Youth.** What do you regret?

**Young Woman.** I deeply, madly regret that all of this has happened to you and me.

**Youth.** What has happened?

**Young Woman.** This deck, everything that just passed between us, the fact that we're together now. The fact that you're being like this to me, that I'm being like this to you...

**Youth.** Like what?

**Young Woman.** Like this. This. Or have you not noticed anything?

**Youth.** Yeah, there's something I'm not getting.

**Young Woman.** O my golden one, don't you see?

**Youth.** Hunh? Oh... Oh!!! Yes? Yes??? Don't leave, I'm a fool. I feel it, too...

**Young Woman.** What???

**Youth.** No? Tell me – no? No??? Don't leave.

**Young Woman.** I'm not leaving. I don't know – what you felt there, but I'm not leaving. I'm mopping the stinking deck, and you're bothering me instead of helping. Quiet...

**Youth.** What?

**Young Woman.** Get the captain!

**Youth.** What happened?

**Young Woman.** Look who's coming! Not there – over there, on the pier, in the uniforms. They're heading toward us – don't you get it? Quick! Run!

*The Youth starts scraping around the deck on all fours. Near the hatch, he runs into the Captain as he is coming out onto the deck.*

**Youth.** Captain!

**Captain.** I see!

**Young Woman.** Will we make it?

**Captain.** No. All hands on deck!

**Youth.** Maybe it would be better...

**Captain.** You should be out of here already, you should already be below sea level. Run, little sailor!!! Hold it! Show me what's in your hands.

*He takes the little book from the Youth and reads the title. He is surprised. He returns the book.*

**Youth.** I...

**Captain.** We'll discuss it later. Run! (*To the Young Woman.*) Come here. Leave the mop! Take these keys. Use them to open the weapons cache and pull out everything that shoots. Not everything that you can carry, but everything that shoots. Understood?

**Young Woman.** Yes, Captain.

**Captain.** Repeat it.

**Young Woman.** Not everything that I can carry, but everything that shoots. Will that be more than I can carry?

**Captain.** Yes, a little. Run. We won't get a second chance.

**Young Woman.** Ah...

**Captain.** Shoo.

**Young Woman.** But...

**Captain.** Shoo!

*The Young Woman runs out. The Captain nervously walks about the deck.*

**Captain** (*unleashes a terrible scream, shakes his fist at someone above*). Ah-ah-ah! What the hell, Lord! They already did their damn inspection! My dear little god, we already passed the

bloody custom-house! Did you forget? Did you forget? Have you got a problem with your memory now? Sclerosis? I'll help you. (*He digs in his pockets – pulls out a handful of tablets and tosses them up.*) There, stuff your face! Maybe that'll help. It doesn't help me anymore. Four times a day after eating. Have you already eaten? Hunh? Maybe it's me you'll have for lunch today? Then I'll stick in your throat, and you'll kick the bucket. Understand? Do you understand that I'm not joking? I'm asking you. Do you understand?

**Youth** (*leaping out onto the deck*). It's not my fault!

**Captain**. That's right. (*Coming to.*) What??

**Youth**. It's not my fault. I called everyone.

**Captain**. Who do you think you are? Why are you standing there like a tombstone? Are you smart? Are you an airhead?

**Youth**. No-o.

**Captain**. Are you the globe?

**A voice from the moorings**. Hey, on the Carpathia!

**Captain**. Yes, officer. One second, officer. My people will come down the ladder right now. (*To the Youth.*) Where are those invalids?

**Youth**. They're stirring.

**Captain**. Where's the girl?

*The Young Woman clambers onto the deck and falls, overwhelmed by the weight of the weapons she has lugged there. The Captain runs to the fallen Young Woman and begins to throw overboard automatic weapons, carbines, high-caliber machine-guns, ammunition bands.*

**Youth**. Are you throwing away the weapons?

**Captain**. No, I'm feeding the little fish.

**Youth**. Are you throwing away all the weapons?

**A voice from the moorings**. Hey, on the Carpathia. How long do we have to wait? I'm starting to lose my patience.

**Captain** (*throwing over the last automatic rifle*). Coming, coming! (*To the Youth.*) Help out. And wake up, please. It's morning already. Time to get up and brush your teeth.

*The Captain and the Youth head down the gangway on the opposite side from where they threw over the weapons.*

**Youth**. Captain, it seems I've made a big mistake.

**Captain**. A big one? After the mistake your parents made, all the others are...flea snot.

*The Antagonist and two customs agents come up the gangway.*

**Youth**. There's a pistol in my knapsack.

**Captain**. What?

**Youth**. I brought a Browning with me. I thought...

**Captain**. You th-thought? P-point to the spot where you did this th-thinking – I'll rip it into tiny pieces and use it to exterminate rats. You idiot, you cretin, you son of a cretin.

**Antagonist**. Senior officer of the customs bureau. May I see your papers, captain?

**Captain** (*getting out the papers*). Yes, of course. (*To the Youth.*) Don't move, you dolt, it's too late.

**Antagonist.** Are you talking to me, captain?

**Captain.** No, officer. Forgive me, officer. I do have one personal question for you.

**Antagonist.** I'm listening, captain.

**Captain.** How does the customs bureau deal with idiots in its ranks?

**Antagonist.** Hm! As far as I know, quite severely. Why?

**Captain.** Oh, no reason. That's what I thought. Thank you, officer, you've been a great help. (*To the Youth.*) Did you hear?

**Youth.** Yes.

**Captain.** Do you understand?

**Youth.** Yes.

**Antagonist.** Where are the other members of the crew?

**Captain** (*To the Youth*). Well?

**Youth.** Uh... uh... There!

*Onto the deck creep the Old Man, the Servant, and the Woman with an infant in a knapsack on her back. They fall in.*

**Antagonist** (*walking around the uneven pirate formation*). Impressive. Is that everyone?

**Woman.** There's also Tubik the tomcat. Except he's a house cat. Tubik the Housecat. But actually, we're not sure. You can't tell by his fur. On a leash, he runs like a Doberman Pinscher. He catches rats.

**Antagonist.** Rats?

**Woman.** Rats!

**Antagonist.** Captain!!!

**Captain** (*showing his fist to the Woman*). Yes, officer.

**Antagonist** (*calmly*). I hope you will not object if, while I talk with your people, my people inspect the ship.

**Captain.** Officer, we already passed inspection. Our papers are in order.

*The Antagonist rips the papers in half.*

However, nobody's perfect.

**Antagonist.** What's especially lame is your style. What is happening? Civilization is falling apart.

**Captain.** It's painful to acknowledge that it was namely our customs declaration that hung like a stone around the neck of a fallen civilization. How can I endure it?

**Antagonist.** Oh, I don't know, captain, I don't know. I can only promise you that the papers aren't going to be your biggest problem today.

**Captain.** You're bringing me back to life, officer.

**Antagonist.** Glad to hear it. Let's get rolling. (*He indicates the fallen Young Woman.*) What is that?

**Captain.** That is a wholesome child sleeping. She passed out right here on the deck.

**Antagonist** (*squatting alongside the Young Woman*). Why does this wholesome child sleeping reek of gun oil?

**Captain**. She's dreaming about the heroes of her favorite films. (*The Young Woman moans.*)

At the moment it seems that she's in Cybercop Eight. They've just killed her partner, but someone in the government has sold out to the drug lords. It's up to her to find the owner of the goods that are locked up inside an enormous warehouse, which is guarded by a hundred thugs armed with bazookas. Now she will kick open a door, use her laser gun to mow down twenty or thirty scoundrels, and say...

**Young Woman**. When I first saw you, I thought – do such beings really exist? Nothing has happened yet, but I already know that we will be together. What is your name?

**Youth**. I'm not allowed to say, did you forget?

**Young Woman**. I did.

**Antagonist**. Very interesting. Why isn't he allowed to say his name?

**Captain**. He's delirious. Love sickness, youthful hypersexuality – hormones popping out of his ears. What's a name in such a situation? They call him the Globe.

**Young Woman**. Globe... My stomach really hurts.

**Youth**. Where, here?

**Young Woman**. Lower. Did I bring the whole lot?

**Youth**. Yes, yes, the whole lot – lie down. What's your name?

**Young Woman**. No...

**Antagonist**. I like the relationships among the members of your crew. They all are so young (*he looks at the Old Man*), romantic, smell of gun oil and don't even know one another's names. (*Harshly, to the Old Man.*) Hey, creature! Your name, sex, age, occupation.

**Old Man**. Well, that's quite obvious.

**Captain**. He's – an ethnographer. The author of the monograph "Life among the Malabarian Pirates." They call him Grandpa. He's a male. He can't remember his age – he remembers the first manned space flight.

**Antagonist**. An ethnographer? Fine. Hey, you, mother with child. Yes, you – I'm addressing you. Come here. (*To the Captain.*) Is she also an ethnographer?

**Captain**. Absolutely.

**Antagonist**. Tell me, beautiful, what is an ethnographer?

**Woman**. There's no pornography. There's not anything illegal.

**Antagonist** (*to the Woman*). Back to your place. (*To the Captain.*) Well... well? Captain, who are these people?

**Captain**. They're ethnographers, they're professional travelers. They're studying the lifestyle of seafarers. It's a scientific experiment. We're attempting to recreate the environment that existed on ancient vessels. There's nothing illegal. Purely humanitarian goals. IONESCO is in charge. I could show you the papers.

**Antagonist**. I know what I would see there – I don't even want to touch them. I want to know the truth. Who are these zombies? Where did you dig them up? What have you got planned? Where are you going, Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia?

*The Captain shudders. A customs agent comes out onto the deck with the Youth's Browning. He hands over the pistol to the Antagonist.*

Not a very big haul. However, it's entirely sufficient to delay your departure and extend our relations for an indefinitely long period. I'm satisfied, I won't hide it.

**Captain.** Officer, this is a toy.

**Antagonist.** What? Did I hear you correctly? You're telling me that this is a toy pistol?

**Captain.** This is a children's toy. It's a token of my son.

**Antagonist** (*very harshly*). Did you say "token"? Did you say "son"? It turns out that you have such things? You really didn't think when you said that.

**Captain.** This is a toy pistol.

*The Antagonist takes out the cartridge clip, examines it and puts it back in. He releases the pistol's safety, pulls the bolt across. He places the barrel of the pistol against the Captain's temple.*

**Antagonist.** If this is a toy pistol, you may sail wherever you like. If it's a toy, I will leave your wreck at once and write in the report that you're cleaner than a monk's cap and that you smell as sweet as the armpits of the Virgin Mary.

**Captain.** It's a toy pistol.

**Antagonist.** But if it's not...

**Captain.** I can guess.

**Youth.** No!!!

**Captain.** Shut it, Globe!

**Young Woman** (*half-rising*). Who screamed? Captain, what's wrong?

**Captain.** Sleep, my daughter. Everything's fine with me. I'm with a customs officer from a friendly country. Close your eyes!

**Antagonist.** For the last time...

**Captain.** It's a toy.

**Young Woman, Youth** (*simultaneously*). No!!!

*The Antagonist pulls the trigger. A misfire. He tries again. Another misfire. A third time. Misfire. He throws the pistol down on the deck, turns sharply – prepares to leave. The Captain is breathing heavily.*

**Old Man.** But did you release the safety? Officer, you probably forgot to release the safety.

**Captain.** Well, thank you, Grandpa.

*The Antagonist walks right up to the Old Man.*

**Antagonist** (*after a pause – very slowly and articulately*). I released the safety. (*He heads toward the gangway.*)

**Customs Agent.** Excuse me, Sir, they have a whole cache of cold steel on board.

**Antagonist.** We're leaving.

**Customs Agent.** It's a statue of a bull. It was stolen from a town on the northern seaboard. And you know which town. I'm prepared to swallow my cap if that's not true.

