

VI - Flotsam

A submarine lies on the ocean floor, the pressure at this depth is straining the metal plates of the capsule, but its lights vain gloriously deny the encroaching darkness and its crushing oblivion. The stage is split into four sections, numbered from left to right, one to four.

One – The ocean floor.

Two – Left side of the submarine, engine room, a young woman peering at dials, valves, a forest of enmeshed pipes and mechanisms, each groaning a note of displeasure in its own hissing, steaming, elemental tonic.

Three – Right side of same engine room.

Four – The ocean floor.

Two and Three are separated by the innards of the beached submarine.

The young woman is dressed in overalls, a tool belt around her waist, she is 25 years old.

ENGINEER I know you can do this... Why do you have to be so stubborn!
(she pulls a spanner from her belt and begins to adjust something in
the submarines chest. The hissing modulates to a major.)
That's my girl, you just stay together for me okay?

*She straightens, she is dishevelled, a haggard figure, but a determined one too.
She replaces the spanner and consults the mass of instruments.*

ENGINEER I sure hope you plan on taking me home after this Wanda.

*A figure enters section four, the captain of this vessel.
She enters forlornly, stares numbly at the mechanisms in front of her, falls to her knees and weeps.*

-
ENGINEER Hello?

The weeping stops abruptly, the captain stands.

CAPTAIN Who's there? Why the hell are you still aboard my ship?!

ENGINEER Private Reilly, third class ma'am...

CAPTAIN What the fuck are you still doing here you idiot!
Everyone left, I ordered everyone off!
You could have... what the hell were you thinking!

ENGINEER I can fix her ma'am.

CAPTAIN Well you've disobeyed your first and last order...
You picked the wrong day for insubordination Reilly.

She slumps momentarily.

ENGINEER I mean it Captain, we can fix it.

CAPTAIN (slumping) we're at the bottom of the sea.

You should have jettisoned Reilly, you didn't need to die here.

REILLY I didn't have any intention of dying today Captain.

CAPTAIN Eleanor is fine, no more need for formalities any more.
(She lets her hair down, exhales heavily, shakes her head.)
How's hull pressure?

REILLY Stable. For now at least [she studies dials]
Should be able to get power to your side if I...

She moves a the handle of some contraption, lights dim on her side, monitors and gears whirr to life on the captains side, she eyes them without joy.

ELEANOR You're serious.
...[she searches inside herself and finds her mettle]
Alright let's... try.

REILLY That's all we can do.

she starts to whistle

ELEANOR How do you stay so... positive?

REILLY It's better than the alternative.

ELEANOR I guess you're right...
...
So... Why'd you join up?

REILLY Seaweed.

ELEANOR You're just full of surprises.

REILLY It has more vitamin C than an orange.

ELEANOR You eat it?

REILLY Bathe in it, anything, it's amazing.

ELEANOR But... the military? Surely there's better ways to get seaweed?

REILLY I transferred from a marine biology course, the army paid my tuition
then I just... joined up.
I've always been good with engines, worked in a garage for about 7 years.

ELEANOR You don't meet many female mechanics.

REILLY I've met a few, surly bunch.
You don't meet many people down here though.

ELEANOR Don't like people?

REILLY I like some people, I'm just... not so good with open spaces.

ELEANOR Like a duck to water.

REILLY Never trusted ducks.
But yeah, it's a natural fit I guess.

ELEANOR I was surprised you signed on for this expedition, rumour was you were getting out last term.

REILLY Things change.
I never asked how long you've been a captain.

ELEANOR 3 years, before that I was in orientation.

REILLY Pretty big promotion.

ELEANOR Funny, it doesn't seem it now...

Silence.

REILLY Let's try and get some pressure back here...

(she busies herself with a valve)

ELEANOR They give you the odds, I never forgot them.
Chance of wreckage, 1 in 7088.

REILLY I guess its a day for long odds then.
I wonder what the chances of re floating a wreck are...

she busies herself again, the red lights flicker off, replaced slowly by a fluorescent blue glow. The glow illuminates the exterior of the sub, like a lighthouse lighting safe passage.

