

The voyage of the  
*Demeter*

by Majid Salim

Based on *Dracula* by Bram Stoker

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This play is dedicated to my family

## Characters

|                |                            |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| CAPTAIN RIMSKY | Captain of the Demeter     |
| PETROVSKY      | First Mate of the Demeter  |
| OLGAREN        | Second Mate of the Demeter |
| CHEKOV         | A Sailor                   |
| ILYANOV        | A Sailor                   |
| RUBIKOV        | A Sailor                   |
| DRACULA        | The undead vampire         |

# Scene One

*The scene is backlit by a pair of eyes staring into middle distance. Eventually, from across the span of centuries. DRACULA speaks.*

DRACULA: I was murdered.

*The eyes fade.*

VOICEOVER: Captain's Rimsky's log, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1897. The Demeter was chartered four days ago by British North Sea Shipping Limited, to sail to London. I hired three hands and two mates to travel on the voyage, and was particularly careful in my choices: I only took those I had sailed with before or who came with a personal recommendation. The reason for this is that our voyage was one of utmost importance. Our cargo is of the most unusual variety imaginable: seventeen crates of soil from Romania.

*Lights rise to the inside of the ship. The five sailors are seated around a long table, waiting for their food to arrive. PETROVSKY, the first mate, is a giant of a man with a temper and natural authority. OLGAREN, the second mate, is more of a thinker. CHEKOV is a studious man who reads the Bible regularly. ILYANOV is a happy go lucky junior member of the crew. RUBIKOV is also a young sailor who is inexperienced. CHEKOV and RUBIKOV are playing chess, OLGAREN is carving a small piece of ivory, and PETROVSKY is waiting for his food. The mood is jolly and convivial: CHEKOV and RUBIKOV exchange inaudible banter and OLGAREN hums to himself.*

VOICEOVER: Today we set sail at noon after a day of loading cargo. East wind, fresh. We are seven hours out of Varna.

PETROVSKY: I'm starving.

RUBIKOV: It's freezing. I want hot food. That shift on the deck froze my hands.

PETROVSKY: Ah, fuck your hands. You should have worn mittens.

RUBIKOV: I left mine in Varna.

OLGAREN: Speaking of hands, did you here about Mikhail Stenorov? I bumped into someone who had spoken to him in Varna. You know, Stenorov - he sailed on the Mereidra with Captain Rimsky.

*PETROVSKY and RUBIKOV nod in acknowledgement.*

OLGAREN: He lost one of his hands.

RUBIKOV: How?

OLGAREN: In a fight in port in Astrakhan. He was in a bar by himself, with a large crowd of locals. They were moaning about potatoes. They get all their potatoes shipped from rural Russia, and in the latest shipment they were all small and tough. So a debate about poor farming in rural Russia eventually becomes all about how Russian farmers are whoresons. Stenorov, he comes from a line of farmers. It might be because of that he started sailing when he was fourteen. Anyway, he's a little drunk and feeling proud, so he says to one of the Astrakhanis, keep talking like that and I'll kick the shit out of you. You know, it was one of those situations where you're outnumbered and know you might take a beating, but you feel like breaking a nose or two before they finally knock you right out. So he squares up to the biggest one and punches him square in the face. The problem is, instead of piling on top of him, the Astrakhanis say nothing. Not a roar or a shout out of any of them, no beer spilt, nothing. The big Astrakhani he punched wipes a little blood off his lip and then straightens up again. 'Right', he whispers softly, 'Let's show him something.' At that point Stenorov, who isn't that bright even when he's sober, works out that this isn't your normal port brawl but something a bit more sinister, and he might be in trouble. The Astrakhanis hold him down while one of them heats an axe blade on the fire. When it was red, they roll up his sleeve, and hack his hand right off his arm.

RUBIKOV: God Almighty. That's horrible. What happened then?

*Olgaren shrugs.*

OLGAREN: Then they just kicked him out of the bar. He got back on ship and had a fever from the infection all the way home. He's never sailing again. I don't know what Stenorov might do. Last I heard he was trying to drink himself to death in Varna.

PETROVSKY: Hmm... [*elbows OLGAREN*] That'll take him twice as long with one hand.

*All laugh raucously.*

RUBIKOV: Seriously, don't crack jokes, that was a pretty evil thing to do. Astrakhanis, I don't know them.

PETROVSKY: I know. They must be a tough bunch.

RUBIKOV: An evil bunch.

PETROVSKY: Oh, don't talk to me about evil people. I heard a story about Pacific Islanders. Some of them are cannibals: if you're wrecked on an island there, and they don't understand your language, they eat you alive.

RUBIKOV: Eeugh.

PETROVSKY: And in the Urals, amongst the farming fold, they say that when famine hits they will eat anything. Boiled dogs heads, fungus growing on their doorsteps ... they say they even rob the graves of the recently departed to have meat to put on the table for their children.

RUBIKOV: Did you ever hear about that madman chopping up prostitutes in London?

PETROVSKY: Yeah, I heard about him? What did they call him?

RUBIKOV: The Ripper, I think. After that, there were all sorts of stories you heard told about the other evil things going on in London. Like men who worship Satan, who sacrifice children on altars to him, the Prince of Darkness...

CHEKOV: Don't talk about the Devil.

RUBIKOV: What?

CHEKOV: Don't talk about the Devil, you know it brings bad luck. As for the men in London who worship him, they are damned. The Lord have mercy.

PETROVSKY: Hmm, let's hope we don't meet anybody like that in Whitby.

*The CAPTAIN enters with ILYANOV.*

RUBIKOV: Captain!

*All the men rise, and the CAPTAIN lowers them with a gesture of his hand.*

CAPTAIN: As you were men.

RUBIKOV: Captain, I forgot to file my life insurance in Varna. I meant to mention this earlier...

CAPTAIN: Forgot? That's no good Rubikov. Nobody likes a sailor who can't keep his documents in order.

RUBIKOV: Sorry, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Still, I don't imagine it will be a problem this once, although expect the insurance beurocrats to get annoyed at you next time.

*Polite laughter.*

PETROVSKY: Captain, I've been meaning to ask you about our cargo. I saw the cargo inventory earlier, and it said we are carrying boxes of ... Romanian soil?

OLGAREN: Yeah, I know. Those Englishmen are nuts. Whoever's selling *soil* to them must be making a fortune. It selling soil works I might go into business selling them seawater.