**Antagonist.** For starters, you can swallow your untimely tongue. Do you really not understand what just happened here? We have been told to leave. And we will leave, even if they have an atomic bomb here and a full hold of heroine.

**Customs Agent.** Sir, I will be forced to submit a report.

**Antagonist.** Captain, you were interested in how we deal with idiots?

*The Antagonist and the Customs Agent simultaneously go for their pistols. Two shots are heard. The Customs Agent makes a few unsteady steps and falls.*

**Antagonist.** Approximately like that. Only the idiot usually isn't able to get off a shot.

**Captain.** That was an excellent show.

**Antagonist.** I'm leaving.

**Captain.** I got that already.

**Antagonist.** You don't have anything to say to me?

**Captain.** No.

**Antagonist.** Pity. They'll bring your papers in half an hour. They'll remove the body in ten minutes. Happy sailing!

*The Antagonist and the second Customs Agent leave the ship.*

**Captain.** Well, how about it, citizens of a town on the northern seaboard? Let's get acquainted. They call me the Captain. You have twenty minutes to come up with names for yourselves. We'll meet in the passenger lounge. On tonight's program: a lot of vodka and group revelations. Everyone down below.

**Youth.** But...

**Captain.** Down.

*Everyone goes out. The Woman and the Youth help the Young Woman, who is still weak from fainting. The Captain is alone.*

*(To someone up above.)* Well yes, yes... I agree. But you're a fine one, too. From a purely human perspective, you can understand me. You have to spend as many years as I've spent, you have to waste as much money as I've wasted in order for that to arise after everything and have it all ruined. Yes, I've come undone – I'm not a saint and you know that full well. I'm not a saint. You hear? Yes, I agree – you really saved me today. However, there's no need to play with me anymore like you did in front of that one. Okay? I'm in good shape when it comes to adrenaline – I have a superb amount of adrenaline in my blood – I don't need any more. And if I ever do, I'll let you know.

*He picks up the pistol from the deck.*

This is all a lie – a cold barrel. It's a soldering iron and a three-inch drill combined. My one desire – to dive like a little fish onto the deck and put my fins on the back of my head. How could I look them in the eyes? Tell me! How? How?

*He fires three shots into the air. Thunder rumbles.*

All right, fine. You can think about it. In any case, I didn't get you.

*He stops near the body of the customs agent.*

You didn't go without lunch today after all. Oh, listen... Those tablets that I gave you. I didn't mention – there's a counter-indication. People suffering from a heart condition and pregnant women. I hope you're not pregnant. Because if you are... But then something tells me that it's not out of the question for... Hey, listen! Here I am. Me, personally – here I am. Well then, I can't survive another conjurer like you. Do you hear? It's either me or him. Think about an abortion.

*Thunder.*

I'm serious.

*Thunder. Lightning.*

I spit on you!

*Rain pours down.*

Okay, old man – you're not in the mood today. We'll talk some other time – the crew of the pirate schooner "Carpathia" has gathered in the passenger lounge and awaits its captain in order to begin... If you change your mind – drop by. There'll be drinks. Ah, yes – I forgot. In your condition... Ha-ha-ha.

*He goes down into the hold. Lightning. Rain. Gloom. The muzzle of the bull. Angels of death lead the dead man away.*

## *Scene Two*

*The passenger lounge. The Captain enters, wet and chilled to the bone.*

**Captain.** A-a-a... Where, where, where? *(He snatches at the air with his claws.)*

*The Servant pours a glass and puts it in the Captain's hand. He drinks it and takes a bite of a chicken leg.*

*(To the Woman.)* Where do I know you from?

**Woman.** I can't think up a name.

**Captain.** Stop, stop, stop. *(He rummages around in his pocket. He pulls out a pack of photographs, which scatter onto the floor. He finds one and shows it to the Woman.)* You?

**Woman.** Me.

**Captain.** And next to you?

**Woman.** What are we drinking to?

**Young Woman.** Let's drink to getting acquainted and to our future friendship.

**Captain** (*munching*). And next to you – is who?

**Woman.** You. I thought you didn't remember.

**Captain.** I don't remember. It just came flooding back.

**Woman.** Are we drinking or not?

**Captain.** Of course. We're intelligent people after all – we drink. Right, Little Katja? Shall we call you Little Katja?

*They drink.*

**Woman.** We shall call me Little Katja. You even remember that? How about the lake?

**Captain.** Yes.

**Woman.** Then...

**Captain** (*sharply*). No! That I do not remember. That's it – let's drink.

**Woman.** But...

**Captain.** Yes!

**Woman.** Even...

**Captain.** Even that! That never happened and could never be. And do you know why?

**Woman.** Why.

**Captain.** Because tomorrow you will be the first to climb aboard along narrow steps, where two people can't pass each other, where if you get hurt – you're dead. You will be the first to climb with a knife in your teeth to obtain gold and a better fate for yourself and your Dumpling. And do you know who will drive you to those steps? You guessed it, it will be me. And you guessed why. Because I will get four-fifths of your loot, because this is my ship, because I know where we're going, because in the place where we're going, the reason why I found it would have no meaning unless I'd found it. Because I found it! Do you hear?

**Servant.** Your pills, Captain.

**Captain** (*calming down*). All right.

*The Captain takes a pill. The infant cries.*

**Captain.** Give him here.

*The Woman passes the infant to the Captain. He holds him awkwardly but carefully.*

Good Dumpling. Who are you crying about? Don't cry – uncle Captain will sing you a lullaby now, he'll calm your nasty little psyche. (*He sings in the style of a lullaby.*) "Fifteen men on a dead man's ship. Yo-ho-ho. And a bottle of rum." A fine dumpling. And he cries loudly – that's excellent. What did you drag him along with us for? Hunh? I need men, not dumplings.

**Woman.** He's a boy.

**Captain.** What?

**Woman.** He's a boy – a man.

**Captain.** I need robust men, who can wield weapons, pillage, kill and create children – psychologically robust men.

**Woman.** He's psychologically robust.

**Captain.** Are you sure he's your son?

**Woman.** I'm sure, he's mine.

**Captain.** Then he's likely to be three times more sick in the head. With that kind of heredity he wouldn't be accepted into a band of maniacal sickos, yet you want him to eat off of the same plate as my people.

**Woman.** Hey, no need to worry about that. (*She indicates her own chest.*) His plate is right here.

**Captain.** Okay, take him. (*He gives back the crying infant.*) Just don't let him cry anymore. He's crying because he thinks that things are bad for him now. Explain to him that the country to which I'm taking you is not called El Dorado. It's called "Holy Shit How Strange That We're Still Alive." And all of you aren't even going to make it to that country. Explain...

**Woman.** He's not asking you where you're taking him. And we're not asking you. No one is asking.

**Captain.** You think you're not asking? Don't make me laugh. The very way that you're breathing, even your backs... Your own gait is asking: "Where are you taking us, Captain?"

*The Old Man approaches the Captain and places a hand on his shoulder. He shudders.*

**Old Man.** I don't want to know anything. They weren't crying, but I saw tears. I was crying myself, although it wasn't visible. And it was only the third time in my life that I'd ever cried.

**Captain.** What are you talking about, Grandpa?

*The Old Man weeps as bitterly as only an old man can cry.*

**Captain.** Stop. Don't cry. What are you crying about?

**Old Man.** I sat for days in front of the television and drank glasses of vodka, although I'd never before... And I was crying then for the first time since the day that my mother died. Which is to say, that was the second time.

**Captain** (*he embraces the Old Man*). What had happened?

**Old Man.** Nothing had happened. I'd opened the champagne, I was waiting. They were landing on the Moon, but on my television they were broadcasting some dance collective of revolutionary Latinos. I don't care about revolutionary Latinos. I wanted to see how a man would make the first step on lunar soil. I wanted to see the first footprint of a man on the planet. Did I have a right to that? Why were they playing songs and ... these... different people?

**Captain.** And then what?

**Old Man.** Nothing.

**Youth.** How nothing? Armstrong stepped onto the surface of the Moon and said: (*almost everyone automatically mutters Armstrong's phrase*) "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind!"

**Old Man.** That's the point – nothing happened. But I waited to hear the Interviision broadcast: "Everyone, everyone, everyone!" And they would tell me that a cosmonaut-explorer, some guy named Vaskin – let them call him Vaskin, they can't use Gagarin again – had landed in the region of The Sea of Tranquility fifteen minutes before their Armstrongs. I had a right to that. You know I seriously believed that.

**Captain.** And what about now?

**Old Man.** What about now? They're already headed to Mars, while we sit here crowing.

*The Old Man weeps.*

**Captain.** Grandpa, can you hear me?

**Old Man.** I hear you...

**Captain.** Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia.

**Old Man.** I hear you, Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia.

**Captain.** Well then, if you can hear me, if you all can hear me, I, screw it, I swear by the horned iron creature that stands on the deck, that we will be on Mars first. Did you hear me? Gramps, you – specifically. Specifically your varicose foot will be on Mars before anyone else's. Before anyone's. Don't ask me – how I will do it. I don't know. But I will do it. Now I'll tell you what I have left instead of semi-automatics and grenades. I have in reserve the whole world. The whole world – who doesn't understand? You? You? You? It's pointless. No one – not one soul in the whole world – knows how it's possible to take over modern vessels, armed only with rocks and truncheons. No one has the impudence to go up against the Fleet of Her Royal Majesty and win. But I do. Understood?

**The Crew** (*almost everyone*). Yes, Captain.

**Captain.** Then let's get to work. Globe?

**Youth.** Aye, Captain.

**Captain.** What do you know?

**Youth.** What do you mean – what do I know?

**Captain.** I mean – what do you know that I don't know.

**Youth.** I... don't get it? Hunh?!

**Captain.** Well?

**Youth.** Oh, oh, oh. I get it. I know that Swedes love sweets so much that they say of them: "A Swede will even eat a sugary salami."

**Captain.** Good. What else?

**Youth.** In Africa there are certain tribes, in which the women stretch out their breasts to such an extent that they can feed a child riding on their back simply by throwing their breasts over their shoulders.

**Captain.** Good.

**Youth.** In ancient times, if a thief wanted everyone in a house he was planning to rob to fall asleep, he would light the dried finger of a hanged pirate on fire.

**Captain.** Very good. How do you say "Hi" in Russian?

**Youth.** Preevyet!

**Captain.** That's enough. Globe, write down your battle orders in that little book. Upon our approach toward an enemy vessel, midshipman Globe will be on the deck – to conduct negotiations, answer questions – distract attention. The basic version: "The ethnographic expedition of the Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia has suffered a disaster. There are badly wounded men on board. Our means of communication aren't working, a vessel is needed to get to the nearest port." At the approach of the boarding ladder, issue the signal to attack. Is that clear?

**Youth** (*taking notes*). It's all clear, Captain.

**Captain.** Onward. (*Pointing to the Young Woman.*) You?

**Young Woman.** Tomcats don't have periods.

**Captain.** Weak, what else.

**Young Woman.** Children are born from the belly-button.

**Captain.** Better. What else.

**Young Woman.** Men are not beasts, like everyone thinks they are.

**Captain.** Oy, my girl, how did you end up with us if you think that men – are people?

**Servant.** Take note, Captain, she's not that naïve. After all, she didn't say "people." She said "not beasts." And that's not quite the same thing.