ELEANOR You parked us?!

REILLY Haha, it's to conserve air.

ELEANOR ...Good thinking.

REILLY There should be a monitor on your side that can monitor pressure, air, cargo...

ELEANOR *(she stands)*
Sure, I see it.
[she moves to a monitor]
Well f.... we're not looking good Private.

REILLY Chloe, call me Chloe.

ELEANOR We're leaking.

CHLOE I know.
I sealed off the fore side, but it's going to cause a rupture at some point.

ELEANOR I can't believe I'm going to die at work.

CHLOE So quit.

ELEANOR Who would I resign to?

CHLOE Don't we have a black box?

ELEANOR That's for aeroplanes.
Fuck it. I quit.

CHLOE Feel better?

ELEANOR No.

CHLOE Want a job? You can be my assistant.
Keep an eye on the pressure gauge on your side and tell me if it drops suddenly.
It's the one with...

ELEANOR We are so fucked.

CHLOE It's not so bad.

ELEANOR We're on the sea floor, slowly taking on water.
What could be worse?

CHLOE Well I can't smell so almonds so I suppose the reactor's still intact.
Which means at least we won't be dying of radiation sickness.

Eleanor slumps to a seated position.

A sharp blast of air and a loud clank are heard in the belly of the sub.

CHLOE God I love my job, that should keep us safe enough for a while, the leaks
been isolated in the aft engines.
Should stop anything from leaking up to us... *[she trails off]*

*Chloe works on, determined. Eleanor is losing whatever grain of positivity had been sparked in her.
She stares vapidly out of a porthole*

ELEANOR It's the things you love that kill you...
I used to love the water.
The feeling of sand on your skin. Or bubbles.

Soaping away a day of frustrations, sacrifices, compromises.
One of those weird oversights in the grand plan, I'll be surrounded by water -
Yes, but if you touch it you're probably dead.
And you trick yourself into thinking "this is it, this is the dream. I have
realised my dream."
Well yeah, kind of, but it's not so glamorous up close, behind glass.
Maybe they do try to tell you though.
Trips to the zoo as a kid.
Come see the majestic lion! In his 32 metre squared enclosure, eating tofu
and having nightmares about gazelles eating his family.
PTSD, do animals get PTSD?

shapes drift past the porthole but she does not see them, at least, she does not acknowledge them

CHLOE Can you help me here?

ELEANOR I forgot to write my will.

CHLOE Pass me the screwdriver.

ELEANOR Not that I have much to leave behind. Two houses, a dog.

CHLOE Got it, okay now pass me the socket wrench.

ELEANOR I guess I'd just give it all to charity.
One last good gesture into this dark world.

CHLOE fuck!

ELEANOR You okay?

CHLOE Yeah just... hurt my hand.
But...

A sharp click.

CHLOE I fixed it!

ELEANOR Hoo. Ray.

CHLOE I'm serious! I think we've got power again.
God said...
Let there be light!

*The lights stutter to life, the shadows flee to the corners.
Eleanor looks around in awe.*

ELEANOR You're a fucking genius private.
How did you do that?

CHLOE Well. It's temporary.

*They sink into silence, the lights strain to keep shining.
Outside, the light has attracted visitors.
Here the focus switches from the interior of the submarine to the exterior.
The noise and voices inside are muted, the ocean hums.*

[from here onwards / denotes a switch from interior to exterior, vice versa.]

/

A crowd has gathered.
*Flotillas of rainbow coloured fish, delighting in the spotlight of this lagan ship,
they dance around, throwing light about them as a child might.
Their display brings larger creatures.
The jellyfish and crustaceans.
Braver than the fluorescent schools, they crack their knuckles on the hull, though no sound here it makes.*

/

*The lights flicker off, a rasping noise shudders through the submarine.
Emergency lights again.*

ELEANOR What was that?

CHLOE I... don't know.

ELEANOR It came from outside...

CHLOE ...