CAPTAIN: Ha! You'd make a million I'm sure. Seriously those, we are carrying seventeen boxes of Romanian soil, total weight three tons. A solicitor is going to take possession of them in London. They are apparently required for a bontannical experiment. The lawyer was very precise in his letter; on no account must any of the boxes be opened, as they are carefully sealed and if any are opened the sea air might dampen the soil. So no prying.

CHEKOV: Romanian soil, eh? What part of Romania?

CAPTAIN: Transylvania, I think.

CHEKOV: Never been there, but if I ever do I'll be sure to get a box of that soil for myself. Shipping common soil ... [*raises eyebrows*]

ILYANOV: I know. Anyone would think we were real landlubbers!

*Raucous laughter.*

CAPTAIN: Never trust a man who can't tie a rope.

*Lights dim.*

## Scene Two

Voiceover: Captain Rimsky's log, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1897. Made good speed with a northerly wind and arrived at Bosphorus on 11<sup>th</sup> July. Boarded by Turkish customs officers. Backsheesh paid. All correct and under way by 4pm. Passed through Dardanelles on 12<sup>th</sup> July. Boarded by more customs officers from a flagboat of guarding squadron. Backsheesh paid again. The work of officers was thorough but quick, as they wanted us off soon. All sails set in a good easterly, and we passed into Archipelago by dark.

*Lights raise. Crew are eating their meal. PETROVSKY looks irritable, and stabs at his food. RUBIKOV enters wearing a heavy coat, sits down and joins the meal.*

OLGAREN: How's things, Rubikov.

RUBIKOV: Captain says that with all sails set we should pass Cape Matapan tomorrow late afternoon. Saw some clouds to the east, might rain again.

OLGAREN: Another freezing night then.

RUBIKOV: And no vodka to cheer us up: poor us. [*Pause*] Incidentally, has anyone been on the cargo deck today?

CHEKOV: I was earlier. Why?

RUBIKOV: Were you inspecting the cargo?

CHEKOV: No. The Captain said the boxes must remain shut.

RUBIKOV: Are you certain?

CHEKOV: Yes. Why?

RUBIKOV: I was down there to get a new rope from the store, and noticed that one of the boxes has been tampered with.

PETROVSKY: What?

RUBIKOV: It looks like it has been opened. I told the Captain, he might mention it to all of us. He seemed irritated.

PETROVSKY: [*To CHEKOV*] Idiot! What the hell were you tampering with the cargo for?

CHEKOV: [*Defensively*] It wasn't me. I've seen soil, I'm not interested in seeing any more.



PETROVSKY: Well who else was it? What were you doing, planting a garden? A ship's no place to get green fingers.

CHEKOV: I said it wasn't me!

PETROVSKY: The Captain said that the boxes shouldn't be tampered with you bible bashing fool. Now one of them is open the soil might get damp. The lawyer we're delivering to will chew our heads off!

CHEKOV: [*Angry now*] For the last time, damn you, it wasn't me! I'm not going to be blamed for damaging the cargo! I'm talking to the Captain!

*Chekov storms out.*

ILYANOV: Ah, Petrovsky, you were harsh on him then. If he says he didn't do it, he didn't do it.

PETROVSKY: The Captain left specific orders, no prying. [*Calming*] But maybe I was harsh on him. I'll apologise later. Oh what the hell, I don't know what's wrong with me. I've been feeling irritable all day. Maybe it's the cold.

OLGAREN: Get out of the wrong side of your hammock?

PETROVSKY: Maybe. I don't know, I've been feeling tetchy all day. But if it wasn't Chekov which one of you was it? It wasn't you was it Rubikov?

RUBIKOV: No, first mate.

PETROVSKY: Hmm. If I find out it was I'll strangle you.

OLGAREN: Enough, Petrovsky. It's just a box of earth. Let's eat.

PETROVSKY: Damned cargo. It's never a good omen if you cargo is spoiled in the journey.

OLGAREN: It was probably one of those damned Turk customs officers. Forget it.

*The meal continues.*

OLAGREN: [*To ILYANOV*] How's your day been?

ILYANOV: You know what? I've had a bad day too. I hardly slept last night. I don't know what, but I feel ... nervous. I keep on checking the ropes to make sure the sails are set tight, keep watching the skies for clouds, in case a storm is coming ... I just can't relax.

PETROVSKY: I know. Something's wrong on board this ship. I can feel it in my entrails. I never feel like this normally. It must be a bad omen. I'm sure there is bad luck ahead.

OLGAREN: They say that ship's are always struck by bad omens before the Kraken strikes.

ILYANOV: The Kraken? You mean the gigantic sea monster?

OLGAREN: Yes, the terror of the seas. The Bishop of Bergen says he saw it once. It's a quarter of a mile nose to tail, has teeth four feet long. It devours ships in two or three bites. They say sometimes it emerges from the depths and you see it sunning itself on the surface of the ocean.

RUBIKOV: I wonder what you could do, if attacked by a monster that large, what defence you might have against a beast that dreadful. Do you think they could ever build guns big enough to kill something that big?

OLGAREN: Probably not. There's probably nothing you could do if attacked by a monster that big. They say nature is red in tooth and claw ... the ship would just be overwhelmed by its ferocity and you'd die.

RUBIKOV: Yes, but you'd die if a lion attacked you, until they invented the hunting rifle. Now you can kill one from two hundred yards away. Surely men are more lethal than any animal, even one with four foot teeth. Eventually!

PETROVSKY: [*Seriously*] That's true Rubikov. But Kraken is natural evil, and there will always be evil. And no matter how lethal men are we will always be afflicted by it, and there will always be nothing we can do.

RUBIKOV: [*Sceptically*] Evil? Pah! That's a Biblical notion. We're at the turn of the twentieth century and Biblical concepts should all be obsolete. We're scientists now and there is no problem that cannot be solved with the application of science.

PETROVSKY: Can a scientist explain what happened to Stenorov's hand in Astrakhan? There is evil, but we give it different names. But evil afflicts men. Tell me Rubikov, how would you feel if you

were being hunted through a forest by a pack of wolves, miles from help?

RUBIKOV: A pack of wolves? I've never really thought about it. It's unlikely in this day and age. [*A pause as he thinks*] Well, I suppose I would be terrified. I'd feel vulnerable and defenceless. Frightened of being eaten alive I suppose.