**Captain** (*addressing the Young Woman*). All right then, people or not beasts.

**Young Woman** (*after pondering*). People.

**Captain.** There you have it... Right, you'll still manage. Jot this down. Cadet... what name?

**Young Woman.** Shoo.

**Captain.** Wh-what?

**Young Woman.** Shoo. That's my name now.

**Captain.** Are you dissatisfied with something?

**Young Woman.** I'm satisfied with everything, more than satisfied.

**Captain.** So noted. Before an attack Cadet Shoo will situate herself on the deck in a horizontal position. She will lie there pretending to be a dying person. Her clothing: a bathing suit of the exposed... highly exposed, type. The cadet's task: to identify the captain of the enemy craft during the attack and destroy him with her permanent weapon.

**Servant.** Hunh?!

**Captain.** Questions?

**Youth.** But?

**Captain.** Yes?!

**Youth.** No.

**Servant.** That's right. None, that's what I meant. But... Hold on! I beg your pardon, Captain. What are you implying by the term "permanent weapon"?

**Captain.** An apt question. Cadet Shoo's permanent weapon is – a nail file. Ha-ha-ha. You don't really expect her to hide a crossbow in her trunks, do you? Ha-ha-ha.

**Servant.** Certainly not. So it means a nail file. Oh, the Captain's a joker. (*To the Young Woman*.) Write it down. Nail file.

**Young Woman.** I don't need to, I memorized it.

**Servant.** Do you get it? He-he.

**Captain.** Now let's get serious. Grandpa, your turn.

**Old Man.** Are we going to Konstantinov?

**Captain.** To hell with Konstantinov. You're going to Mars. I made a promise to you after all, or did you already forget?

*The Servant expressively twirls a finger around his temple.*

**Old Man** (*lifting his hands in dismay*). The head!

**Captain.** It's a turnip, not a head! I repeat! Once again for the sclerotics and wise guys. (*He looks expressively at the Servant.*) Grandpa is going to Mars. I promised him that and I will keep my word. But we're not talking about that now. We're talking about what he will do when we are climbing aboard the Merchant.

**Old Man.** Yevgeny Markovich...

**Captain.** Curses! Concentrate! Forget about the fact that you have more sclerotic medals than hair and brains combined. Forget about Konstantinov. Forget about all Yevgeny Markoviches within a radius of 1,000 miles. Forget about everything. Answer me just one question.

Capiche? One finger! One!

**Old Man.** Okay.

**Captain.** What's the difference between an atom and a microbe?

**Old Man.** Oh, my boy, to each his own. There's a peaceful –

**Captain.** Stop, that's enough. We're full! You've said all that's needed.

**Servant.** Where do I put our man of the space age?

**Captain.** On the boarding crew. Grandpa, memorize what I'm about to say. And this concerns the rest of you, too. We are not murderers, but pirates. And may I go blind if we are not – noble pirates! Grandpa, get sharp now. I'm not recommending that you kill the ladies and gents we're going to see on the ship. Put down their resistance – yes, that's essential. But they won't put up a resistance.

**Woman.** They'll stand there and watch as a bunch of unfamiliar mugs climb toward them with filthy intentions.

**Captain.** Familiar, painfully familiar faces, with ambiguous but devilishly amiable intentions. That's how it will be.

**Old Man.** Tell me more simply. What must I do in order to go to Mars?

**Captain.** When they tell you – forward, you must move forward and smile.

*He drinks two hundred grams of vodka.*

**Captain.** I am so tired.

*His face drops into the salad.*

### *Scene Three*

*The Captain is sleeping with his face in the salad. Enter the Antagonist.*

**Captain** (*waking up, but not turning his face toward the new arrival*). Arkady, is that you, my son? I knew you by your footsteps. Only you walk that way. You came after all. I knew you would come. Don't say anything. I know – you couldn't make it before. Now everything's good. Didn't you hear what I was saying yesterday on the square? It's a shame you didn't hear it. I told them: "This city is dead. It died the way a tortoise does – it's hard to notice. Children play with it as if it's alive. **Weep, children. Your tortoise is dead!** And I won't console you at all."

Then I told them about the bull. Do you remember, I was also telling you about the bull? I put it like this: "When the fathers of your fathers were little, even then no one remembered where this statue was taken from. But now they want to coat it with gold. And do you know why? Iron rusts – it talks. The bull was talking to us. In the morning he would be flecked with cinnamon, but by evening he would shine because the children had polished his coat with their hands. They sat on the bull's back, and the bravest ones grabbed him by the neck and sat there

like little czars, holding on by the horns, which had been worn down by millions of touches and become as thin as needles. The city has died! It's already been three years since the bull turned black from rust. Have you ever seen black rust? Go look... *(He waves his hand.)* We don't have any children and therefore they coat the bull with gold. Gold is silent."

Just don't answer for them, Arkady. I know everything that they might say. They could say that there aren't any fewer children and that the women are bearing as many as they did before. Idiots. If they are giving birth to beings who fight to climb onto the back of the bull, it means that the wives are changing them for freshwater small-fry – for any old crayfish or perch.

*Pause.*

I don't know, I don't know anything. I'm incapable of thinking and my head splits whenever I try to do it. There's only one thing I do know. I am a wealthy man and there's something that I can change. Maybe I'll make it worse, but I cannot stand to look at what you call a wife. There are few of them and they've made you all weak. They've stopped giving birth to extra children – children who will allow themselves to die.

*Pause.*

Out there, beyond this sea, exist other cities. There we'll find girlfriends who will want to live with us. Or we'll take them with us by force. We'll find a place that is suitable for founding a city. Everyone will receive as many women as he can feed. I won't ask anyone why he needs them. We've begun to work for a new world. Everyone who comes with me will receive his share of the spoils and a peaceful retirement. If he loses his eyes in battle, he will be paid 10 piasters. If, because of an injury, his hand shrivels up or he has to amputate a leg, I will pay him 60 piasters. If he dies, his women and children will be taken in by others. Are you coming with me, Arkady? *(He senses something wrong.)* Who's here?

**Antagonist.** Me.

*The Captain turns. He is paralyzed, literally thunderstruck. It is with difficulty that he regains consciousness.*

**Captain.** But where is Arkady? I recognized his walk.

**Antagonist.** This is my walk. And right now your Arkady is sleeping next to his new wife and sailing toward you. I need you, Captain.

**Captain.** Do we have something to talk about? I don't think so.

**Antagonist.** Oh really? Why am I becoming wiser but you're not? Shouldn't we develop in a parallel way? I want to buy a certain something from you.

**Captain.** How many times do I have to tell you – I can't sell something that I don't remember, that wasn't deposited in my memory. I don't remember. You've already come to me how many times and asked me to sell you something about which I haven't the slightest understanding. Maybe it's a valuable thing, but maybe not. If I don't know how much it's worth, how can I sell it to you?

**Antagonist.** Just sell it. Say – I am selling the right...

**Captain.** Go away.

**Antagonist.** You aren't afraid that I'll come back again?

**Captain.** I'm not afraid – I've erased you. You don't exist.

**Antagonist.** I don't give a damn about where you've been. I don't give a damn about anything except what you possess. And I will catch you. I'll wait for the moment when you slip up, and I'll rip the right from out of your esophagus.

**Captain.** Go away.

**Antagonist.** We'll see you soon.

*He goes away. The Captain is alone.*

**Captain.** So what, my children? A party?! To tell you all what I think of you or have you already guessed? I will say thank you. To you, Belly, to you, Beard! I don't see Arkady. Is he here? Why are you back there, Arkady? Approach – bid me farewell, I will say thank you for everything that I have done for you. For the fact that you're alive, that your daughter has a daddy Bunny Tail. And you will say thank you to me for the fact that today, when the sun is setting, five cripples will again crawl into my cabin and call me their captain, but you won't be there. And instead: "Captain, my little boy has diathesis, and grandpa's blood pressure is 220 over 180. Will you permit me to not go to my battle station today, Captain?" And the Captain will say: "Okay"! They can do anything now, Arkady! In this world, where children whom I christened and into whose hands I put their first knives, so they wouldn't be afraid to play in the sand-box, they say goodbye to me from the back row.... In this world where I can't assemble a crew of five men out of a hundred who are indebted to me either for their lives or for the fact that they have wives and the means to feed their offspring.... In a world where my strongest sailor strolls onto the scene with a little tome of Apollinaire and gets blown about by the wind, while my servant twirls his finger at me around his temple.... In this world the woman who goes with me becomes the Alamo, and the child who drinks her milk – a Fort Knox. And they are now – gods – they don't have to go to their battle stations now – they've already won – they're already dead.

I took your bull from you – its photograph is in every brochure. "Bring good fortune to our town." You are going to be ruined – you'll have to create a new one or wait until the Fleet of her Royal Majesty catches me. Then they will return this god to you and you will be able to cover it in gold to your heart's content. Pray that they return the bull to you as quickly as possible. Because if they return it to you after a few years, its hide will be shining. And you will understand...

Good-bye, children! Don't search for me. And don't let them search. I am going to a place where....

#### *Scene Four*

*The Young Woman and the Youth are on the deck.*

**Young Woman** (*pulling at the Youth's scarf*). I really hope that you aren't searching for what I'm searching for on this ship.

**Youth.** And I hope that you aren't here for the sake of the person that I'm here for.

**Young Woman.** Hush. Don't say anything more. Not a word.

**Youth.** Don't be scared, it's not who you thought.

**Young Woman.** Really?

**Youth.** No, it's just...

**Young Woman.** If you say the word "father," I will throw myself into the sea.

**Youth** (*stunned*). Then I won't say it.

**Young Woman.** To me you are the smartest, the bravest, and the most handsome. Will you really never say that vile word?

**Youth.** Never?

**Young Woman.** Yes, with me – never.

**Youth.** That terribly vile word?

**Young Woman.** That word which for me is now worse than death. If you say that word, we won't be together anymore.

**Youth.** We're going to be together?

**Young Woman.** Yes, you're the smartest and strongest person I can imagine.

*The Young Woman embraces the Youth, kisses him on the lips. She pushes him away.*

**Young Woman.** Do you hear that?

**Youth.** I don't hear anything. There are eighteen steam hammers pounding in my head – I can't hear a thing.

**Young Woman.** Why eighteen?

**Youth.** Because I love you.

*The Youth embraces the Young Woman, kisses her on the lips. The Young Woman pounds on the Youth's back with her fists.*

**Young Woman.** Excuse me for interrupting you. But someone is panting, and I just can't when someone is panting.

*The Young Woman and the Youth dash for the ship's side. They look below.*

**Young Woman.** What are you doing down there? I'll show you how to eavesdrop.

**Youth.** Where in the world did he come from? It's fifty kilometers to the nearest shore.

**Young Woman.** A spy. Ah, he's drowning! Don't drown, my dear. (*To the Youth.*) Call the Captain!

**Youth.** How? It's nighttime already.

**Young Woman.** Well, you fool! (*She yells.*) Man overboard!

*The Captain, half-undressed, leaps out onto the deck. Behind him – all the other members of the ship's company, including even Tubik the Housecat.*

**Captain.** Where is he?

**Young Woman.** There! He's huffing and puffing, but not calling for help.

**Captain** (*leaning over the ship's side*). Who are you?

*Some unclear muttering is heard.*

**Youth.** An Asian of some sort. He probably still hasn't learned how to speak.

**Old Man.** That means he's Japanese.

**Servant.** In general, the practice is first to save a drowning man, and then to obtain his personal information.

**Captain.** All together now, pull him up!

*With a group effort they pull the Japanese Man onto the deck. He is shivering but able to stand. The Captain takes a look at his eyes.*

**Captain.** His eyes look fine.

**Young Woman.** He was following us.

**Old Man.** Overboard with him, overboard. Stop twiddling your thumbs. He's a weakling.

**Captain.** Oh, we're all roused up. Take a look at yourselves. Retreat. We'll sort things out tomorrow. (*To the Servant.*) Take him to your room for the night.