ELEANOR *[she peers out of the porthole]*
There's something out there.

CHLOE It can stay there.
If we open a hatch to get out we're finished.
The change in pressure would rupture points all over the ship...

ELEANOR So we just wait here for whatever it is to... do whatever it wants?

CHLOE Don't worry. This baby could hit a whale and only suffer a few dents.
Nothing's getting in here.

ELEANOR Nothing's getting out either.

CHLOE ...We could both go.
But I don't think we'd get very far.

ELEANOR The pressure alone...

CHLOE Judging from the maps and the point of impact we're somewhere near challenger deep.

She starts working on the submarine once more

ELEANOR Should have stayed in Hawaii...

CHLOE Should have, could have, would have...

ELEANOR ...Anyone ever tell you you're kind of blunt.

Chloe puts down her tools slowly and straightens. She speaks through the wall. Slowly.

CHLOE Listen. I need you to be a captain. Okay?
I can't do this alone. I need you to help me.
If you're not going to do that can you at least
keep quiet and try to keep your negativity to yourself.

Eleanor is taken aback

ELEANOR ...Sorry.

CHLOE It's fine. Just...

she is unsure, adrift.

CHLOE Help me. Okay?

The pair silently recommence the repairs.

/

The onlookers, curiosity sated, wheel around the submarine, unafraid of it, here and there one will bounce into the hull, sending echoes off into the deep.

Something much larger approaches.

The cry of a great whale sends the other onlookers scurrying back into the dark.

The whale orbits the craft, then veers and goes back from whence it came.

Two mermaids come into view. They place ears to the hull in silence.

/

Inside tensions are mounting.

CHLOE Can you pass me a phase tester?

Eleanor passes it through to her wordlessly.

She feels useless, her authority non-existent, she floats absently around, looking here and there.

She comes to the wireless radio.

She fiddles with it, no response.

ELEANOR This is Captain Wills of the H.M.S Neptune.

Come in, Over.

CHLOE Busted.
I tried it earlier.
Almost everything here is busted.

*Eleanor pulls a CD from her overalls and inserts it into a player.
Music warbles from a speaker overhead.
'Wild Horses' by The Rolling Stones.*

CHLOE Wouldn't have taken you for a Stones fan.

ELEANOR This is the only one of theirs I like.

*Eleanor ambles around, the music drowning out her anxiety.
She finds a cache, food stored by an eager crew member perhaps, amongst the snacks a bottle of
cheap rum.*

ELEANOR Do you drink?

CHLOE What? Now?

ELEANOR If I'm going to die, I'm not doing it sober.

*Chloe wrestles with the urge to spout obscenities, powerless, separated from the object of her
consternation.*

CHLOE You know what? Yeah. Pass it here.

Eleanor takes a swig, then crosses to the partition and hands the bottle through.

ELEANOR How's it going in there?

CHLOE Much the same. I can turn the lights on and off.
Seems to be about all though.
Years of education, years of experience and now I'm a
glorified light switch.

*A thump, the lights turn back on.
The song changes.
Jim Reeves 'welcome to my world'*

CHLOE Jim fucking Reeves?
What age are you anyway?

ELEANOR He's one of the greats!
He reminds me of my mother.
She had a huge crush on him.
She used to put him on when she was in a good mood.

/

*The whale has returned.
Bringing with it Poseidon.*

POSEIDON This will not stand.
 ...What are you?

*He comes closer, touching the hull of the submarine apprehensively.
He watches the lights, passing his hands through their glow.*

POSEIDON A weapon perhaps?
 An insult at least.
 They leave their wrecks in my kingdom.
 Their toxins leak into my people, into me.
 You will be the death of us all.

He peers inside.

POSEIDON But why sacrifice your own?
 Unless... prisoners maybe?
 ...no.
 Why are you here?
 You stand upon a precipice.
 It falls to me once more.
 To decide your fate.
 Trespassers.
 Poisoners.
 But perhaps... victims also.

[he looks upwards]

So many.
Such waste.
Will their fate be yours also?