PETROVSKY: Then you know how evil makes men feel. Evil terrifies men, it makes men small. It can be found in many places. What can you do in the face of evil? Nothing, you can do nothing. As for the Kraken, if it wanted to tear this ship in half, and pick us out of the ocean to consume, there is nothing you and I could do, my friend. That is the nature of evil, and even if they could build a cannon big enough to kill a monster that size, there will always be evil somewhere. So don't subscribe to the idea that Man can conquer all too fully, Rubikov. Man may have telegrams, the steam engine, and airships, but he is still haunted by the spectres of his ancestors, who crossed themselves and prayed in fear of forces they could not explain or conquer.

OLGAREN: That's the truth. Try telling a shark that human beings are all-powerful when it's biting you in half. Man is neither the strongest nor the most ferocious creature on Earth.

RUBIKOV: All right. But if you want to define evil that way then there are lots of evil things. The Black Death was evil. Earthquakes are evil. Can you say that?

PETROVSKY: Yes you can, and you would too if you'd lived through one that destroyed everything you hold dear.

*RUBIKOV concedes the point. The argument and discussion have sombered the crew's mood. ILYANOV tries to break the ice.*

ILYANOV: Anyway, what are we making ourselves miserable talking about evil for? This stew tasted like a skunk died in it, and I ate every single mouthful.

*He laughs raucously but nobody laughs with him.*

OLGAREN: You always complain about the bloody food Ivanov. I'm going for some fresh air.

*Lights dim.*

## Scene Three

Voiceover: Captain Rimsky's log, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1897. I have spoken to Chekov, who assures me he in no way tampered with the cargo box that was found opened. We have to assume it was the Turkish customs officers, when nobody was looking. We will apologise for the damage to our receiver in London.

Passed Cape Matapan three hours ago. Something seems to have happened to the mood of the ship. Since the argument between First Mate Petrovsky and Chekov everybody has been tense, but something else seems to be happening, something I cannot put my finger on. The crew seemed stressed all the time; nervous, scared even, but won't speak out. We are now eight days out of Varna.

*Lights rise. The CAPTAIN is plotting a course with callipers on a map. OLGAREN enters. He is pale as a ghost.*

CAPTAIN: Ah, Second mate Olgaren.

OLGAREN: Captain.

CAPTAIN: How are the men?

OLGAREN: The men are fine. Captain, I ... I think we have a stowaway on board.

CAPTAIN: A stowaway?

OLGAREN: I ... I ... saw someone.

CAPTAIN: Who? When?

OLGAREN: During my watch I had been sheltering behind the deck house, as it was raining hard. I saw a tall, thin man – definitely not one of the crew – come up the companion way, go along the deck forward, and disappear. I followed cautiously, but when I got to the bows I found nobody. All the hatchways were bolted shut Captain! He just disappeared!

CAPTAIN: First the cargo tampered with, and now a stowaway! It couldn't be. Petrovsky was right, this ship is cursed with bad luck.

OLGAREN: The two could be interrelated, Captain.

*CHEKOV enters.*

CAPTAIN: Chekov, there may be a stowaway on board! Olgaren saw someone. Have you seen anything out of the ordinary on your watch?

CHEKOV: A stowaway? No Captain, I've seen nothing. That would explain the tampering with the cargo.

OLGAREN: Yes, he may have opened a box to hide in it. With your permission I'm going to get the men and order a general search of the ship.

CAPTAIN: I don't know if that's such a good idea, Olgaren. Are you certain it wasn't just your eyes playing tricks on you?

OLGAREN: Absolutely certain, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Hmm. [*pause*]. I know the men have been feeling subdued for a few days, there must be a reason. Maybe this would improve morale. Alright Olgaren, take Ilyanov and Rubikov and search the ship for stem to stern. Take handspikes and report back to me.

OLGAREN: Aye aye Captain.

*OLGAREN leaves.*

CAPTAIN: Chekov, I was meaning to talk to you. I've noticed the crew seem depressed for some reason. I was wondering how you feel.

CHEKOV: I don't know, Captain, it's difficult to say. I feel ... nervous. When I'm on deck I'm always looking behind my back. I don't know why, but there's just a feeling onboard... a stowaway could explain it. What will we do, Captain?

CAPTAIN: We will have to restrain him. Those three with handspikes should be enough for one rat bitten stowaway.

CHEKOV: If we do find him, it might do something to lift the mood of the ship.

CAPTAIN: Let's hope so. Rubikov's watch is about to finish, why don't you go and relieve him.

CHEKOV:           Aye aye Captain.

*The CAPTAIN resumes his chart work, but seems distracted.*

Voiceover:        Captain Rimsky's Log, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1897. We have reports of a stowaway on ship. I have ordered a full search above and below decks. As I said earlier, for some reason all the men seem stressed and depressed. I am now somewhat anxious about the crew. They are avoiding eye contact with each other. I spoke to Petrovsky this morning, and he seemed irritable and contrary. He could not make out what was wrong, but said it was *something*, and crossed himself.

I have to admit to having strange thoughts myself. When I was plotting the course this morning I suddenly, and for no reason, came upon the conviction that some malevolent force was watching me from behind. I dropped my callipers in surprise, and turned around quickly, but there was nothing there. The experience shocked and disturbed me, and I haven't been able to explain it.

If we discover a stowaway I will keep him bound, and may have to make a port call in Gibraltar to hand him over to the authorities.

*OLGAREN returns.*

OLGAREN:        Captain, have you seen Ilyanov?

CAPTAIN:        No, why?

OLGAREN:        I can't find him anywhere. Captain – he's not on the ship! He's disappeared!

CAPTAIN:        What? Get Petrovsky. I want to search the ship again. Chekov, tell the men to be assembled in one hour. I'm going to get my revolver.

*Lights dim.*

## Scene Four

*Lights raise. All the men, bar ILYANOV, are assembled and waiting for the Captain. They look tense and stressed. The Captain enters holding a revolver.*

PETROVSKY: Captain Rimsky.

CAPTAIN: Petrovsky. Men.

*He holsters the revolver.*

CAPTAIN: We have searched the ship twice now, stem to stern. There is nowhere any stowaway could have hidden from us. We are by ourselves. Ilyanov is nowhere to be found. Where is he?

