

THY BROTHER'S WIFE

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

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PO Box 103
Slocum, RI 02877-0103
Email: david_christner@yahoo.com
playwri43@gmail.com

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (2 women, 3 men)

HADDIE ELIZABETH GARDNER STARBUCK.....24, a young Quaker widow

ABIGAIL MARY GARDNER MACY.....32, Haddie's sister

AARON NATHANIEL STARBUCK.....25, a whaler, Haddie's first husband

ISHMAEL CRADDOCK STARBUCK.....32, a whaler, Haddie's second husband

FLETCHER OWEN STARBUCK.....42, Master of a whaler, Haddie's betrothed

The Setting

Much of the play takes place in the dressing and sitting rooms of Haddie Starbuck's home, a nineteenth century Quaker affair on the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts. One scene takes place in the office of Fletcher Starbuck, Captain of a whaler, and a brief scene unfolds in a Quaker meetinghouse. The final scene takes place on the Nantucket docks where a ship is set to sail. The idea of these locations is sufficient for the play to work. Costumes, however, should be authentic. The degree of realism of the sets is dependent upon physical and fiscal resources of producing theaters.

The Time

The island of Nantucket, Massachusetts in 1825.

Playwright's Notes

This edition of *Thy Brothers Wife* is set on Nantucket Island; however, with very minor modifications the setting can be modified to fit any seaport in which there was a Quaker presence and a link to whaling. Newport, New Bedford, New London, Hudson, NY, and Mystic are locations that come immediately to mind. The playwright also suggests the use of sea shanties to open and close the play.

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ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON HADDIE ELIZABETH GARDNER STARBUCK, 24, a young Quaker on Nantucket around 1825. She is buoyant and attractive, keen-witted, independent and self-confident. She has been twice widowed from seafarers out of Nantucket, and the play opens with Haddie preparing for her marriage to a third seafarer, in this case, the older brother of her previous two husbands. Twice she married, a little recklessly, with passion as her guide, only to find loneliness; on this occasion she has tempered her passion with reason, a deeply felt abiding love and the prospect of long term security. For Fletcher Starbuck is Master of the whaler, *Indomitable*, and already a wealthy man, who has promised to take Haddie with him on a final voyage. Haddie is seated at a dressing table in an area representing her dressing room and wearing some kind of mid-19th century dressing gown. The use of LIGHTS will differentiate her dressing room from her sitting room where most of the first act will be played. Haddie is brushing her hair and studying her image in the mirror more from curiosity than vanity. Her manner is that of a Quaker: simple and dignified. However, Haddie has a fine sense of irony

and an independent streak that is troubling, to say the least, to the elders at Meeting. After a moment she turns to the audience, thinks for a moment forming her thoughts, and then begins her monologue.

HADDIE

Call me Haddie. Haddie Elizabeth Gardner Starbuck--Starbuck twice and soon to be three times over. (A few beats.) Had thee told me I would bury two husbands, brothers to boot, before a score and four years had passed, I would have sworn thy rigging had come lose. But, alas, bury them I did; didn't actually bury them myself, did I. From what I surmise, they were both gobbled up by an angry sea some three years and 3,000 miles apart in the uncharted waters of the South Pacific. So twice widowed I was before a quarter a century had passed, and broken hearted--for I married for what I took to be love, if not for life, on both occasions. Far too many young women from this island embark upon marital voyages praying for a fair wind only to be left with nothing but the distant memory of a ship disappearing over the horizon from the walk. The walk thee probably knows is a raised platform on the roofs of houses on Nantucket and other seaports on which to look out to sea--ostensibly to observe the return of a loved one after a long voyage. But in my case, in what is all too rapidly becoming a seafaring custom, the loved ones never return.

(She pauses and takes a few languid strokes of the brush through her long hair.)

HADDIE (continuing)

However, the human heart heals in time; for it is God's will for it do so. So, although bruised twice by shattered dreams, the heart that beats beneath this bosom is as full of life as ever and ready again to cast off the lines of loneliness for another excursion into the human heart. For on this day, I'm about to embark upon a third voyage of intimacy--on this occasion with the elder brother of my previous two husbands. Aye, it was only through an unprecedented bending of and re-examination of Truth by the Meeting elders that allowed my second marriage and the one immediately forthcoming to take place at all. How a quiet Quaker girl came to cause such a stir in our refuge of peace on this small island is by no means a tale for the faint of heart. While my story may not compare favorably with the blood letting of a whale killing or the sinking of a clipper in a savage gale, it might very well prove to be of interest to those inclined towards romance. It all began with Aaron--Aaron Nathaniel Starbuck . . .

(She rises and begins to pace about the room, remembering Aaron with some affection.)