*The Servant nods, leads away the Japanese Man. The Captain examines the place where the "saboteur" came aboard and, shaking his head, exits.*

#### Scene Five

*The Captain is running through a karate regimen. Explosive movements in the Kyokushin style are accompanied by sharp exhales of "Os!" The Japanese Man, in a white apron and cap, is wiping goblets with a cloth and watching the Captain, delightfully clicking his tongue and shaking his head.*

**Captain** (*freezing in his final stance*). Os!!

*He does breathing exercises, then takes a towel from the Japanese Man and wipes off his face with it.*

Is there something I'm not doing right?

*The Japanese Man smiles, bows. The Captain bows to him in return.*

Well, show me how to do it.

*He gently pushes the Japanese Man toward the center of the room. The Japanese Man doesn't understand at all. He is frightened.*

Show me, show me. You're the Japanese guy after all, not me. How is it done? I haven't practiced in a long time. Come on, justify your existence.

*A halting and frightened Japanese Man tries to repeat the movements of the Captain. What results is a humorous caricature of the regimen. Having become completely tangled up, the Japanese Man guiltily freezes, his arms at attention.*

Is that it? What you just showed me – is that it? I'm asking you.

*The Japanese Man is silent.*

Os!?

**Japanese Man** (*fearfully*). Os!!!

**Captain**. Os – what?? Os – what??? Come on, you Bushidō caboose, why am I letting you whittle your life away? You're no one. You're nothing, you showed up completely out of the blue. Even that bit of a brain that thought up all of this doesn't know where you came from and why you're needed in this play. (*Dreadfully.*) Os???

**Japanese Man** (*frightened*). Os!!!

**Captain**. Devil take it – what os?? Do you understand that I spared you? “Don't shoot me, Captain Imbecile, I'll prove useful to you yet.” That's what I read in your eyes when they pulled you out. My whole crew is up in arms because of you. But I decided that you were some sort of master. That you were skilled in something that at some point would save us all – them all. That you were a talisman. Understand?

**Japanese Man**. Os!

**Captain**. Dammit Japan, you don't even know how to cook.

**Japanese Man**. Os!

**Captain**. You stink at karate – you're a wet noodle!

**Japanese Man**. Os!

**Captain**. You can't talk like a human being.

**Japanese Man**. Os!!!

**Captain**. You don't even know English. Where have you seen Japanese people like that? What were you like when you were there? Like this? Well, well? Like this? You've forgotten. But do you understand? Like this?

**Japanese Man**. Os!!!

**Captain**. What the hell are you doing here?????

**Japanese Man**. O-o-o-oss!!!

*Some noise is heard up above. The ship lists. The Captain turns away from the Japanese Man and furiously pounds on the bulkhead with his fists. A tray with the glasses that the Japanese Man was wiping begins to slide off a high shelf. The Japanese Man attempts to direct the Captain's attention to this, since he is standing next to the shelf.*

**Japanese Man**. Os-os-os!

**Captain** (*swinging around*). What?

**Japanese Man**. (*pointing at the tray*). Os-os-os!!!

**Captain** (*not noticing the falling tray*). I don't get it.

*With a long leap, the Japanese Man flies over the table and manages to catch the tray before it hits the floor. All of the glasses except one remain standing on it. Only one falls and, without breaking, rolls around on the floor. The Captain follows it with a look of surprise. Screams and heavy footfalls are heard up above. The Japanese Man stands with the tray.*

**Captain** (*politely and thoughtfully*). I think we need to take a look at what's happening up above.

*The Japanese Man puts the tray on the shelf.*

**Japanese Man** (*bowing*). Os!

**Captain** (*bowing respectfully*). Os!

*The Captain lets the Japanese Man go ahead. They exit. The Captain returns, picks up the glass, examines it in a surprised manner and places it back on the tray. He exits.*

### Scene Six

*Panic on the deck. The sailors are rushing about chaotically. There's no one at the helm. The Globe is up on a barrel, completely crazed. The Woman is rushing about with her child, the Young Woman with Tubik. The Servant and the Old Man have picked an inopportune moment for an elucidation of their relations. There is screaming, swearing. The Japanese Man comes flying out onto the deck, and he's almost knocked off his feet. After a few seconds, the Captain walks out onto the deck.*

**Captain.** What's with the hysterics?

**Youth.** The Merchant!!!

**Captain.** Where?

**Youth.** South-southwest. On the...

**Captain.** I see!!! Hell! Why so close? Were you counting crows again?

**Youth.** Albatrosses.

**Captain.** Albatrosses. Go, goddamn it. You've counted us to death!

**Youth** (*getting down*). I don't want to end up under the keel. I want to live, I have prospects.

**Captain.** Stop shaking. Did you put batteries in the megaphone?

**Youth.** Uh-uh-huh.

**Captain.** Where is he?

**Youth.** Who?

**Captain.** The megaphone – where?

**Youth.** Du-du-du-dunno.

**Captain.** You want to live?

**Youth.** There!

*The Captain finds the megaphone.*

**Captain** (*into the megaphone*). One...two...three. A suitcase went sailing about the sea. In that suitcase was a couch. And on that couch did sit a rhino. If you don't believe me – ask the albino.

*Everyone clams down. They listen to the Captain.*

*(Into the megaphone, in gentle tones).* My dear listeners! Today once again I, the Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia, am coming to you on the airwaves of Radio Fortune. It's time to relax and listen to your favorite music. *(He yells.)* What are you – flea-bitten watch-dogs, have you forgotten what hemp rope looks like? Who's sick of breathing through his nose? This isn't a suicide club or a registration center for the gas chamber. You are here to instill fear in everything that floats on water. Why are you spazzing out? You are the terror of the seas, not a bunch of headless chickens. Crew, listen to my command! Remember the battle plan, commence Operation "All Aboard."

*The crew begins to move like a well-oiled machine. As if out of nowhere, arbalests, onions, mini-catapults, broadswords, sabers, knives, etc. appear in the hands of the sailors. The Young Woman undresses to the point of "a bathing suit of the exposed... highly exposed, type" and, hiding something in her trunks, lies on the deck in the pose of a dying person. The Old Man overloads himself with gadgets for the battle and hides. The Servant and The Woman with child, having prepared the boarding ladder, stand ready with it. The Captain forcibly sticks a rolling pin into the hands of the Japanese Man and, explaining something through signs, camouflages him behind a pile of debris. Having grabbed an arbalest and a broadsword, he himself hides. The Youth checks to see if everyone is well concealed and lies down like a knave, next to the Young Woman. It grows dark – the merchant ship approaches. The Globe hardly budges.*

**Merchant ship** *(through a very powerful amplifier).* Shto sloocheelos? Mozhem lee myee ahkazat vam pomush? What's happened? Can we help you?

**Youth** *(raising himself up a bit).* Preevyet! The ethnographic expedition of the Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia has suffered a disaster.

*The Youth faints picturesquely. Darkness.*

### Scene Seven

*The passenger lounge is filled with good spirits due to the capture of the Merchant. The table is filled to bursting with food and beverages. The pirates are celebrating their victory. Everyone is very drunk.*

**Youth.** But this one, this one...

**Captain.** You should tell us about the ape instead.

**Youth.** Ah! She looks like this *(he demonstrates)*. She's got a hundred different earrings stuck on, instead of breasts there's a Polaroid swinging, black claws. Teeth – in three jaws, and all of them porcelain. I say to her, young lady, resistance is futile. Lie down on the chair – pull out your dough. But she's just snapping one Polaroid after another of me. And hissing, like a snake at a little duck.

*Everyone laughs.*

**Young Woman.** Globe the Duck.

**Captain** (*through the laughter*). Who are you talking about?

**Youth**. What do you mean, who? The little fool in green shorts. She was either a Norwegian or some kind of African. I was too scared to notice. But she was a complete fool – that's for sure.

**Captain**. And whom did I ask you to talk about?

**Youth**. When?

**Captain**. Just now.

**Youth**. Who?

**Captain**. The ape.

**Youth**. Well, I don't know. I didn't look down there. Maybe she is an ape.

*Everyone laughs and drinks. Except the Servant.*

**Young Woman**. I, I saw a monkey with a little tail. In the captain's chamber.

**Servant**. The captain's?

**Young Woman**. Their captain's.

**Servant**. Got it.

**Young Woman**. She was hiding in the nightstand – only her little tail stuck out.

*Everyone drinks and makes merry. Everyone, except the Servant.*

**Youth** (*dancing*). We creamed, creamed, creamed them!

**Old Man**. We creamed them properly.

**Captain**. Another round!

**Youth**. Not that word – properly. Perfectly! Heavenly music! All aboard! They were laughing when we were crawling along the ladder! They didn't understand anything. Grandpa, remember, how they helped you climb across?

**Old Man**. Surprisingly kind little sailors.

**Captain**. Well, what do you say, does the system work?

**Old Man**. I smiled, like you told me to, and everything turned out great. I respect you, Captain. Now when are we going to Mars?

**Captain**. Soon.

**Youth** (*to the Young Woman*). Let's go, let's take a stroll.

**Captain** (*to the Youth*). Look at me. You're not right.

**Youth**. I'm lo-looking.

**Captain**. What do you see?

**Youth** (*looks at the Servant*). Pfff, what a lousy interface.

**Captain**. You're looking the wrong way.

**Youth**. And where should I look?

**Captain**. That's not me, that's my shadow. That's the shadow of my shadow.

**Youth**. But where are you of your shadow?

**Captain** (*climbing onto the table*). Here he is, Globe!

**Youth** (*throwing up his hands*). Oh, mommy! It's you, Captain?

**Captain**. It's me, Globe.

**Youth**. I've found you, Captain.

**Captain**. Globe, you've found me.

**Youth**. It's you, Captain.

**Captain.** It's me, Globe.

**Youth.** I've found you.

**Captain.** You've found me.

**Youth.** I tried to find you through a search service. It was impossible. I started to spend all the money that I could earn on it, and I found you. But when I did, it seemed to me that it wasn't you. But it is you, because I have, at last, recognized you.

**Woman.** That's enough for you today. Time to hit the sack.

**Youth.** It's him, I recognize him.

**Captain.** You recognize me, eh? Very nice, I'm slowly coming to recognize myself too. A remarkable man – entirely worthy of a woman's gentle touch.

**Woman** (*to the Youth*). Let's go, let's go... These are your little legs – you walk with them.

**Youth** (*in a sober voice*). Wait just one minute. (*To the Captain.*) Father, do you recognize me? I'm your son, although you call me The Globe. (*He explodes.*) You couldn't come up with anything better? You, my father?

*Pause.*

**Captain.** And everyone here already knew, eh? Am I the last one at this celebration of life? Well, that's the way it always is. Nobody loves me.