PETROVSKY: He must be overboard Captain.

CAPTAIN: Well, he didn't jump, did he? We've both sailed with him before, he's not a lunatic. If he's overboard how did he get there? Who knows?

*Everybody gets the CAPTAIN'S point, and the men are hushed. They look at each other.*

CAPTAIN: Nobody knows? That's impossible. One of us must know what happened to him.

*PETROVSKY leaps to his feet, and stands next to the CAPTAIN.*

PETROVSKY: God help us. He must be overboard. He's nowhere on the ship.

CAPTAIN: I don't see where else he could be except overboard. I have my revolver and will keep it with me. From now on we take double watches.

OLGAREN: Captain, I can't believe one of us would have harmed Ilyanov. We all liked him.

CAPTAIN: Then where the hell is he?

OLGAREN: It could have been an accident – a gust of wind that knocked him over ...

CAPTAIN: No Olgaren, you know as well as I do he was a good sailor.

CHEKOV: Who last saw him?

RUBIKOV: I walked past him on watch on the aft deck at about seven pm. I didn't say anything to him. Everything seemed normal. Did anyone see him after that?

*All the men shake their heads.*

OLAGREN: Well, what are we going to do?

CAPTAIN: We take double shifts. That is all. And to whichever one of you knows what happened to Ilyanov, I have only one thing to say: I will find out what happened to him, and if any of you are guilty of a crime, I will find out, and you will be hung when we reach London.

*The CAPTAIN leaves. CHEKOV is not handling the stress very well.*

PETROVSKY: All right, we all heard.

CHEKOV: [*deeply agitated*] About Ilyanov. Someone must know what happened to him. [*looks around*]

*Nobody says a word. Everybody looks at everybody else with distrust.*

CHEKOV: That's impossible! You know that poor man, who probably died in the sea, couldn't have gone overboard by accident. Someone must have pushed him.

CHEKOV: Who would push a man overboard to drown? It's a sin.

RUBIKOV: Speaking personally, the one thing that freaks me out isn't so much that Ilyanov has disappeared as much as that the Captain's now armed. Who is he planning on shooting. And what he said freaked me out! He might as well have said 'Gentleman, one of you is a murderer!'



PETROVSKY: [Ired] Oh shut the fuck up Rubikov.

CHEKOV: He's right though. One of us, for reasons that mystify me – Ilyanov was not a bad man – one of you it sickens me to think I know – one of you may have killed him.

OLGAREN: That's enough Chekov. This kind of pressure doesn't help. I'm still certain I saw a man on the ship, someone else. But there are no stowaways on board, we know, we searched. He may have fought Ilyanov and both were hit overboard. There's something of a ghost about this ship, and maybe now the stowaway is overboard too it will go.

CHEKOV: What did he look like Olgaren? The man you saw.

OLGAREN: I didn't see his face. He was tall and thin. But I had a dream last night. In the dream I woke up, and he was staring at me, by my bed, bent over me. There was something in his red eyes that was implacable. I was terrified. I woke up from the dream, but I couldn't breathe. I lay in bed and suffocated for five, maybe six seconds after I woke up, and for a split second towards the end I thought I was going to die. It scared me senseless, that experience.

CHEKOV: Lord help us. This ship was damned with bad luck, let's pray and hope God changes our fortunes.

OLGAREN: [Recovering his composure] No thank you Chekov. I'm not a religious man.

PETROVSKY: Nor are any of us, Chekov. Let's bring this debate to an end. Rubikov, do you have anything you want to say?

RUBIKOV: No. I'm just a little unnerved.

PETROVSKY: Understandable. Olgaren? [OLAGREN shakes his head] Very well. Olgaren, you're on watch. The rest of you should get some sleep.

CHEKOV: I can't see myself sleeping. Long night.

PETROVSKY: Yes. And the Captain is armed for now so for God's sake don't get out of bunk until you are called. You know everybody has to shit themselves when the Captain's so disturbed he's carrying a sidearm.

*Lights dim.*

## Scene Five

Voiceover: Captain Rimsky's Log, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1897. Rough weather last three days, all hands busy with sails – no time to be frightened. Men seem to have forgotten their dread. Petrovsky cheerful again, and all on good terms. Praised men for work in bad weather. Passed through Gibraltar and out through Straits. All well.

*Lights raise. The CAPTAIN and OLGAREN are passing time in each others company.*

CAPTAIN: There goes the Rock.

OLGAREN: Have you ever been to Gibraltar, Captain?

CAPTAIN: Yes Olgaren. It's not as nice as Malta.

OLGAREN: I knew a girl from Malta once. She was an artist.

CAPTAIN: I would have thought a man like you might marry an artist.

OLGAREN: I couldn't handle the art history lessons she insisted on giving me, what with me being uneducated in the arts.

*The CAPTAIN grunts a laugh.*

CAPTAIN: I have to tell you I have no interest in art. Only in old ships. I think a trireme tells more about the men of Rome than any of their statues. After all, they made statues of the men who sailed those boats.

OLGAREN: Statues that don't age. I like the idea of seeing those famous Roman generals as they were, forever.

CAPTAIN: True, but just because they lived centuries ago doesn't make them cleverer, or better sailors. I could look any one of those Romans in the eye, knowing I could sail better than them. He wouldn't even know of magnetic North.

OLGAREN: True, Captain.

CAPTAIN: The thing to remember is that they might be famous men posthumously, but they never had the steamship, or even knew

the Earth was round. Alive now they would be dunces on the seas compared to you or me.

OLGAREN: That's the point I suppose. They have been famous a long time, but were just men, those ancient sailors. I wonder how it would feel to actually meet someone that old. I wonder if that's not the feeling I'm trying to get by looking at statues.

CAPTAIN: You think interesting thoughts Olgaren. Anybody would have thought you sail for the chance to read books in your hammock all day rather than for money.

*Both men laugh good humouredly. There is a peaceable pause; the CAPTAIN chews on his pipe, OLGAREN looks into the distance.*

CAPTAIN: [Clearing throat] Olgaren, about Ilyanov.

OLGAREN: Yes Captain?

CAPTAIN: About the man you think you saw. Have you given any more thought to him?