HADDIE (continuing)

Aaron was the first--the youngest--and the least refined of the three Starbuck brothers to whom I found myself betrothed over a span of little more than six years. Aye, that Aaron Nathaniel Starbuck was a handsome lad, a fine Quaker, even if still sowing his wild oats, and from one of Nantucket's most influential and powerful families. He courted me with passion and charm and the proceeds from three successful whaling voyages when he was two years less than a score old. It was a solid monetary foundation upon which to begin a long voyage together as husband and wife.

I being only 17 myself upon beginning the venture knew neither what it was to have a mate nor to miss one; Aaron was ruggedly handsome with the island look about him. He was as stout as the keel of any whaler to round the horn, and had I not been so firm in my resolve of purity, we most surely would have been sanctioned at Meeting for "too close an intimacy" prior to a proper Quaker wedding. (Dreamily now.) Aye, his flowing blond mane shone like liquid gold under the light of a Nantucket sunset. And the urgency of his physical needs was like a thunderous summer squall followed by the tranquility of calm sea. I tried to put those memories aside, to forget such things altogether . . . but to little avail. It's as if his touch was as deeply embedded in my soul as an iron in the back of a great whale. There was no forgetting of something so deeply rooted.

(Now snapping out of it.)

HADDIE (continuing)

But, alas, it was a short voyage because off he sailed before the full moon had grown dark to find his destiny in the South Pacific where an unseen leviathan sank the small boat he was in, drowning the entire crew. Never found a trace of the boat nor the crew, did they. Nigh three years later it was when the *Purchase* returned to Nantucket with her belly bursting at the seams with whale oil of the finest kind and I received Aaron's share of the lay which was the custom.

At Meeting shortly thereafter, Aaron was officially declared "gone to the deep" by the elders, and I was what they labeled a "free" woman, which meant I was laboring under an unwritten Quaker edict that allowed I should marry the first good Quaker lad who was willing to provide me with security--which I could just as well provide for myself, being the seamstress that I am and having invested wisely the capital Aaron brought to our union. Being free, childless, having a sizable dowry and, although, not considered to be one of the island great beauties, I'd been told more than once that I wasn't hard to look at, which I

HADDIE (continuing)

took to be a compliment, even if it did have to round the horn and cross the equator to get to me, I was fancied nearly as desirable a quarry as one of the great leviathans from the deep. And, I might add, just as troublesome to conquer.

Aye, we Quaker women are independent thinkers--have been encouraged to be from the very start, but my thinking was far more radical than was the conventional Quaker approach to Truth under which I had been nurtured. To marry out of Meeting was unthinkable to even a thinking young woman such as myself. This, in so far as the elders were concerned was good and proper way of thinking. However, much of what I saw happening in the world around me provoked much thought in my own mind and much consternation on the part of the elders, for I seldom failed to express my opinions about how island affairs had to be viewed within the larger context of events on the Continent. The Revolution and all the wars since had shown us islanders that we were indeed *not* an "island into ourselves" no matter how much we wished it. It was my frank expression of such ideas that brought the Meeting elders to the realization that encouraging women to think for themselves, while in and of itself was a way of arriving at Truth, it carried with it the burden of dealing with inquisitive minds and the new ideas generated therein. One Meeting elder was heard to say that: "our mistake was letting women know they have a right to have an opinion, without letting them know when to have it."

In any case, in the view of the Quaker elders, and much to my own dismay, I was viewed as a very marketable commodity, by the majority of the island's young bachelors, most of whom wanted little more than a solid foundation from which to launch their own world adventures and a fit woman to bear children to perpetuate their family name. Aye, I was not inclined to become a part of any such design be it the proper way of the Quaker life and wife or not.

I can assure thee as well that the feeding frenzy that occurred outside my door when the elders proclaimed me fair game might well nigh have listed this small island had it not been so firmly anchored in bedrock. And, oh, how I craved companionship at the time; Aaron had introduced me briefly to the bliss of the sacred union between husband and wife, and I will not tell thee that I did not long for the presence of a good man beside me in my bed. But where was such a man to be found? Clearly not amongst the fools flying false colors in the street beneath my window.

(She walks to a window upstage, looks out then comes down stage and continues her monologue.)

HADDIE

Aye, the turmoil beyond my door was flattering even to a Quaker girl to whom such attention would ordinarily be a sure sign of some weakness. But I exercised no more control over the multitude than does a Captain over a mutinous crew. In general my suitors were a decent enough lot, but I gave them a wide birth because their over eagerness to haul me in tempered my enthusiasm for the enterprise. So I kept my weather eye peeled for a mate whose temperament and resources were on a more even keel and whose sense of adventure could be satisfied with a life divided evenly between domestic tranquility and the thrill of the hunt on the far side of the globe.

Having given the matter considerable thought, the most likely candidate for the mystical union I so dearly desired turned out to be none other than Aaron Starbuck's next older brother, Ishmael Craddock Starbuck, first mate on the whaler *Independence* and a Quaker in good standing. But my good intentions ran afoul when Ishmael refused to even acknowledge my existence to say nothing of my interest in him as a shipmate for such an extended voyage.