**Young Woman.** We didn't know. (*She looks at the Youth.*)

**Youth.** He is my father.

**Captain.** Well so what? Do I deserve a medal for that? How would you suggest I deal with all this?

**Youth.** I...

**Captain.** You couldn't find a more appropriate time to announce this to me? Look at her. (*He indicates the Woman.*) Bring me the Dumpling. (*He takes the infant by the collar, like a kitten, and raises him up with an outstretched arm.*) Globe, take a close look, this is also my son. Well so what? He's not making a tragedy out of it or spoiling everyone's party. Why can't you, a full-grown schmuck, conduct yourself any better than this chubby little thing?

*Pause.*

Perhaps there's someone else here who's my son?

**Young Woman.** Not a son.

**Captain.** Then what?

**Young Woman.** A daughter. But I'm not drawing any conclusions from that. Except one.

*She looks at the Youth. The Youth falls to his knees and weeps.*

**Captain.** A daughter? Where?

**Young Woman.** Here!! Me!! Five feet seven inches tall, measurements 36-24-36. I'm not telling my weight. They used to call me *Anyechka*. That's so – for your information.

**Captain.** And what do you want from me?

**Young Woman** (*shouting*). Me??? Want??? I want my share of the loot, Captain, and the sixty piasters that are due to me for the loss of my hands and eyes. That's all!

**Captain.** Understood, I'm not a fool. We're through. Who's next? (*He prods the Servant with the Dumpling.*) You?

**Servant** (*calmly*). You know yourself.

**Captain.** Ah, yes, something happened there. You were with that one who...

**Servant** (*phlegmatically*). Yes, yes, yes...

*Pause.*

**Captain.** Then, perhaps you too, Grandpa?

**Old Man.** I didn't want to say it, but such a possibility does exist. And what's more, in my personal archives...

**Captain.** Stop! We've reached the end! What, have you all gone crazy? Gramps, look at yourself and look at me.

**Old Man.** This is called the organism's physical wear and tear.

**Captain.** Well, so what?

**Old Man.** Mine's more severe.

**Captain.** Well?

**Old Man.** No, allow me to say "Well!" Well so what, so you look younger? What does that prove?

**Captain.** And, to you, that doesn't prove anything.

**Old Man.** Brothers and sisters, let us vacate this space – discussion is pointless. The Captain doesn't even know how old he is; how in the world can he remember such fine points as you and me.

**Captain.** I don't remember? I remember it all. I remember Arkady – that's my son. He was supposed to come with us. But he had a circumstance, he has a wife or a dog – I've forgotten already. I remember you. (*He indicates the Servant.*) You purchased... Correct?

**Servant.** I didn't purchase, I bartered... You've forgotten.

**Captain.** Again, "forgotten"? No! I remember it all. I remember how old I am. One second. We'll count it up right now... One second... Okay... Okay... Oh, my God. No. There. No!

*Pause.*

**Captain.** But if even you, Hiroshima-and-Nagasaki? If even you? You're not one of my sons?

*The Japanese Man is silent.*

**Captain.** You're not my son, are you? Why are you silent? You don't mean...?

**Japanese Man.** Os!

*The Captain hits his head against the table.*

**Captain.** Ladies and gentlemen, don't you have the feeling that this already happened to you once before? I do. Now someone else will come forward.

**Woman.** There's no one else. I'm the only one left.

**Captain.** And Tubik the Housecat? Where are you, little one? Tubi-Tubi-*Tubeechka*, come here, my little cat. If I'm your daddy, you should have a birth mark on your little butt. Now

we'll find it and, in that way, establish one more instance of successful paternity. (*He examines Tubik.*) Not a speck? Ah, what a shame. You didn't get one, forgive me. Though all is not lost. Hire an experienced lawyer, perform a blood test...

**Woman.** Captain, don't play the fool.

**Captain.** Katja? Little Katja! (*He pulls out a little notebook.*) But, Katja, what was your mom's name?

**Woman** (*in horror*). No!!!

**Captain** (*hiding the little notebook*). Yes, I'm also of the opinion that I have enough relatives for today.

*The Servant gives everyone the sign to exit. He leads out the Woman, who is barely able to drag her legs along. Everyone exits. The Captain sits down at the table. He drinks a glass of vodka.*

Life is good.

*His face falls into the salad.*

### *Scene Eight*

*A knock at the door. The Servant enters. The Captain continues to sit with his face in the salad.*

**Servant.** May I come in? I won't be long, Captain. As they say on Planet Hollywood, I have two pieces of news for you.

**Captain** (*from the salad bowl*). Start with the good news.

**Servant.** In that case I can't ever start.

*Pause.*

I was the last to leave The Merchant. I went down below – checked to see if the crew and passengers were locked up securely and if we had enough time to get away. Everything appeared to be under control – they were still in shock. No one moved a muscle and...

**Captain** (*from the salad bowl*). Cut to the chase.

**Servant.** Then I swung down into the captain's chamber. The captain was dead. His throat had been cut. And I suspect that it was cut with a nail file.

**Captain** (*from the salad bowl*) O, Lord!

**Servant.** I didn't tell you about this earlier – didn't want to spoil the party. But circumstances have changed. That's the second piece of news. We are being overtaken by the naval frigate of the Fleet of Her Royal Majesty!

**Captain** (*from the salad bowl*). Crew, listen to my command! I declare readiness number one! Remember the battle plan. Take up your weapons!

**Servant.** Aye-aye, Captain.

*The Servant clicks his heels. He turns and exits the lounge. The Captain straightens up and screams.*

*Scene Nine*

*The deck of the R.M.S. Carpathia. On the horns of the iron bull hang pieces of women's attire from amongst the loot seized on The Merchant. There are many new boxes and packages. Disorder. The crew is preparing for battle, continually glancing at the side of the approaching Frigate. The Woman is furiously tearing off the underwear that is hanging on the bull. The deck is cleared of rubbish – everything extra flies overboard. A tarp is pulled off of a wooden catapult. A stone, wrapped in fuel-soaked rags, is loaded onto it. The stone is set aflame.*

*The Captain comes out onto the deck with a gait that is too heavy. He is clean-shaven, outfitted in a pressed captain's uniform. The Youth brings the Captain a megaphone.*

**Captain** (*into the megaphone*). Everyone change into your whites!

*Without ceasing their battle preparations, the pirates change their clothes. They dress in white shirts and tie on neck scarves.*

*The Youth brings the Captain a pistol. The Captain glances at it and throws it overboard. The pirates, following his example, throw overboard all the firearms seized from The Merchant.*

*The Captain walks about the deck with the megaphone in his hand, literally thinking up something to say to the crew. The Frigate approaches and, in various languages, orders the Carpathia to stop. The pirates gloomily prepare for battle, glancing at the Captain when he can't see them. The Captain wants to say something. He is silent. He gives a signal.*

*The catapult fires. The crew showers the approaching Frigate with arrows and rocks. Its vast shadow covers the Carpathia. Instinctively, everyone draws back, while continuing to shoot. A jolt. Everyone falls onto the deck, gets up and, in total silence, gathers around the Captain, unsheathing their knives and sabers. A huge iron boarding ladder falls onto the Carpathia, shattering yards and deck structures.*

*After a few seconds of silence, the pirates, with a shout, launch themselves onto it in an assault. Naval infantrymen run to meet them in a swift and mighty stream. A battle. Darkness. Screams.*

*End of the first act.*

**ACT TWO***Scene Ten*

*Darkness.*

**Youth.** When the Titanic was sinking, its distress signals were received by the radio operators on several ships. But only one vessel managed to reach the location of the catastrophe with time enough to save some of the people who were drowning in the cold water. The captain of that

vessel did not have the right to change course – he was supposed to deliver a very important shipment and he would have been subjected to a huge fine if he was even slightly late. However, the captain did change course and saved a lot of people. Not everyone, but a lot. Everyone that he could. Thousands of people prayed for him and for the radio operator on his vessel. After that, the Captain never had to work again in order to earn money for food. He became a rich man. For many, he became a saint. The whole world asked God to grant this man salvation and eternal life. And, so as to know...

**Captain.** What was the name of this ship where he was captain?

**Youth.** But don't you remember?

**Captain.** Me? How am I supposed to remember it?

**Youth.** Everyone asked that he be granted eternal life, and no one thought to get him a good memory. People are strange.

**Servant.** People are wise.

**Captain.** So what was the name of the ship?

**Youth.** In white paint. Elegant English letters. Some sort of very beautiful script. The ship's name was the R.M.S. Carpathia.

*The lights come on. The Captain, the Servant, the Old Man, the Youth, and the Young Woman are sitting in the hold of the Naval Frigate of the Fleet of Her Royal Majesty. Covered with wounds, in rumpled clothes, locked up in chains. Tubik the Housecat, with clanking shackles, is trying to catch mice.*

**Captain** (*springing up*). They finally figured it out. Light – that's good.

**Servant.** Someone will probably come now.

**Young Woman.** Why isn't she here? What are they doing to her? (*She weeps.*)

**Servant.** They can't do anything to her. Captain, tell her...

**Captain.** I hope that they can't. I shouted for her to climb onto the bull's back with the child. I think she made it.

**Old Man.** Are you counting on the right of inviolability for those who sit on the statue of the sacred bull? Aren't you being naïve, Captain?

**Captain.** I don't think so. I know their commander. It seems I know him well.

**Youth.** If the legend is true, the right of asylum has never once been violated. Many criminals have sat on the bull for weeks while waiting for an opportunity to flee. The police weren't even able to forbid relatives from feeding them.

**Young Woman.** What's the use?

**Youth.** And some did manage to slip away. Remember how that one peasant sat there for three months, but then collapsed anyway. And they were only threatening him with fifteen days for hooliganism. He probably wanted to set a record.

**Servant.** I remember.

**Youth.** Everyone knows about this. The country whose citizens violate the sacred custom will be disgraced. They wouldn't dare.

**Old Man.** You acted wisely, Captain, in taking the bull with you. Probably this was how you planned to protect the women and children who would be coming with you. Am I mistaken? Was it a tender display of caring?

**Captain.** Don't pick on me. I don't know – I don't know why I did it, I don't know anything. But I did see who their commander is. He won't violate the right of asylum.

**Young Woman.** What's happening to her, the poor thing.

**Youth.** Don't cry, we'll see her soon.

*The din of the opening hatch. The statue of the bull with the Woman sitting on it is lowered by cables into the hold. The bull and the human are wrapped up in many layers of transparent polyethylene tape, and the beast is neatly bandaged. The statue is lowered to the floor. The cables come unhooked from their terrible freight on their own and soar upwards.*

**Young Woman.** A-a-a-a!

*She weeps, burying her head in the shoulder of the Old Man, who hasn't even looked at what was lowered through the hatch.*

**Youth.** Those people are...

**Old Man.** Has the right of asylum been violated?

*The Captain lets out a terrible laugh.*

**Captain.** The right of asylum has not been violated.

**Servant.** Maybe she's alive?

**Captain.** No.

**Young Woman.** No? *(She goes up to the bull and looks through the tape at the outline of the Woman.)* Come look here. At these little pieces of Scotch tape. Do you understand what they are? They're patches. She tore a little hole with her nails, in order to breathe, and they sealed it up. They didn't even lay a finger on her. Look at how many patches there are. Look, look – you have to see it.