*There is a long pause as OLGAREN seeks to verbalise things he is yet thinking about.*

OLGAREN: Captain ... we're ... not bad people. Neither of us is a thief or a slave trader. On the Day of Judgement, you, like me, will look at God and say, I just did my own thing and got by, and if I'm going to Heaven I'm going to Heaven, and if I'm going to Hell, what can you say, I'm going to Hell.

CAPTAIN: What's your point Olgaren?

OLGAREN: I know you are a basically decent person Captain, as am I. We sail because we love the sea, some day we will settle down in retirement. We don't stick our necks out, we don't deserve too many troubles in life.

CAPTAIN: [*In a friendly manner*] No, but sometimes trouble stops by. You have to know how to deal with it.

OLGAREN: Yes Captain.

CAPTAIN: Anyway, like you, I'm glad our trouble is over. Thank you Second Mate Olgaren.

OLGAREN: Captain.

*Lights fade.*

# Scene Six

*Lights raise. PETROVSKY and CHEKOV are eating their meal. RUBIKOV enters.*

PETROVSKY: Rubikov, how did watch go.

RUBIKOV: Nothing to report First Mate. The Captain says we'll be in the Bay of Biscay with bad weather morning after next.

*PETROVSKY grunts.*

PETROVSKY: If the bad weather clears westerly we could be in Whitby by the 1<sup>st</sup> August.

RUBIKOV: Doing anything interesting in England?

PETROVSKY: I'm straight to Oslo, next morning.

RUBIKOV: Where is it we are destined?

PETROVSKY: Whitby. It's in the North.

RUBIKOV: Then I'll take a train down up to Edinburgh, and spend a few days there before I sign up anywhere else. What about you, Chekov, you God botherer? What are your plans?

CHEKOV: [*dryly*] Probably the same.

RUBIKOV: Yeah right, Chekov, you bible bashing nut. Why are you such a zealot?

CHEKOV: I'm not a zealous man. I have heard the Good News Saint Paul spread.

RUBIKOV: Who's got time for that?

CHEKOV: Well, it helps you when you think of your discussion of evil that you had the other night. You asked Petrovsky if they could ever build a gun big enough to kill the Kraken. Petrovsky was answering a bigger question than the one you were asking; they might kill the Kraken, but the Kraken is a natural evil, like hurricaines, and there will always be natural evil. So what do you do about it?

RUBIKOV: What is natural evil?

CHEKOV: Evil from forces of nature, like the earth, sea, or the animal kingdom.

RUBIKOV: Is that how do you define evil, Chekov?

CHEKOV: No, not exclusively. You could say there are different kinds of evil. You could argue there is natural evil, like the Kraken, if you view the Kraken as a force of nature. But most people define evil in terms of people's actions though – evil, you could say, is the ill-will in people who are free to act otherwise, and who know the moral imperatives to do so.

RUBIKOV: So how can God be good if he lets evil things happen to good people?

CHEKOV: I've read a book on that subject – I used to take it around with me – by John Stuart Mill. There are a couple of arguments in fact. You could argue that evil is compensated for later by the Lord, that it expiates sins. Or you could argue, as some do, that this is the best of all possible worlds for fulfilling the Lord's purposes, and that some evil will always exist here in spite of this. You should read the Bible more often Rubikov, it is full of guidance on these subjects and more.

RUBIKOV: I know. [Pause] There may have been evil on this boat, Chekov.

CHEKOV: I know, I know. And I wondered ... I prayed for God's help. I knew something was wrong, and for days I could have sworn I felt some malevolent presence on the ship. At times I was frightened. I know our Lord helped us through.

PETROVSKY: I have a question for you Chekov. You know all about evil, but how do you combat it?

CHEKOV: With God's grace.

PETROVSKY: How does God's grace help you against a madman with a knife?

CHEKOV: You need faith during that test.

PETROVSKY: I'm a man without faith. Faith alone wouldn't stop a two hundred foot wave, a madman with a knife, or the Kraken. I think sometimes evil things happen to good people, and sometimes there isn't a thing you can do about it.

*Captain enters.*

CAPTAIN:           Where's Olgaren?

PETROVSKY:       He was here a few minutes ago Captain. He went to relieve Rubikov of duty.

CAPTAIN:           He's not on aft deck. Why isn't he at his post? All of you, get off your backsides and find him.

ALL:                Yes Captain.

*All leave except the Captain. Lights fade for fifteen seconds. From across centuries, Dracula speaks.*

DRACULA:           We were worthless, once.

*The Captain yells in horror. Lights rise. The Captain is agitated.*

PETROVSKY:        [Agitated] Captain! We cannot find Olgaren anywhere. He has disappeared!

CAPTAIN:           I saw him.

PETROVSKY:        What?

CAPTAIN:           I saw him! I saw him!

*Lights fade.*

# Scene Seven

VOICEOVER: Captain Rimsky's Log, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1897. Our worst fears of earlier days has been confirmed. There is a man onboard the boat, a stowaway, a terrifying looking man. I saw him for a second and he made my blood run cold. Oh God he looked evil. None of us feel safe now. He may have murdered Ilyanov and Olgaren. There seems some doom over this ship and I have called all the men for a meeting.

*Lights rise. All the crew are assembled.*

CAPTAIN: How in God's name do we explain this when we get to port?

PETROVSKY: We're doomed. Who is he? When the hell did he get onboard? He might be hiding anywhere on this ship, any nook or cranny. We just have to keep searching it, endlessly, in shifts, until we find the bastard.

CAPTAIN: He looked elderly, you could probably knock him out.

PETROVSKY: Captain, I suggest we shoot him when we find him, and dump him overboard.

CHEKOV: No! Never!

PETROVSKY: Captain, we're miles from land. We all agree that whoever he is he might have murdered Ilyanov and Olgaren, and might want to murder one of us too. He's a dangerous man and we need to shoot him in the head when we catch him. Then all we have to do is dump him overboard and tell the port that he was resisting us too violently.

CAPTAIN: Enough, First Mate Petrovsky.

PETROVSKY: Seriously, Captain. You know we can shoot him.

CAPTAIN: It's an option I will consider.

CHEKOV: No Captain, it's a sin. We have to bind him up.

PETROVSKY: Fuck yourself Chekov, you coward.

CHEKOV: I'm no coward, and I hate the evil bastard as much as you do. We could bind him up and starve him for a week to punish him if we feel like it. But we cannot murder him. We need to hand him over to the authorities.