I cannot fathom to this day what it is about the human heart that makes one so want the very things that are most difficult to obtain. Not only was Ishmael inaccessible by virtue of his disinterest in me, but even if I somehow devised a way to overcome his indifference, I would then have the elders with which to contend.

All prospective Quaker marriages have to be inquired into by committee, approved and managed by the Meeting. And there is a provision of Quaker discipline that prohibits marriages between brothers and sisters of deceased spouses. I could be disowned at Meeting for even attempting to engage Ishmael in any kind of a romantic liaison. However, being the free thinker that I had been brought up to be, I decided to tend that line when it needed tending and to initially concentrate my energy on making my high-minded brother-in-law, the object of my pursuit. It was common knowledge in among seafarers that as soon as the great beasts became aware of the whalers' presence, they would make a run for it. However, if a whaler could position himself in the forward track of a whale and show no interest in pursuit, more often than not, the prey would approach the hunter out of curiosity or some other unexplained reason.

By listening to the quiet of my mind I formulated a plan that would in the estimation of this island girl prove so resourceful in its simplicity that no man would be able to ignore its originator. (A beat.) I let it be known in terms that were meticulously defined, that the only man on the island in whom I had *no* interest in courting was one Ishmael Craddock Starbuck.

HADDIE (continuing)

And true to form, before the next high tide, Ishmael Starbuck turned up at my door for a gam and by the time the moon turned full, we were hooked in and strolling about town from tide to tide. And the talk of the town too, I have no doubt. Clearly our intentions were honorable, even if not sanctioned by Meeting, however before we could act more overtly upon the personal feelings that had become the impetus for our devotion one to the other, something had to be done to ameliorate the Quaker injunction about marrying the spouses of deceased kinsmen.

Aye, this proved to be less problematic than it might appear. Ishmael's father was a Meeting elder and perhaps the most influential man in island economic affairs. Without his financial support our new Meeting House would still be nothing more than an idea adrift in the doldrums of fiscal malaise, and Meeting itself would be on a far less stable keel. So when it came clear that Fletcher Starbuck, Senior desired that an accommodation be made to allow his second son to marry his third son's widow, a bargain was struck in which the marriage could take place. I was after all, as Aaron's widow, viewed in the Quaker community as the responsibility of the Starbuck family, so why should either Ishmael or myself be denied the benefit of matrimony when it was what we in union so ardently desired.

Such a decision by the Meeting elders came as no surprise to me, for Quakers are an inherently practical lot, and the elders saw our union as good for both Meeting and the individuals concerned. A proper Quaker marriage was recorded at Meeting in the same year the Essex was destroyed by a whale in the South Pacific. An omen perhaps, but we scarcely could have known that, for in such a state of bliss we languished. And it was not until months later that we even got wind of the extent of the tragedy, and then the hush surrounding the incident was heard throughout the Quaker world.

Aye, we married far enough in advance of Ishmael's next voyage that I had sufficient time to conceive and bear him a child while he was away, but, alas, it was not God's will that I bear children to this whaler either. And when word came of his loss in the oceans on the far side of the globe, I was again left both husbandless and childless. And with a depth of loneliness in my soul from which I didn't know if I could ever recover. The sea was a cruel mistress with whom I had no way to compete. The loneliness made the vast oceans inside my own being seem as unconquerable to me as was the sea to my lost husbands. Bethinks the inner sense of adventure felt by a woman exploring the depths of her mind can satisfy, to some extent, a woman's craving for identity. But a man's search for his identity is directed outward to something external and much larger than his sense of self. So off my husbands sailed to prove to themselves that which they need not have proved to me at all.

(She drags a chair down stage, sits and continues her monologue.)

HADDIE

After losing Ishmael I swore off marriage altogether. Companionship or not, my heart had been twice broken, my dreams twice shattered and my hope for a smooth voyage through this life severely shaken. It was not until Fletcher Starbuck returned from a whaling voyage that this resolve weakened and I again looked without complete disfavor at the prospect of securing a mate. His attempt to comfort me in my loss of a husband and mine to help him mourn the loss of a brother soon led to a human bond between us that would not be denied.

By any account, it should have been a frigid day in the devil's own lair before Haddie Starbuck permitted another whaler's shadow to darken her door, but I relented, reluctantly, at first, but then finally with all the unexplained blindness that is as much a part of love as is salt to sea water.

With Fletcher as the Captain of a vessel and well nigh ready to trade his sea legs for a position in distributing whale oil instead of procuring it, his prospects for long term survival far exceeded those of his predecessors in the field of matrimony and every other.

Fletcher is a kind spirited and patient man; already he is an Elder in Meeting, and although only two score and two he is greatly admired and respected on this island for his wisdom and evenhandedness. His initial foray into the bounds of matrimony ended tragically when his young wife succumbed to smallpox during a bitter island winter, leaving him childless and heavyhearted. For years Fletcher remained a recluse, locked away in his cabin aboard one whaler after another.