**Captain.** Quiet!

**Youth.** You have to see it, Captain. It's your work.

**Captain.** Quiet, I say! Listen close. Don't you hear something?

*Everyone listens intently. The muffled cry of the infant is heard.*

**Young Woman.** Oh, God!

**Captain.** The Dumpling!

*Everyone dashes to the bull and begins to tear off the tape. The polyethylene falls away. We can see the bull and a dead woman sitting on it with a crying infant. Everyone steps back. Finally, the Captain brings himself to take the infant from the arms of the mother. He passes the Dumpling to the Young Woman, who at first takes him into her hands with disgust, but then presses him firmly to her breast. The body of the Woman is removed and placed on the deck.*

**Servant.** Her throat has been slit.

**Captain.** By what?

**Servant.** Yes. By a nail file.

**Young Woman.** Ai! It's mine. She took it away... Then. That's why I wasn't able to.

**Captain.** She did that for your sake. She killed the captain.

**Old Man.** She's killed us all.

**Young Woman.** They won't show us mercy?

**Servant.** She slit her own throat so that the kid would have enough air.

**Youth.** What are we going to do with him?

**Captain.** But you know, Lord, that I didn't want to kill their captain, that I didn't want to kill anyone.

**Old Man.** You've killed us all, Captain.

**Captain.** I was joking, do you believe me, grandpa?

**Old Man** (*turning to the Captain*). Yes, I believe it. You could...

**Captain.** I didn't have time to rescind the command.

**Old Man.** He who doesn't have time...

**Captain.** ...is always late.

**Old Man.** And that's that.

**Captain.** Yes, I know. I see. What am I to do. You tell me.

**Old Man.** Captain, you're now at the lowest point that a human being can sink to. You've murdered; however, that's only half the trouble. You did it not with your own hands, but with your words, and the trouble doesn't stop there. You murdered for the sake of a joke – not for glory or money. You made a murderer out of a woman who was breast feeding. This child was drinking blood, he was drinking the milk of a murderer.

**Captain.** What does that mean?

**Old Man.** It means that you can't get any lower.

**Captain.** Thank you, Grandpa. I do my best.

*Absolute silence.*

**Old Man.** Go, you hear, the boy is crying.

**Captain.** Thank you.

*He walks away from the Old Man. The little boy has begun to cry.*

**Youth.** What's wrong with him?

**Young Woman.** Dunno, he probably wants to eat.

**Servant.** We don't have anything to give him.

**Youth.** They aren't going to feed us until right before the execution. They said so.

**Young Woman.** Even the child?

**Youth.** They don't even know that he's alive.

**Servant.** Even if they did know... I saw their captain too.

**Captain.** All the same...

*The Captain runs up to the bulkhead and pounds on it with his fists and his feet.*

**Captain.** Hey, you, the strong and the brave! Hey, you, guarantor of safety on the high seas! Open up! Give us food for the child! We have a child here! He's alive! He's hungry! Your idiotic god didn't act this way. You hear, your Dale Carnegie didn't teach you to let children starve! We have a child here! He's hungry!

*The hatch opens halfway for a second and a dead rat falls at the Captain's feet. The hatch closes. The captain picks up the rat by its tail.*

**Captain.** It's something at least. Worst-case scenario, one of us will die sated. Tubik, catch.

*He flings the rat toward the cat. He sits on a box near the Youth.*

**Captain.** Think, Globe, think. That's what you're here for.

**Youth.** I'm thinking, Captain.

**Servant.** To be honest, I wasn't expecting even that much.

**Captain.** No, me neither. It means that we can influence them. We asked for food. We received it. Perhaps they think they're having a laugh at us, but in the end we did feed one member of our crew. They didn't think about that. It means they're vulnerable.

**Young Woman.** And the kid? What are we gonna feed the kid? He's a baby, he can't have dead rats yet. Ratties. Katja called them ratties...

*She weeps. The Youth wants to say something.*

**Captain.** Say it.

**Youth.** It's nothing, I'm delirious. I can't come up with anything else.

**Captain.** Come on, say it, and don't apologize.

**Youth.** Amongst the Eskimos, I think that's right. Yes, precisely – it's the Eskimos. If a woman dies in childbirth and there are no other young women in the camp, they give the baby to an old woman. The baby sucks on her breast. A day passes, two, three. A baby, when it's just born, can survive a few days without food. But then the old woman, however ancient she may be, starts to produce milk. I don't know why. But it's true.

**Young Woman.** We don't have an old woman.

**Youth.** We have you.

**Young Woman** (*in horror*). No, anyone but me. Feed it yourselves. If he's so smart, let him feed it. It'll work just as well. How in the world am I supposed to make milk? I don't have children. I've never given birth. Doesn't that tell you something, you experts on women's physiology? After all, I'm a woman. Well, almost...

**Captain.** Little daughter, well, think about it yourself. As crazy as it may seem, all the same – it's our only hope. Do you understand? If you weren't here, we really would give the infant to Globe. Now, don't look at me like that. I know I'm out of my mind. But you're going to have to live with this. Not for long... And if he weren't here, I would feed it myself. Or give it to Grandpa. I would try – do you understand? I would make an attempt. Who the hell knows what'll happen?

**Young Woman.** No one knows anything.

**Captain.** We have you. It doesn't hurt, it ought to be pleasant. Has a boy ever kissed your breast?

**Young Woman** (*quietly, so the Youth can't make out what she's saying*). No, no one has kissed my breast.

**Captain.** It doesn't matter. It really should be just fine. It's like if you've got a frozen spot and they're pouring cold water on it, but then they slowly turn it to hot. You can feel it coming –

closer and closer. And then all of a sudden it instantly feels like you're in a warm, heated room. It had just been freezing, but now it's warm – in a flash.

**Young Woman.** Captain, can I talk to you for a second?

**Captain.** Yes, of course.

*They walk over to one side, dragging their chains behind them.*

**Captain.** What do you want to tell me?

**Young Woman.** I can't, daddy. I honestly, honestly can't, don't force me. It's not allowed. Don't ask me why.

**Captain.** Why?

**Young Woman.** He's not allowed to have my milk.

**Captain.** Are you sick?

*The Young Woman is silent.*

**Captain.** With what?

*The Young Woman nods her head.*

**Captain.** Oh, no... How did it happen?

*The Young Woman shrugs.*

**Captain.** Is that why you came with me?

**Young Woman.** Yes.

**Captain.** My little girl, how in the world could our God be so unfair? Why not me?

**Young Woman** (*embracing the Captain*). Daddy, don't get upset. It's all going to be over soon anyway. I'm even a little bit glad. I'm just sorry for all of you.

**Captain.** No, don't talk like that. We're going to start fighting for life now. We're already fighting for it, right now. I don't know how yet, but I'll save you.

**Young Woman.** Oh dad, it was so hard for me and mom without you.

**Captain.** And it was very hard for me without you two. But it's never easy for me. You know that.

**Young Woman.** I know.

**Captain.** Listen, we do have to give him to you. If we don't, he'll die.

**Young Woman.** And if we do, he'll also die.

**Captain.** First of all, he might not get infected.

*The Young Woman shakes her head.*

**Captain.** Hold on. Even if he does get infected, it takes a very long time. They'll find a cure for it. They'll cure him. Listen, we're not risking anything. If we don't attempt to save him, he'll be dead by tomorrow. Do you understand?

*The Young Woman nods her head and looks at the Captain.*

**Captain.** Good girl. I knew that you'd understand me. You're my daughter after all.

*He kisses the Young Woman.*

**Young Woman.** You don't remember mom at all?

**Captain.** No, I can't remember that far back. Let's go.

*The Captain and the Young Woman walk over to the others. The Young Woman unbuttons her blouse, takes the infant into her arms and places him on her breast.*

**Young Woman.** Oi! Oi, he bites! Oi-oi-oi-oi-oi! It hurts!

**Captain.** Hang in there, my girl, hang in. We'll go away, we won't disturb you.

*The pirates cross to a different place. The Young Woman pays attention to the new sensations. She squirms in pain. All of a sudden, a wave of excitement flows over her. She breathes deeply. Her eyes open wide.*

**Young Woman.** O God, I want to live.

### *Scene Eleven*

*The hold. Everyone is asleep. The Japanese Man is meditating. A little lamp casts a dim light. Now we can hear people screaming and running about on the deck. The Youth wakes up. He shakes the Captain and the Servant awake.*

**Youth.** Wake up, wake up. Something's happened up there.

**Servant.** Wake up the others?

**Captain.** There's no need yet. Let them sleep.

**Youth.** Maybe this is it...

**Captain.** Maybe.

*The screams and footfalls become louder.*

**Servant.** Doesn't sound like it.

**Captain.** Do you know what it reminds me of? You all were rushing about like that when you spotted The Merchant. There's a panic up there. They're preparing for battle. Someone has come up close to them – they're preparing for hand-to-hand combat.

*Up above, the separate screams converge into a roar. The front end of a large sailing vessel, decorated with a figure in the form of a stylized bull's head, pierces the side of the Frigate right in the middle of the hold. The Captain, the Servant, and the Youth fall to the floor from the blow. The others wake and spring up. The Japanese Man meditates.*

**Young Woman.** What's happened?

*The infant is crying.*

**Captain.** More likely something good than something bad.

**Servant.** It looks like this...

**Youth.** Is it ours?

**Captain.** It's ours. That means they came for us after all. They couldn't just pretend that nothing had happened.

**Young Woman.** Rescuing us? Good Lord, are they rescuing us?

**Youth.** They're rescuing us. (*To the Young Woman.*) Do you understand, we don't have to die. We're not going to die – we can get married.

**Young Woman** (*with the bawling child in her arms*). Globe, you blockhead, I'm your sister. They're rescuing us, they're rescuing us! If you only knew how much I love you.

**Youth.** I love you. I don't give a damn about anything else.

*They throw themselves into one another's arms. They hug, almost squashing the unfortunate Dumpling. They laugh. The Old Man takes part in the general merry-making. The Young Woman and the Youth embrace him from both sides.*

**Servant.** Captain, what do you think – will they save us?

**Captain** (*through tears of joy*). No. No. Not a chance. But they've come. Do you understand what that means? They came for us after all. In order to rescue us. Now we have a City again. We've found it. We've found something worth dying for. I'm happy.

*Noise from the battle up above is heard. Blades clinking, blows, screams.*

**Captain.** You made this happen. You did, old man, you did, little girl, Katja and the Dumpling did. They came. What a pity that we aren't able to die with them on the deck.

*The crackle of machine-gun fire drowns out the Captain's words. Everyone stands still. First the Old Man, and then everyone else, as if robbed of any remaining strength, falls or slowly sinks to the floor. The Youth pounds on the floor with his fists in impotent spite. The Old Man sinks back into marasmus. The Young Woman and the Dumpling weep bitterly. The Servant is on his knees, whispering something. The Japanese Man is meditating. In the middle of this scene, the Captain is standing and weeping. And laughing. Darkness. Machine-gun fire.*

### Scene Twelve

*The hold. Everyone is asleep. The Japanese Man is meditating. The hole in the ship's side has been patched up with iron plates. From the deck, the beating of a drum can be heard. The Youth wakes up; he shakes the Captain.*

**Youth.** Captain.

**Captain.** Wha-hunh?

**Youth.** Drums.

**Captain.** You think they're for our souls?

**Youth.** I think so. It's an execution.

**Captain.** It's an execution, you're right. Don't wake them. It's still early – yes, there's no need. It's an execution.