PETROVSKY: We are the authorities, and I say damn him.

CHEKOV: Captain, we are Christians. This man, whoever he is, may be starving or half mad. We need to be careful. We're all likely to be interviewed by the Police when we get to shore because we'd have to report Ilyanov and Olgaren's disappearance anyway. We would only bring suspicion upon ourselves if we get our own hands bloody. As it is the Lord may have mercy upon us.

PETROVSKY: Forget God. What are you going to do if that madman starts dragging you overboard? You're going to shoot him! You nut. What happens if we tie him up and he gets out of his ropes? He'd be running loose again.

CHEKOV: First Mate Petrovsky. I just don't believe we can murder a man. The Bible and the Law say you can't. I'm not suggesting we turn the other cheek, but this stowaway is a murderer, and he'll be in gaol for a long time – he might hang. It's foolish for us, free of blame, to take the same risks as him. The Lord have mercy on us.

PETROVSKY: Fuck you Chekov. I'll do what I want. [*To RUBIKOV*] Rubikov, what do you have to say?

RUBIKOV: I don't know. I'm just frightened. I have to tell you all something though. I've had a dream about a tall thin man on ship.

*Everybody flinches.*

CAPTAIN: Yes, I've had a dream.

CHEKOV: Me too.

PETROVSKY: It's nothing to be afraid of. When we find him we'll leave him tied up in a chair and you can polish your knuckles on his face for a bit. There'll be nothing terrifying about him after a couple of minutes of that.

RUBIKOV: [*Giggles*] No maybe not. But don't you think it's strange that we have all dreamed about him?

CHEKOV: I have to admit I am disturbed.

CAPTAIN: Enough of this nonsense. It may be something to do with group psychology. Just a coincidence. We all been having bad dreams – nobody wants to be murdered by a psychopath stowaway.



CHEKOV: Captain, can we request double watches from now on? Nobody wants to go on watch by themselves either.

CAPTAIN: Yes Chekov, that will be the arrangement until we get to Whitby. Can you please excuse myself and First Mate Petrovsky, gentlemen.

CHEKOV: Yes Captain.

RUBIKOV: Yes Captain.

*Both men leave. The CAPTAIN look sat PETROVSKY hard for a couple of seconds.*

CAPTAIN: So Petrovsky. Shitting yourself yet?

PETROVSKY: A little, Captain. How about yourself?

CAPTAIN: Looking forward to Whitby, Petrovsky. I don't know what happens then. We'll need to be interviewed by the police.

PETROVSKY: When we find him, can we shoot him?

CAPTAIN: After he answers our questions? Maybe.

PETROVSKY: Were you frightened of him?

CAPTAIN: A little. He said 'we were worthless once.' His accent educated, but difficult to place. His Russian sounded archaic. He looked ... evil. He didn't look even remotely frightened of me. We might have to shoot him. I'd feel more comfortable not doing it but the bastard might be deranged – we may have no choice.

PETROVSKY: As I thought, Captain.

CAPTAIN: Because the crew's lives are at risk I wish you to start carrying a firearm, Petrovsky. I'll unlock the weapons cabinet and get you to take the shotgun. I myself will continue to carry my pistol. The others can do with handspikes.

PETROVSKY: Very well Captain. If I see him I'm not going to be frightened.

CAPTAIN: We might be about to hit rough weather. Let's hope it doesn't last. There's a tough couple of days ahead anyway, with two men down. We'll all be shattered.

*Lights fade.*

# Scene Eight

VOICEOVER: Captain Rimsky's Log, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1897. We have spent four days in hell, in a maelstrom, with the wind in a temper. No sleep for any one. The men are all worn out. Hardly know how to set a watch, since nobody is fit to go on. First mate Petrovsky volunteered to steer and watch alone, and let men snatch a few hours sleep. He was armed with a shotgun. The seas are terrific. By dead reckoning we are in the English Channel, although in this storm it will be impossible to raise help – even the sound of the horn would be lost in the noise of the wind and waves. As for the stowaway, we have searched the ship twice and there is no sign of him. Petrovsky and I have agreed to go armed at all times nonetheless.

*The scene is backlit by a pair of eyes staring into middle distance. Eventually, from across the span of centuries, DRACULA speaks.*

DRACULA: I killed a son of mine once. It was when we were hunting, in the eighth year of King Billreuth's reign. There were forty of us on horseback. He fell from his horse and cracked his neck. I stood over him and he pleaded for a physician. But I refused. No son of mine was to be a cripple. I pushed a knife into his throat, which was lumpy with broken bones. We Transylvanians are a proud people, and as a Count, I was always a powerful man.

I was asked to leave the Church many years ago. It was after I drank the blood of a country girl in my land who was to marry. The Church asked me to renounce Satan. I was a young, foolish man, and refused. When I was renounced I was damned in the eyes of God.

*The lights raise to show RUBIKOV sitting alone.*

DRACULA: These men, these forms, so young. They will never even live to one hundred. What possible meaning could there be in the life of such a transient being? How could it understand what it means to be damned? But yet I was a man once, as young as him, and I knew life.

*The eyes fade out, and the lights dim with RUBIKOV still on stage. There is a long pause, in darkness.*

RUBIKOV:           Who's that? Stop! Help! Help!

*RUBIKOV starts screaming, blood curdling screams, that end abruptly.*

DRACULA:           [By way of explanation] I was damned.

*The lights raise again. RUBIKOV is sprawled lifelessly on the table. The CAPTAIN, CHEKOV and PETROVSKY come rushing in, alerted by the screams. Both the CAPTAIN and PETROVSKY have weapons drawn.*

CAPTAIN:           Oh horror! God, what is this?

*CHEKOV checks the body for signs of life.*

CHEKOV:           Dead, Captain. There's a throat wound. It looks like its been chewed. It looks like a wild animal did it.

PETROVSKY:       The stowaway. He must be a savage, Captain!

CAPTAIN:           That evil bastard!

CHEKOV:           How can a man that old looking do something like this? Bite out his throat? He must be a madman, like you say Petrovsky, a savage. He's picking us off, one by one.

PETROVSKY:       We have to search the ship again.

CAPTAIN:           We've searched the ship a hundred times. And with three of us? We're going to be killing ourselves running the ship now – we might have four more days before we get to Whitby! We're going to be shattered. It probably cannot be done.