Aye, be it our mutual sorrow that attracted our hearts, and when love filled the void that the hunt could not, Fletcher professed his affection for me and I for him. Under contract he had another voyage to complete, but were we so intent on securing our union that we couldst scarcely wait two or three years hence to marry, so we again approached the elders at Meeting and have been granted permission to marry.

It is arranged with Fletcher's father who owns the vessel that Fletcher commands, that I will accompany him into the world. I choose to stand beside my husband on his final and our maiden voyage. And I vow to be left behind nevermore.

It is for my union with Fletcher that I make ready now, entering into this marriage neither as starry-eyed nor as innocent as I was well nigh seven years

HADDIE (continuing)

ago when I first promised the beating heart beneath this bosom to another. I enter into this venture with a much broader knowledge of myself and of the man with whom I have chosen to walk life's path. A foolish young schoolgirl am I no more. The price for current optimism was pain, but with that pain so have I gained strength to overcome adversity and gained access to the dark recesses of my own soul. And it is in that darkness that I now see the faint glimmer of a distant light.

Pray, let us sit quietly for a moment and think on these things.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END
THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on Haddie and, ABIGAIL MARY MACY, 32, a properly married Quaker and Haddie's sister and confidant. They have been through many troubled seas together. Abigail is dressed conservatively in the manner of the times, but she is highly agitated, which is unusual for a Quaker. She is pacing about, throwing up her arms, starting to speak and then stopping. She clearly has something important even vital to tell Haddie, but she just can't muster the nerve or find the right words.

HADDIE

Dear Sister for the love of the Spirit who looks over us all, will thee please stop this whick-wacking about the room and tell me what news thee has come upon from the wharf.

ABIGAIL

Dear Haddie, how one wind at once can blow so fair and so foul I know not.

HADDIE

Pray tell me then, Sister, and I will judge that which is fair and foul.

ABIGAIL

It is a miracle and a curse all in one, and thee should be held blameless on its account. For thou hast done no wrong in the eyes of God.

HADDIE

My reckoning with God will come at His bidding, until then, however, it is the eyes of the elders with whom I must contend. Pray tell me the news that came in on the tide.

ABIGAIL

Aye, I must tell thee, dear sister, for thy heart in all our mutual sorrows has continued to beat in union with mine. And I will not forsake thee now.

(Abigail tries to speak, but sits in silence.)

HADDIE

Dear Sister, thou knowest I love thee dearly, but this silence with which thee has been stricken cannot help but raise some consternation in my heart. Aye, it is only a few bells before my wedding, and from all that is apparent within and without, there is not sufficient time for thee to wait for the Spirit to move thee to reveal what ill or foul wind arrived with the *Independence*.

ABIGAIL

Pray, Sister, sit thee down, and I will tell thee what in my heart can only cause thee great calamity on the occasion of thy wedding day. It is my duty and obligation to do so. Pray sit, Sister.

(Haddie reluctantly takes a seat.)

HADDIE

Pray sit thee too, Sister. I cannot remain anchored while thee races about like the wind.

(Abigail sits across from her, reaches out and takes her hands.)

ABIGAIL

Aye, the morning tide carried with it the long awaited return of the *Independence* and behind her the *Freedom*, both returning from voyages initiated from this port near three years ago.

HADDIE

Aye, these are facts of which I am well aware, Dear Sister. And I will not permit thee to veer and haul like an undecided wind, filling thy speech and my head with information that I need know not. Now drive the iron home, Sister, or take thy leave so I might prepare for my wedding.

ABIGAIL

Forgive me, Sister, I mean not to veer and haul, but rather to find the words that will best appease thy anguish.

HADDIE

The only anguish I feel dear, Abigail, is that originating from the apparent inability of thee to tell me truly what it is for which I should be so distressed.

ABIGAIL

It is a delicate matter, and thee must lend me thy patience along with thy ear for I know not how to tell thee best.

HADDIE

All tales are best told with honesty and forthrightness.

ABIGAIL

Aye, that is God' s truth, and I will from His strength muster the courage and eloquence to relate to thee not only what I heard but what I witnessed on the dock with my own eyes. The town must be fully agitated by now, and the news would be forthcoming in time from one who holds thee in less regard.

HADDIE

Dear Sister, if thee continues to vacillate like an undecided wind, these hands will find their way around thy sweet neck until this information I neither sought nor from which I apparently will not benefit is choked out of thee.

ABIGAIL

Aye, I fathom thy vexation, Dear Sister, and I will, in view of the alternative, attempt to steer a straight course. Pray give me a moment to gather my thoughts for this matter perplexes me greatly.

HADDIE

Aye, take thy leave, but be quick about it for when the bell tolls I shall answer its call as promised.