**Servant** (*not rising*). I dreamed that they won't execute me today.

**Youth.** He's not asleep.

**Old Man.** The tea had better be hot, I have a sore throat.

**Captain.** It's better if they're sleeping.

**Servant.** They're executing our men.

**Youth.** Right. They probably took some of them prisoner.

**Captain.** If I understand anything about the psychology of their boss, we'll soon find out who.

*The drums beat a tattoo. The trap swings open from above, and into it fall three bodies. Not reaching the floor, they hang, swinging on ropes. Thin little streams of liquid flow onto the floor. The sleeping pirates wake up. No one screams.*

**Captain.** Lord, when will you bring me unto you?

*He approaches the bodies, in order to see their faces.*

**Captain.** Arkady? Arkady? Why are you punishing me like this? Why didn't you come with me when I was calling you? You would still be alive. And why did you come now, you wretched little boy? Why did you come after me? I hate you. It was you I remembered. You alone. You, you, Arkady! My son. A-a-a-a!

*He spitefully tugs on Arkady's body by the legs. He weeps.*

**Youth** (*approaching the Captain*). Captain, don't.

**Captain.** Yes, I'm the Captain. I remember, I remember. I have to save those who remain. Yes, yes – right away. Just let me cry a little bit – two seconds. I haven't cried since the day that my canary died. Her name was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A tomcat throttled her. This was back before the First World War. Ever since then I've been allergic to tomcats. Where is Tubik, give him to me – I'll tear apart that creature, I'll snap off his head, I'll gobble up his ears.

**Youth.** He's not to blame.

**Captain.** Everyone's to blame. You, her, him. You're used to just me being to blame? Hunh? You've gotten used to that? Yes? Everyone's to blame. And Tubik – more than anyone else. Only dogs are free from blame.

**Youth.** Why is Tubik to blame?

**Captain.** Because he's not a dog. If I'd had a dog, which lays its head on its knees and stays quiet – I wouldn't have dragged myself out to sea, I wouldn't have gotten mixed up with this mutilated crew, this rickety old gang. I want Tubik to bark. Bark!

**Youth.** Stop it, Captain. We need your hysterics like a hole in the head. Come to your senses. You went out to sea on the "R.M.S. Carpathia." Do you yourself understand what that means? You went out to sea on the "R.M.S. Carpathia"! Why bring up canaries? And you did get mixed up with a mutilated crew and a rickety old gang. And now you must rescue this rickety gang. You, Captain. And no one else.

**Captain.** I remember. I must at least rescue those that I can. Yes, yes – right now. (*In a different voice.*) Globe, what were you telling me about a hanged man's finger?

**Youth.** When? Ah, I remember. When you were asking me what I know. But that's a superstition after all. It's just a superstition.

**Captain.** Repeat it, what were you saying?

**Youth.** I said that long ago some thieves believed in the soporific power of the finger of a hanged pirate. Allegedly, if such a finger, dried out, was set on fire in front of a house that the thief was planning to rob, everyone in the house would fall asleep.

**Captain.** Globe, we need one of Arkady's fingers. We'll put the guards to sleep and run away.

**Youth** (*stepping back*). Captain, you are insane. I can't take anymore.

*The bodies begin to slowly rise upward.*

**Captain.** My dear Globe, we need to do this. Help me.

*The Captain leaps up and seizes Arkady's body by the legs. He pulls himself up, grabbing him by the hand. He attempts to break off a finger. The body continues to rise upward.*

**Captain.** Globe, grab me by the legs.

*The Youth, after an internal struggle, leaps up and grabs the legs of the Captain, who clings to the hanged man's finger with superhuman strength.*

**Captain.** Help him, if you want to live.

*The pirates rush toward the Youth and hang onto him in a picturesque cluster. For a few moments, the Captain manages to continue holding onto the finger, and the whole composition, together with the corpses, rises upward. Finally, the Captain falls. A small pile of bodies. The wailing of the Captain. The trap closes.*

**Captain.** I didn't get it! I didn't get it!

*He breaks free from the pile of bodies, handing out punches left and right. He runs around the quarters, hitting everything that comes within reach of his fist.*

**Servant.** It was impossible.

**Captain.** You're a fool. You're a monkey. You're a venal monkey. I had a chance to save your little red butt, and I didn't hold onto it. That's it, I didn't hold on! I let go. I dragged you all into this madness and I've lost. I, Captain of the "R.M.S. Carpathia," have lost. Ahhhhh.

*The door clanks open. Enter the Antagonist. There is little that is human in his appearance.*

**Antagonist.** Preevyet, you murderers and thieves. (*He points at the Youth.*) Mogu yah vahm pahmoch? Can I help you? I've heard that the ethnographic expedition of the Captain of the "Carpathia" has suffered a disaster?

**Captain.** Yes, certain difficulties have arisen.

**Antagonist.** Ah, hello, Captain. I have to tell you that I've been observing your efforts with much interest. Not just professionally either. You automatically elicit sympathy. And there's a lot in your paradoxical actions that I recognize and understand. There's even a kind of familiar feeling that arises... Stupid, isn't it?

**Captain.** Well no, why?!

**Antagonist.** My function is simple – to track you down and kill you. I've managed to get more than halfway there. But I feel like throwing my weight around. Do you understand me?

**Captain.** Absolutely.

**Antagonist.** I need your help. You must agree to play a little game.

**Captain.** We agree.

**Antagonist.** I love the quick and impertinent ones. It's a good thing that I'm proposing a fair game. You can only win – there's nothing to lose. I have of course my own selfish aesthetic interest, but that, I think, shouldn't really discourage you. The game is called "Think of a Desire." The task – for all of you – is to think up one desire. My task is to fulfill it. Naturally – within the bounds of reason. If anything's unclear – you can ask one question.

**Captain.** Are we to assume that the full name of the game is "Think of Your Last Desire"?

**Antagonist.** But of course. I'll note that you have rather clumsily used up your right to a question. To be charitable I'll add that it's desirable to grant your desires... Hm, a pun. It's desirable to wait until tomorrow morning to state your desires. Good luck, you murderers of captains of peaceful merchant ships. *Preevyet!*

*He exits. The door closes with a creak.*

**Youth.** I'll give you a thousand-to-one odds that I'm acquainted with his dad. (*To the Servant.*) You wanna bet?

**Servant.** Get lost!

*The light goes out.*

**Servant.** Eh, that's not what I meant.

### *Scene Thirteen*

*Everything is as before. No one is asleep. The Young Woman is breastfeeding the Dumpling. The Japanese Man is meditating. The Old Man is in a deep marasmus. The rest are thinking up their last desires.*

**Servant.** I'll take as much as they give us. I'll stuff myself to the point not just that I don't want to live anymore, but that a dead man would beg to throw up.

**Youth.** Maybe it's better to choose the method of execution? I don't like hanging – it seems sick to me.

**Captain.** They say that you don't feel a thing. Something gets pinched there. Certain nerves.

**Servant.** Just don't act it out.

**Captain.** Maybe we shouldn't whistle indoors either?

**Servant.** Don't laugh at that.

**Youth.** But couldn't we ask to become fluent in some obscure Turkic language? I read about something like that once.

**Captain.** No! You can't pull the wool over this one's eyes. They have to be real desires. Desires that he'll consider feasible. But, along with that, they have to be desires that will save us.

**Youth.** Is that still possible?

**Captain.** This guy has the swagger of a provincial Mephistopheles. And the horned one has a custom of leaving a loophole. Always. So that when the person doesn't take advantage of it, when it's already too late – he can stick his nose in it. Right in it. There, look – the way out was so close. Blame yourself, you could have found it. We don't have an excuse for not wriggling through that chink. We know full well that it exists.

**Old Man.** But I'm still going to ask that they let me live to see the day when humans land on Mars. They won't refuse an old man. I only have a little time left.

**Captain.** Grandpa, what are you saying?

**Old Man.** What's wrong?

**Captain.** Have you forgotten what I promised you? About Mars? About the fact that you will go there? That you will get there first? Have you forgotten?

**Old Man.** I haven't forgotten. But I see that circumstances have changed. I cannot insist that you keep this promise.

**Captain.** You have to insist. You are obligated to insist. All that I have left is the desire to keep promises. And the Lord God knows that there are quite a few.

**Old Man.** Is there any hope?

**Captain.** Who cares about hope?! You're as good as on Mars already. Let me think for a second. What do we need? I'll figure it out right now. OK, listen. If Grandpa is going to Mars, then naturally he can't use that as his desire. He has to think one up right away. (*To the Old Man.*) You will use his desire. (*He points to the Servant.*) Does everyone agree? I won't hear any objections. Excellent. Grandpa, you want a lot of vodka. Enough for both you and him. (*To the Servant.*) And then you'll give your desire to me. All right?

**Servant.** All right. But I don't understand what the point is.

*The Captain springs up and begins to bang on the door.*

**Captain.** Grandpa has thought of his last desire. He wants a whole lot of vodka. A whole lot. A whole lot. Vodka! Vodka! Vodka!

*Sailors bring in several cases of vodka. The pirates are stunned into silence.*

**Youth.** Just like that?

**Captain** (*to the Servant*). How much do you need? Take it.

**Servant** (*pulling one bottle from a box*). I can't drink more than one bottle of this crap anyway. Even with one, you won't recognize me the next day.

**Youth.** That's the truth.

**Captain.** OK, we're losing time. There's enough fuel. Grandpa, sit over here. We'll conduct our pre-launch preparations.

*The Captain surrounds the Old Man with bottles, attempting to simulate a rocket on the launch pad. He hands the Old Man a bottle.*

**Captain.** Listen carefully. You've been resurrected. You are Yuri Gagarin. You can polish off a liter of vodka. At each of my commands you take a mouthful. Capiche?

**Old Man.** Capiche.

**Captain.** By the time we get through a liter, you'll be on Mars. And we're off!

*The Old Man takes a swig.*

**Captain.** Fine, we'll count that one as practice. Now let's get serious. Attention, attention, attention. This is the control tower at the launch pad "Floating Suitcase." I'm checking for readiness number one.

**Old Man.** Roger, readiness number one.

*The Old Man takes a gulp.*

**Captain.** Key to start.

**Old Man.** Roger, key to start.

*The Old Man takes a gulp.*

**Captain.** Ignition.

**Old Man.** Roger, ignition.

*He takes a gulp.*

**Captain.** Blast off!

*The Old Man stands up and takes a gulp.*

**Old Man.** Blast off!

*The roar of a rocket taking off is heard.*

**Captain.** Ten seconds, all systems stable.

*The Old Man takes a gulp and a step.*

Twenty seconds, all systems stable.

*Gulp. Step.*

Grandpa, you are in outer space. Go around the box and head for the Moon.

**Old Man.** Good heavens, what stars. Roger, head for the Moon!

*Gulp. He goes around the box.*

**Captain.** Brilliant. Now use the force of lunar gravity to adjust your trajectory. Don't step on Tubik.

**Old Man.** Roger, adjust trajectory!

*Gulp. Step. Tubik, angry that he got stepped on, meows and runs away.*

**Captain.** A minor accident. But everything's fine. You're already approaching Mars. Activate reverse thrusters.

**Old Man.** Roger, activate reverse thrusters.

*Gulp. Step.*

**Captain.** Prepare for landing.

**Old Man.** For landing.

*Gulp, step.*

**Captain.** The capsule has landed on the surface of Mars. Prepare to exit the orbiter module.

**Old Man** (*taking a gulp*). Roger!

**Captain.** Grandpa, the hatch is open. All you need to do is take one step. Bid us farewell.

**Old Man.** I had a good time with you fellows. I ran like a little goat. I fought like a little boy. Come visit me. I'll be here waiting for you. I love you all.