PETROVSKY:       What are we going to do with the body? Do we bury him at sea or keep it until we reach Whitby?

CAPTAIN:           I don't know! [Regains his composure] We will bury him at sea. We don't have the facilities to keep a body. What in God's name happened to his neck! He looks drained of blood. That savage ...

PETROVSKY: As Chekov says, he must be inhumanly strong, Captain.

CHEKOV: Captain, do we have any more firearms on board? I would like to be armed.

CAPTAIN: I don't blame you, Chekov. But we only have this revolver and the shotgun.

CHEKOV: Rubikov was carrying a handspike, and that didn't help him. I will pray. There is guidance in the Bible, I will read it. I need to understand what we did to be forsaken by the Lord. It must have been something we did ... but we are not bad people. We're not tyrants, we're not murderers, we're sailors. What did any of us do to deserve this. Poor Rubikov, he was young. How does he deserve being butchered like this? I will pray, I'll use rosary beads. I'm going to start carrying my crucifix.

PETROVSKY: Are you alright, Chekov?

CHEKOV: No. I'm scared senseless. We should pray. Will you pray with me?

CAPTAIN: I'm not a religious man, Chekov, but may the Lord deliver us from evil.

CHEKOV: May the Lord deliver us from evil. [*Pause*] But for the first time in my life, those sound like empty words. My mother died when she fell downstairs once. There was nothing natural about her death, she was a strong woman with maybe another thirty years of life to look forward to. It took her two weeks to die. I prayed every day, asking the Lord to be merciful, praying that he would save her. It wasn't her time, it was the wooden steps on the stairwell, the landlord hadn't replaced them. But she died anyway. At that time I questioned the power of prayer. I question it now. Petrovsky, I have to question my faith. I know that prayers won't stop this madman.

PETROVSKY: No prayers will stop him, but this shotgun might.

CHEKOV: Then what's the value of prayer? In combating evil.

CAPTAIN: Maybe prayer prevents evil things before they happen.

CHEKOV: Captain, what am I supposed to do if this man attacks me?

CAPTAIN: Scream for help. Here, take this knife. Use it if you have to.

CHEKOV: I don't know if I could kill a man ... that man. To do that with his teeth ... he must be a demon.

CAPTAIN:

You might have to kill him, to save your own life. Remember that. Rubikov, you poor innocent bastard. Come on, let's pick him up.

*Lights fade.*

# Scene Nine

VOICEOVER: Captain Rimsky's Log, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1897. Two days of fog, and not a sail sighted. We had hoped that when in the English Channel we would be able to signal for help or get in somewhere. Not having the power to work sails, we have to run before wind. I dare not lower them, as I could not raise them again. We seem to be drifting to some terrible doom. Petrovsky seems more demoralised than ever. His stronger nature seems to have worked inwardly against himself. Chekov is beyond fear, working stolidly and patiently, with his mind made up to the worst. Of the stowaway there is no sign, although we remain wary at all times, in spite of physical exhaustion.

*Lights raise. The CAPTAIN is consulting a map and looks despairing. Chekov enters.*

CHEKOV: Captain.

CAPTAIN: Chekov.

CHEKOV: I don't suppose that map is much use in fog like this.

CAPTAIN: No.

CHEKOV: Captain, I ... I have a gift for you. My crucifix.

CAPTAIN: Why are you giving it to me?

CHEKOV: I've had time to think, and am not sure if I can pray very easily without wanting questions answered by God. Questions I can't help but ask. I mean, what did Rubikov ever do to anyone?

CAPTAIN: I know. Olgaren too, a bit more work and he would have made First Mate. He could have been a Captain someday.

CHEKOV: What did they do, Captain? We're all decent men. We're just trying to earn a living. We don't deserve this.

CAPTAIN: [*Shrugs*] What can you say. They were murdered in cold blood. You would have thought that if discovered by one of us the stowaway would give himself up to be kept in chains. But he's clearly a psychopathic killer. How could you reason with a psychopath? He wouldn't listen. You might as well ask a shark what you ever did to it when its biting you in half.

CHEKOV: I know. That's what bothers me. Why did God make sharks, to kill and eat innocent men? Why did he make earthquakes? How could God look you, me or Petrovsky in the eye? When I pray I look for the Lord in my soul, and all my life I have felt Him. But for the past few days I feel an emptiness there. In the past few days I have had the distinct feeling, for the first time in my life, that I am utterly alone when praying. Praying to a God that may not even exist.

*A short pause.*

CAPTAIN: Thank you for the crucifix, Chekov. I will wear it until I get us to land. [*Puts on crucifix*]. I have some advice for you, though. Try not to think about is happening. And talk to a vicar in Whitby, he may have some advice for you. Maybe some answers to your questions. Many people lose their faith once or twice in their lives, Chekov.

CHEKOV: Thank you, Captain. I might just do that. I don't think I want to sail for much longer though. When I get back to Russia I'm going to go into business for myself. I don't want to be at sea for much longer. We are all sinners, but none of our crewmates deserved to die. If the Lord was responsible, then you have to wonder what he punished any of them for.

CAPTAIN: I don't blame you.

CHEKOV: It's my watch. I'll be in the bows if you need me.

*CHEKOV leaves. The CAPTAIN studies the crucifix, turning it over in his hands.*

VOICEOVER: I had to resist the urge to confide my own feelings to Chekov, and instead will write them down. I'm not certain if I will sail again either. I have served on ships with fatalities before, but never anything like this. This experience has shaken my senses beyond repair. There's no training you can be given to help when men are vanishing like this. Mutinies, certainly, I've had a couple. You also hear ugly stories about Belgian slave trading, how the slightest infringement of ship policy results in beating or an amputation: more like working in Hell than on a boat.

But when life tests you like this, you have to fall back on something innate, because there is no training that can help. I have tried my hardest to keep my judgements as consonant with the principles of good leadership as possible, and hope it is enough to acquit myself of any accusation of malpractice when

we get to England. Its possible that I will be bought up for only equipping Chekov with a knife, as opposed to a firearm. But the *Demeter* only has two firearms on board. Who in Gods name can legislate for actions like this? A psychopath onboard, eluding capture, killing the men one by one? None of us feel safe, and we are shattered.