ABIGAIL

Nay, Haddie dear, thou willest not be answering the bell's call for a wedding on this day. God hath seen fit to return Aaron Nathaniel Starbuck to your loving arms on yonder whaler docking at town wharf.

HADDIE

What foolishness is this of which thee speaks? Don't sport with me, Dear Sister.

ABIGAIL

Dear Sister, God had seen fit to make thee not only a bride on this day but a wife as well of the living and breathing Aaron Starbuck whom I saw with my own eyes. Nay, a wife, a bride and a widow to the wonderful brothers Starbuck three. Most assuredly this turn of the tide will provoke great consternation and ridicule on this isle of tranquility.

HADDIE (shocked)

How can this be? Have I not been a good and faithful servant?

ABIGAIL

Aye, this is so, and thee has gained the respect and admiration of the elders for thy handling of both Meeting and personal affairs.

HADDIE

What sayeth Fletcher Starbuck of this implausible matter?

ABIGAIL

I know not for I sought thy counsel immediately upon recognition of the gravity of this matter. But surely by this time Fletcher is well acquainted with the events transpiring upon the dock and is greeting his brother's resurrection and return with a blend of Christian charity and human distress.

HADDIE

Nay, Fletcher Starbuck is not a man to be distressed over the saving of a lost soul to the sea, particularly so a brother.

ABIGAIL

Nay, Dear Sister, thee knows not the hearts of men in these matters any more than they know them themselves. Neither blood nor misfortune can quiet a heart from its calling true when a woman is concerned. I think it is so with Fletcher.

HADDIE

Aye, if it were only the *heart* that required quieting, bethinks it wouldst be a far more manageable affair.

ABIGAIL

Aye, that be true.

HADDIE

Then what of Aaron?

ABIGAIL

I know not what course to take in this matter for the way is uncharted. Aye, had Meeting not declared Aaron gone to his Maker then thou wouldst be labeled a bigamist by Meeting and disowned. But it is through no contrivance on the part of thee that has landed thee in such turbulent waters. Is it not for Aaron and Fletcher to calm this tumultuous sea?

HADDIE

Nay, it is not for them alone to decide how best to stem the rising tide for it is I who is adrift. Fletcher is an honorable man and a respected member of the community, and Aaron, no doubt, will be hailed a returning hero for his part. It is

HADDIE (continuing)

our way, and I am not inclined to cast oil in the wake of either man--for I loved one once and now the other. (A beat.) I know not how to lessen the perplexity of this matter for I know not how I can be true to a marriage vow to the one brother, whom I thought dead, and marry the other, who is very much alive and dwelling in my heart. My faithful search for Truth in all its apparent simplicity has not prepared me to deal with the complex affairs of the heart. Council me, dear Sister, on what course to follow.

(Abigail gets up, walks to a window overlooking the street and looks out.)

ABIGAIL

Dear Sister, the course thou seeks will be determined by a higher power than I can provide; I can only relate to thee through my own poor powers of observation and interpretation the situation as it presents itself to me.

HADDIE

Then let it be so. I will depend on the good nature of our people to see me through this perplexity.

ABIGAIL

But what does *thee* wish to do, dear Sister?

HADDIE

I know not, Abigail; my heart is torn asunder. And I know not how to mend it. Aaron was my first love, and I loved him with the passion of a young girl, but the wound left by his parting has healed. His return opens it again, and I know not what to say to a man I presumed long ago swallowed up by the sea. And my love for Fletcher Starbuck is now foremost in my heart, and it is the love of a woman, not some foolish young girl.

ABIGAIL (looking out)

I know not what to say either, Dear Sister, but thoust best prepare thyself for Aaron's return is imminent and, by all that is Holy, he comes not alone.

HADDIE

Does Fletcher accompany him?

ABIGAIL

Nay, I only pray that it were so. Look upon this spectacle, but draw not any ill-conceived conclusions until Aaron speaketh from the heart. Aye, he now approaches thy door, and it is by himself now that he comes, having left the others astern.

(Haddie goes to the window and looks out.)

HADDIE (distraught)

Nay, this cannot be!

ABIGAIL

Thy eyes do not deceive thee; the image is clear, but what to make of it I know not. I will take my leave and see what mischief comes with the docking of the *Freedom* whose mainmast was on the horizon when *Independence* crossed the bar.

HADDIE

Pray, leave me not now, Sister, alone in these troubled waters and certainly not in search of more mischief.

ABIGAIL

Dear Haddie, these perplexities are not of thy making, however their undoing will need to be tended by thee alone. Listen to thy heart and abide by the good sense of it.

(There is a KNOCK at the door as Abigail starts out. LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE III

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on Haddie standing at the window with her back to the door. She watches outside and catches her breath when she hears the door open behind her. AARON STARBUCK, 25, enters and waits in the doorway. He resembles more a figure from a romantic novel than a ordinary Quaker. His life for six years has been that of a Pacific islander, and his appearance reflects a sense of freedom and sexuality unheard of on Quaker Nantucket. A loose fitting smock hardly conceals his muscular prown chest, and his golden hair is streaming across his shoulders. His pants are tattered, and his shoes have been carved into sandals. A bone necklace of some kind surrounds his throat.