**Servant.** See you, old timer. Don't be angry with me.

**Youth.** Goodbye, grandpa. I won't forget you.

**Young Woman.** I'm very happy for you. Farewell.

**Captain.** For Tubik, the Dumpling, and the Japanese Man, the luxury of intercourse by means of human speech is currently inaccessible. But they also bid you farewell, I'm sure. They love you. I also loved you, Grandpa. Farewell, my son. Don't forget to say something for the history books.

**Old Man.** Goodbye, dad. I won't forget things anymore.

**Captain.** The crew of the space ship "Homeland 2," which consists of the cosmonaut-researcher and Hero of the Soviet Union, Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin, is directed to abandon the orbiter module and walk out onto the surface of the fourth planet of the solar system.

**Old Man.** Roger, abandon module!

*Gulp. Step.*

**Captain.** Speak.

**Old Man.** That's one giant leap for mankind, but that's one small, one very small step, an insanely small step for Man!

*The lights go out.*

*Scene Fourteen*

*A little lamp glows. The Old Man and two angels of death at his feet sit motionless, gazing at the Martian horizon. The Young Woman is breastfeeding the Dumpling. The Japanese Man is meditating. The rest are thinking about their own things. The Antagonist bursts in with a samurai sword under his arm.*

**Antagonist.** Where is the Mars-walker? What'dja do with you the old man? What the hell, have you become total savages? You didn't eat him, did you?

*He walks near the Old Man, looks right at him but doesn't notice him.*

**Antagonist.** I don't like any of this. What's it for? Where is he? *(To the Captain.)* Why are you silent?

**Captain.** Grandpa is on Mars. He was first. I sent him there. I think that he's already died – I didn't give him a spacesuit.

**Antagonist.** You're a lousy joker, Captain. But since you're joking for the last time, I'm ready to believe that this is a good joke. We're meeting in 30 minutes. On the deck.

*The Antagonist exits.*

**Servant.** Well that's it.

**Youth.** I haven't even thought up a desire.

**Servant.** Perhaps I'll start. "Why are you spazzing out? You are the terror of the seas, not a bunch of headless chickens." *(He spits.)*

*He opens a bottle of vodka.*

**Captain.** What did you say? Don't you dare get drunk. Give it here.

*He takes away the bottle of vodka from the Servant and hurls it against the wall.*

**Captain.** You better repeat what you just said.

**Servant.** What the hell? Wasn't that supposed to be my last desire? I don't have anything left in life. You've taken away everything, Captain. And no one knows why. Because of some paranoid fantasies you have. To keep some pointless iron creature from getting rusty, you are murdering your children. *(Sharply.)* Give me back my vodka.

**Captain.** You won't get a single ounce. And if you ever again waste our time, of which we have so little, I'll knock your brains out. Repeat what you said.

*The servant is silent.*

**Captain.** Repeat it.

**Servant.** For some reason I remembered your words: "Why are you spazzing out like a bunch of headless chickens?" (*He spits twice.*) And once again (*he spits*). Give me the vodka so I can die without my pants on.

**Captain.** I won't give you the vodka. I need you. Ladies and gentlemen! I need you all. I am obliged to announce that you now have a chance to see another day.

*Everyone springs up.*

**Captain.** Did you get a good look at the sword that monster was holding? Globe, I'm prepared to give you odds of one to a thousand that it's a little shaper than the razor with which you were trying to open up your veins yesterday.

**Youth.** Where'd it come from?

**Captain.** That doesn't matter. What matters is something else. What matters is that God exists and he is just.

*He kicks the foot of the meditating Japanese Man.*

**Captain.** Get up, you samurai putz. I finally understand why you're needed in this play. We have very little time, guys. And I still have lots to explain to you.

### *Scene Fifteen*

*The deck of the Frigate. Everything is set up for an execution. The sailors are lined up. The beating of a drum. The Antagonist walks along the ranks of the pirates.*

**Antagonist** (*pointing his sword at the Servant*). You?

**Servant.** I want the first one to die to be whomever the Captain indicates.

**Antagonist.** Granted. (*Pointing his sword at the Youth*). You?

**Youth.** I want the first one of us to have his head chopped off.

**Antagonist.** Granted. (*Pointing his sword at the Japanese Man.*) You?

**Captain** (*for the Japanese Man*). This wordless creature requests that he be permitted to play the role of executioner.

**Antagonist.** Granted. (*Pointing his sword at the infant*). What's he want?

**Young Woman.** He requests that you permit the head of the first one of us to be chopped off with your sword.

**Antagonist.** Granted. In your desires I sense a sly calculus and a single will. What are you after, Captain? Are you really still holding out hope?

**Captain.** It's you that gives me hope. I think you won't refuse to play the game I'm going to propose. Don't you enjoy winning?

**Antagonist.** Let's wait and see. (*To the Young Woman.*) What do you want for yourself?

**Young Woman.** Allow us to bid farewell before the...

**Antagonist.** I am astounded by the poverty of your imaginations. Say your goodbyes.

*The Antagonist walks away. The drums fall silent. The splashing of waves and cries of seagulls are heard. The pirates bid one another farewell.*

**Captain** (*embracing the Servant*). Don't be angry with your daddy. He's a bit of a nutcase.

**Servant**. You are the very best dad of all the ones I've had. Just tell me this – that whole situation with the nail file. What was that? Did you really just make a mistake?

**Captain**. Can't you see I'm paying for that? I'm human too.

**Servant**. I thought so.

**Captain** (*embracing the Youth*). Goodbye, my son.

**Youth**. It won't be me?

**Captain**. No.

**Youth**. I knew it. What have you got planned? What am I to do?

**Captain**. You'll see yourself.

**Captain** (*embracing the Japanese Man*). Well, everything's simple with you. Os??

**Japanese Man**. Os!!!

**Captain**. Just don't let us down.

*The Captain approaches the Young Woman.*

**Captain**. Little daughter, don't cry. You aren't going to die today.

**Young Woman**. Anyone but him. Let me instead.

**Captain**. Calm down. Don't drop the Dumpling.

**Young Woman**. The milk never came. And Tubik didn't learn how to bark.

**Captain**. It'll all happen in the place where they're going. Farewell, Dumpling.

**Young Woman**. Meaning?

**Captain**. It doesn't mean anything.

**Young Woman**. Daddy, do you still remember Katja?

**Captain**. Yes.

**Young Woman**. Thank you.

**Captain** (*taking Tubik into his hands*). And you're jingling your chains? Jingle them. It's a pity they didn't allot you a desire. It makes it look like you weren't with us. Yet you're the only one in the crew who runs on a leash like a Doberman. It's true I promised to put Globe on a leash too. But then I changed my mind. Let him live. (*He sneezes.*) I'm allergic to you. Farewell. It's too bad you didn't become a dog. (*To the Antagonist.*) I'm ready. Achoo.

*The Antagonist and the sailors appear. There are drum taps.*

**Antagonist**. Your last desire, Captain.

**Captain**. I think you're going to like it. If I know you well, you won't be able to refuse it.

**Antagonist**. Speak.

**Captain**. Promise me, achoo, that you will set free those of my comrades, whom I manage to walk past...

**Antagonist**. No-o-o.

**Captain**. ...after my head is chopped off!

*Everyone shudders. The drum roll ceases.*

**Antagonist** (*after a long pause*). Granted.

*The Antagonist extends his sword in its scabbard to the Japanese Man. The Japanese Man cannot bring himself to take it. The Captain tenderly punches him around the ribs.*

**Captain.** When something is offered, take it. Just you try to spoil my arrangement.

*The Captain kneels. The Japanese Man, having taken the sword, is completely transformed. Now standing before us is a true descendant of the samurais. He unsheathes the blade, gets into a stance next to the Captain, positions the blade above his neck, and freezes.*

**Captain** (kneeling). Forgive me, guys, if this doesn't work.

**Youth.** Don't you dare apologize, don't you dare.

**Captain.** Don't worry, my son. I'm just joking. After all, I know what I'm capable of.

*The drum roll begins.*

**Young Woman.** But, dad, are you really the Captain who rescued people from the Titanic?

**Captain.** I don't remember. Achoo.

*The Japanese Man severs the Captain's head.*

*The Captain stands up. He takes the first step. He takes a second step. He takes a third step. The angels of death walk close behind him. A fourth step. A fifth. A sixth. The pirates that the Captain passes can pray, cry out, count the steps, or simply stand stock-still. In any case, it's not for us to understand what they understand and feel at this moment. A seventh step. An eighth. A ninth. The captain almost falls. He straightens up. A tenth step. The Captain has passed all of his people and animals and goes further. An angel of death pushes him on the back. The Captain falls.*

### Scene Sixteen

*The sailors have disappeared. The angels of death have disappeared with the Captain. The pirates and the Antagonist are standing. One can sense that they've been standing a long time.*

**Servant** (to the Youth). Raise it up. (He points to the Captain's head, which is lying near the Youth's feet.)

**Youth.** Me?

**Servant.** You! Now it's you! He chose you.

**Youth.** I don't want to.

**Servant.** You're not allowed to refuse. One can't refuse to be the captain of the Carpathia. If that happens, the world will crack.

**Youth.** How do you know?

**Servant.** I was the radio operator who received the distress signal from the Titanic as it was sinking. I was the only radio operator around. I was the only one who didn't want to sleep that night and, out of boredom, I was rolling the radio dial. They weren't as good to me as they were

to him. They granted me a long life too, but they left me my memory. I probably sinned a lot. I've sold my right.

**Antagonist.** He sold it to me. Now I'm the radio operator of the Carpathia, I'm the son of the Carpathia's Captain. And I'm the enemy of the Carpathia's Captain. But now her Captain is you. Take the head.

**Youth.** Is it also possible to buy the right of the Carpathia's Captain?

**Antagonist.** Yes. Take it and sell it to me.

**Youth.** What could make a person sell that right? There's not a high enough price.

**Antagonist.** There is.

**Youth** (*to the Servant*). What did you sell yours for?

**Servant.** You'll understand before I can answer. Take the head.

*The Youth picks up the head of the Captain. Tubik barks.*

**Youth.** Achoo!

**Young Woman.** Now you're not my brother.

**Youth.** Now I'm not your brother.

**Young Woman.** Things have gone from bad to worse. Hello, dad.

**Youth.** No, I don't want it.

**Young Woman.** Dad, I've got milk now. Do you see? I can show you, I don't have to be shy with you – after all, you saw me when I was a little girl. Have a taste, it's sweet. (*She smears the Youth's lips with milk.*) Your son likes it. Look, he's laughing.

**Youth.** I don't want to be your father. I don't want to be your brother. I want to be married to you.

**Young Woman.** Well what's stopping you?

*Pause.*

**Youth.** Hey, I'm prepared to sell the right of the Captain of the R.M.S. Carpathia, I'm prepared to sell the right of the son of the Carpathia's captain!

**Antagonist.** How much?

**Youth.** Only not to you. Forgive me, my son, I cannot sell it to you. But I know who I will sell this head to. Hey, you, what do you think about the most profitable deal you've ever made? I'm offering you a little white piece of memory – each of you will get a small clean scrap. You'll always be able to hide under it, like under your grandmother's blanket, and you won't be there anymore. And what's more, I'll sell you an allergy to fur and the right to take care of Tubik the cat. And I'll also sell you something that will rouse you in the night and pursue you on the sea in old galoshes with walking half-corpses instead of sailors. And something else too... If you're interested, you know how to get a hold of me. I'll be waiting! Consider it yours!

*He starts to hurl the Captain's head into the audience.*

*The head explodes in the air. A shower of confetti.*

**CURTAIN**