*PETROVSKY enters.*

PETROVSKY: Captain, where's Chekov? He was supposed to relieve me.

CAPTAIN: He left to do so. Check in the bows.

PETROVSKY: Aye aye Captain.

*PETROVSKY leaves.*

VOICEOVER: Chekov asked if God could look him, Petrovsky and myself in the eye. I am not normally given to debates of that nature, but the events of this voyage have given me many things to think about.

*A shotgun blast is heard. The Captain yells an expletive, and crouches on the right hand side of the table, gun drawn and pointed stage left. After a few moments a terrified looking PETROVSKY charges in. The CAPTAIN flinches and then lowers his gun.*

PETROVSKY: Captain! I saw him!

CAPTAIN: The stowaway! Where's Chekov?

PETROVSKY: [*Shakes his head*] He's gone.

CAPTAIN: What do you mean?

PETROVSKY: I was looking for Chekov, and walked to the bows. I saw him, Captain! He was tall, taller than you or me. He was holding Chekov by the throat with one hand. [*Gestures*] Chekov must have been six inches of his feet. Holding him with his left hand, Captain! Then, with a toss, he threw him overboard. I tried to steady myself for the shot, but he turned around and I lost my nerve. I don't know how far I missed by. Then I was filled with fear, and I ran!



CAPTAIN: [Finally panicking] Chekov's gone. We're doomed. God help us. God help us.

*PETROVSKY is losing his reason. He is manic.*

PETROVSKY: I'm going back to the bows Captain! I've never been so terrified in my life, but I'm going to go there and finish him off! I know he's been hiding – maybe in one of those boxes of soil, although how a man can lie in soil for days on end is beyond me. After I've killed him I'm going to unscrew them one by one and see.

*PETROVSKY puts a finger to his lips, menacingly, then leaves.*

VOICEOVER: Chekov is dead – overboard. Only Petrovsky and myself are left alive. We have no hope of manning the ship by our selves. Our only chance is to signal help or get in somewhere. With the fog its impossible to tell our position. However, sounding the horn may bring other ships close enough for us to hail them. I would thank God if we could happen across a Navy frigate – but that is wishful thinking. Anything, a fishing boat, a tug, anything. Any other people who could help us! As soon as we have company I'm going to ask for a coastguard or Navy escort to shore. The ship needs to be –

*There is shotgun blast, followed by a scream. The CAPTAIN flinches visibly, and raises his revolver stage left again. PETROVSKY rushes in and cowers with the CAPTAIN, covering stage left with his shotgun. He has gone mad and is gibbering.*

PETROVSKY: I saw him Captain. He was still there. I shot him. And he smiled! He took the slug to his chest, then looked at me and smiled! Then he walked down to the hold, as I watched, and went below decks.

CAPTAIN: That's impossible. Petrovsky, please try to calm down. You're losing your sanity.

PETROVSKY: He – didn't – die! He smiled! Captain, I know the secret now. He's not human. Work that out Captain! He's not human. He's a monster, and he is evil!

CAPTAIN: Petrovsky, we need help. We need to concentrate on signalling other -

*PETROVSKY laughs manically and shakes his head.*

PETROVSKY: No point, Captain! We're doomed. That thing is evil. And it won't let us get to shore. I know what evil is Captain, and there is no reasoning with it...

*PETROVSKY is stilled by one of his own thoughts for a second. His horror turns to despair.*

PETTROVSKY: You cannot reason with that thing. It is pure evil. It wants us dead. And I know what I have to do. I don't want to be mauled by that thing the way Rubikov was. I'm throwing myself overboard.

CAPTAIN: Don't be a fool, Petrovsky!

PETTROVSKY: I'm no fool, Captain. To die like a sailor in blue water, no man can object. I'd rather that than let that thing watch me shit myself like a baby in front of it! Shit myself with fear! That's the secret of evil. Good luck Captain.

*PETROVSKY drops his shotgun and runs off stage right. The CAPTAIN follows him hastily to watch, and after a few moments raises his hand to his mouth in horror.*

VOICEOVER: He ran to the bulwark, and without stopping, threw himself overboard. Deliberately threw himself into the sea. He said something, about the secret of evil. I don't know what he was talking about.

I sit here alone, captain of a dead ship. That monster in the hold has killed my crew. But I shall baffle it, for I shall stand at the wheel from now on, and when my strength begins to fail – if I am not murdered before - I will tie my hands to the wheel, and tie with them Chekov's crucifix, for luck. Then, come good wind or foul, I shall save my soul, and my honour as Captain. I am growing weaker, and the night is coming on. If that fiend can look me in the face, again, I may not have time to act. If we are wrecked, mayhap this log is found, and those who find it may understand. If not, ... well, then all men shall know that I have been true to my trust. God and the Blessed Virgin and the saints help a poor ignorant soul trying to do his duty.

# Scene Ten

*Lights rise to show the stage empty.*

VOICEOVER: The Daily Telegraph, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1897. One of the greatest and suddenest storms on record has just been experienced here in Whitby. There were but few lights at sea, for even the coasting steamers, which usually hug the shore so closely, kept well to seaward, and but few fishing boats were in sight. The only sail noticeable was a foreign schooner with all sails set, which was seemingly going westwards. Between her and the port lay the great flat reef on which so many ships have from time to time suffered, and, with the wind blowing from its present quarter, it would be quite impossible that she should fetch the entrance of the harbour. But the wind suddenly shifted to north-east, and the strange schooner managed to gain the safety of the harbour through luck. The searchlight followed her, and as she came close to shore a shudder ran through all watching her, for lashed to the helm was a corpse, with drooping head, that swung horribly to and fro with each motion of the ship. There was of course a considerable concussion as the vessel drove up on the sand heap.

The coastguard on duty on the eastern side of the harbour, who at once ran down to the little pier, was the first to climb on board. The dead man appeared to be the Captain, and was simply fastened by his hands, tied one over the other, to a spoke of the wheel. Between the inner hand and the wood was a crucifix. The poor fellow may have been seated at one time, but the flapping and the buffeting of the sails had dragged him to and fro, so that the cords with which he was tied had cut the flesh to the bone. The coastguard said the man must have tied up his own hands, fastening the knots with his teeth.

Until the Captain's log has been found the verdict on what happened remains open. He is to be buried in the churchyard on the cliff tomorrow. So ends another mystery of the sea.