AARON ("Honey, I'm home.")

Haddie Elizabeth Gardner Starbuck--I have returned to thee.

(Haddie turns around slowly and catches her breath at the sight of him. He takes a step towards her.)

HADDIE

Nay, stand thy ground Aaron Nathaniel Starbuck for it is from the dead that thee hast returned, and I am looking upon the ghost of thee.

AARON

Nay, I assure thee, Dear One, that inside the ghost thou sees before thee beats a human heart, a heart that once beat in grand unison with the heart beneath thine own bosom.

HADDIE

Pray let me sit before my knees buckle beneath me.

(He starts for her.)

HADDIE

Nay, come near me not! Thy touch could well night ruin me, and there is a vast sea of incredulity before me to which thou are largely accountable. (A few beats.) Pray tell me Aaron Starbuck how thee comes to be alive at all.

AARON

Aye, it is but by the will of God alone that I breathe and walk upon the earth. Of seven good men aboard a small boat wrecked by a leviathan's deathblow, I alone live to tell the tale.

HADDIE

Nay, speak to me not of tales, for those are for whale men to recount on long voyages; I am interested only in hearing God's own truth in the matter.

AARON

Aye, and that is as it should be, and may God strike me down if I speak anything other than what I witnessed that terrible day.

HADDIE

Go on then, but be quick about it. For thy rebirth has placed upon the burden of thee and thy family a multitude of pressing issues that need a swift resolution.

AARON

If thee speaks of thy pending marriage to my brother, Fletcher, then think not of it requiring a quick resolution, for by virtue of the circumstances fast upon us, no wedding bells will toll for thee on this day. On this matter I have already spoken to Fletcher.

HADDIE

And to this he was in agreement?

AARON

Nay, not entirely for he is deeply vexed and perplexed by this matter. But he knoweth that no wedding can take place on this day.

HADDIE

Aye, I too am well aware of this. The matter of which my concern is most focused then is that of protecting the good names of Gardner and Starbuck on this island.

AARON

Aye, thee can be assured the importance of that concern is foremost in my mind as well. And by all rights, no man's name should be smeared, for there is no complicity in this affair which would by reasonable men be assumed.

HADDIE

Knowing what I do of these matters, it is a woman's name that is more likely to come under scrutiny than that of a man. Therefore I must abide not only by my heart in this affair but also by reason. Thou are free to come and go with each tide and distance thyself from this affair entirely; but I am shackled by the conventions of propriety and can only leave this coveted island at great risk to my personal well-being. And let us not forget that the reasonable men who will judge this affair were the same men, who, in the light of reason proclaimed thee dead so I might marry thy brother.

AARON

Aye, I spoke briefly to Fletcher of that matter as well and we are in agreement of its complexity and sensitive nature.

HADDIE

Had thee returned on the next tide instead of this one, those same reasonable men might well nigh label me a bigamist even though they be the same learned men who pronounced thee engulfed by thy mistress.

AARON

Aye, and it would have been so if not by the grace of God, who, in His wisdom, prevailed upon the mistress to loosen her death grip upon my soul. But for what good reason, I know not.

HADDIE

Pray tell me now how this miracle was accomplished.

AARON

Aye, I will tell then in God's truth the facts of the matter which are these: The plank upon which I sat as steersman floated up to me from the depths after a mighty blow from the leviathan's tail destroyed our craft. All aboard, with the exception of I who sits before thee, were swallowed up in a sea awash with the blood of man and beast. With what few wits I still had about me I distanced myself from the debacle and prayed for God to alleviate the suffering around me with a swift hand, but it was not to be His will to do so. With a plank resembling in a like manner the shape of a cross I set out in what the sun told me was the

direction of the mother ship, but alas, she was not to be found. The current in time carried me into vast reaches of what I can only surmise was uncharted

AARON (continuing)

ocean for I know not upon what island I landed many days hence feeding on nothing but flying-fish provided by the hand of God. By His grace the inhabitants of the island on which I landed neither worshiped stone images nor looked up the consumption of human flesh as a measure of manhood. I was taken in and cared for as if a son by the island's good people.

HADDIE

Aye, it was then a loving people in which thee was so fortunate to have been attended all these years?

AARON

Aye, there can be little doubt of that.

HADDIE

And from all appearances a remote one. For after three years and now growing on seven, the Meeting elders presumed thee a lost soul and proclaimed thee officially as such.

AARON

Aye. I thought myself dead as well and to my discredit conducted myself accordingly.

HADDIE

Pray, tell me how the dead conduct themselves?

AARON

Thou would derive no benefit from such knowledge.

HADDIE

Pray, explain to me then how thee came to the knowledge of how the dead do indeed conduct themselves.

AARON

Nay, it is a source of great consternation within me now, and I desire to trouble thee not with it. Let us rejoice only that God hath seen fit to return me to thy arms.

(He starts for her again.)

HADDIE

Nay, move then not from that anchorage, for my heart by this time I have in all earnestness given to another.

AARON

Nay, thou are not at this hour any longer bound to my brother. Fletcher will abdicate his prerogative for thy affection for the reason of my prior claim upon thee. What sayeth thee to this, dear wife?

HADDIE

I sayeth thou has too little knowledge of the affairs of this island that hath transpired in thine absence. And presently, be it known to thee that I will be bound to no man by a tethered line, but by heartstrings alone will I be bound for their strength far exceeds that of any anchor chain. And, further, am I to surmise from the history thus far related that thee knowst nothing of other island events about which your return might cause great calamity?

AARON

Aye, I know of brother Ishmael's loss, a bitter pill that still weights heavily on my heart.

HADDIE

Aye, as it does for us all still. However, doth thee know nothing else of Ishmael's affairs?

AARON

Nay, I had not shared the pleasure of my brother's company for well nigh six years. And my saviors aboard *Independence* spoke little of him either out of respect or a fear of aggravating the open wound in my heart.

HADDIE

Aye, thee whale men are a queer lot. There is little doubt of that.

AARON

What means thee this by such an observation?

HADDIE

Did Fletcher not speaketh to thee of Ishmael and myself?

AARON

Nay, he remained silent on the matter although bethinks he is still greatly troubled. (A beat.) What doth thy preoccupation with my poor departed brother signify?

HADDIE

Only that it is incumbent upon me to fetch the light of truth so that thee might see more clearly.

AARON

Then hesitate no longer; cast forth thy light from beneath the barrel that obscures it.

HADDIE

Aye, as thou wishes. Ishmael Starbuck mattered greatly to me, Aaron. For upon the formal declaration of thy loss, I became betrothed and shortly thereafter the wife of thy brother Ishmael.

AARON

Nay, how can this be?

HADDIE

It was a matter of the heart.

AARON

My brother would not take thee for thine own!

HADDIE

Nay, he did not take me, Aaron, I gave of myself freely and in good conscience. For by all that is true and right, I thought thee perished from this earth. As did we all. The elders at Meeting and the courts declared it so. Had I or any one of us had the faintest knowledge of thy circumstances, I would have remained true to thee.

AARON

Nay, how can a good woman cast such a dark light? (A beat.) How couldst thou so deceive me, Haddie Starbuck?

HADDIE

Wouldst thou have me mourn thee forevermore and grown old and embittered by the lonely lot life hath cast me?

AARON

Nay, that is not my wish for thee, but a revelation such as this troubles me to no end. And is there not a Quaker edict that forbids such a marriage?

HADDIE

Aye, but it was for the sake of convenience and economy overruled by the elders in this case as it was in the case of my betrothal to Fletcher. (A beat.) I fear thy troubled heart is not entirely of my making. So tell me true, speaking to me

honestly from the heart, Aaron, did I remain in thy favor while on thy sojourn on a Pacific island?

AARON

Aye, thy remained in favor in my heart.

HADDIE (looking out)

If that be true, then speak to me frankly about the native woman and three fair-haired children waiting not twenty fathoms from this dwelling. (He looks away.) By the sight I see before me it is apparent that while I may have remained in thy heart, thy loins sought comfort elsewhere. For what reason be they there?

AARON

This is a perplexing matter of which I wish not to speak without counsel.

HADDIE

Doth thee deny that these three are not the product of they union with the island woman who cares for them so lovingly?

AARON

I deny it not. It is clear they have the island look about them.

HADDIE

Of which island doth thee speak?

AARON

Aye, Haddie, thee are the clever one still. These children have the look of *both* islands about them. It is clear these children wear the face of my infidelity.

HADDIE

Aye, I surmised as much. Perhaps it is a blending of such diverse island cultures that will bring about a better understanding of our place in the outside world. For I fear our reign of peace on this small isle is drawing to a close.

AARON

Speak to me not of philosophy when thy betrayal still lingers so fresh on my mind.

HADDIE

How can thee hold me blameful for wedding thy brother, or any man for that matter, when by all accounts both human and Divine, thee had perished?

AARON

It is more a matter of a man's rights than it is a woman's desire for a mate that drives such issues. By the laws of God and man thou remains bound to me till death us doth part.

HADDIE

And what of thy bond to me? Thou had neither reason nor evidence to suppose that *my* demise had rendered our marriage vows of no consequence. And yet did thee not take yea island woman for thy mate and lie with her beneath a canopy of twinkling stars on the night and toil with her through many long days and procreate three children through her union with thee?

AARON

The measure of man's behavior among the people of the world is not to be equally judged against thine own circumstances upon this island.

HADDIE

Nay, I will hold fast to the ideal of common and equal judgment for all people in our Society of Friends. We are all bound by our search for Truth not only on this small island but on those isles of the South Pacific as well.

AARON

Nay, woman, thou knowest nothing of which thee speaks.

HADDIE

I know enough to recognize the anguish in a man's countenance when he allows the truth in his heart to be ruled by the ache in his loins.

AARON

Speak no more of these things, woman, for it becomes thee not to think on such longings.

HADDIE

Aye, it may become me not, but on taking thy leave thee left me with the same longings occupying my loins as those of which thee wishes me not to speak. However, since I anticipated thy eventual return, I satisfied such worldly ambitions with the memory of thee that lived in my heart. (A beat.) What did thee do, Aaron Starbuck--less or more?

AARON

Haddie Starbuck I comprehend not why thy heart has so hardened against me.

HADDIE

The reasons lies beyond that door in the issue thou hast brought home with thee. And for what purpose, I still know not.

(Both of them look at the door. It suddenly bursts open and Abigail rushes in breathlessly.)

ABIGAIL

Pray, forgive me this inconvenience, dear Haddie, but upon the docking of *Freedom* more news of great magnitude and bewilderment has been dispatched.

HADDIE

Nay, I believe it not. What news by any measure could be more vexing than the circumstances that have so recently been cast upon this shore?

ABIGAIL

Think on it, Dear Sister. How couldst the return of another whaler from afar increase the gale that already blows around thee?

AARON (incredulous)

My brother, Ishmael--liveth!

HADDIE (incredulous)

My husband, Ishmael--liveth!

ABIGAIL

Aye, they are one in the same. This husband-brother walks and breathes on this island, and unless circumstances belay him, he is making haste to acquaint himself again with thee. God hath seen fit to answer thy prayers.

HADDIE

Pray then that He too will provide Divine guidance of how to most judiciously accommodate the fortunes of my answered prayers. For I am but a small vessel in a raging sea, a solitary woman caught up in an unholy Trinity.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on Haddie, Abigail and Aaron; all are looking towards the door. There is a loud KNOCKING. All three jump.

ISHMAEL (off)

Haddie--Haddie Elizabeth Gardner Starbuck--thy lost husband hath returned to thee! (More pounding on the door.) Haddie! Haddie, dear wife, I have returned for thee. Open this door and thy life to thy devoted husband who is lost no more.

(Abigail reluctantly goes to the door and opens it. ISHMAEL STARBUCK, 32, rushes into the sitting room. Although less dashing than Aaron, Ishmael is nonetheless a fine specimen and by nature a thinker. He is less impulsive than his younger brother, more so than his older, and still, apparently, passionately in love with Haddie, whaling, the sea, and the island from which he was rescued, not necessarily in that order. He sees Haddie first and starts for her but comes up short when Aaron steps in front of him.)

ISHMAEL (shocked)

Brother Aaron, can this be thee?

AARON

Aye, Brother. It is I . . . returned from the deep.

(They embrace, a little awkwardly under the circumstances.)

ISHMAEL

What be the meaning of this? Hath thee returned from the dead?

AARON

Aye, Brother, as hath thee and in a like manner.

ISHMAEL

By the grace of God I know not how to interpret our good fortune.

ABIGAIL

As is the case with all those present, Brother Ishmael.

ISHMAEL

Sister, I think thee speaks in tongues, but for what reason I cannot surmise.

ABIGAIL

Aye, Ishmael, this line is frayed in many parts, and I know not how to mend it. Seek thy answers from Brother Aaron and good wife Haddie, for I must take my leave. I must venture into the sea of incredulity beyond yonder door to defend my sister's good name. To thee I wish a fair wind, but I think it not possible. Good day, dear Haddie, may God be with thee.

HADDIE

Good-bye, dear Abigail. God speed, but forget not me here, the object of this vexing ordeal.

ABIGAIL (exiting)

I will seek a man of wisdom to represent thy case in the matters presently so vexing to thee. Worry not, both God and I are with thee, as will be Fletcher Starbuck once he gets his wits about him.

(She exits.)

ISHMAEL

Brother, for what purpose doth thou visit this house?

AARON

I have returned after a long absence to reclaim that which is lawfully mine--this good woman, Haddie Starbuck, my beloved and wife. And by what enterprise is thee so directed to this residence?

ISHMAEL

I likewise am here to reclaim that which is lawfully mine-- this good woman, Haddie Starbuck, *my* beloved and wife.

(They both look at Haddie who can only manage a small inclusive shrug at this point.)

AARON

Thy wife!

ISHMAEL

Aye, near three years past we were married in the eyes of God and with the blessing of Meeting.

AARON

As was I. And we are now into our seventh year as husband and wife.

HADDIE

Nay, thee were proclaimed dead by the elders and even legally proclaimed so by a court of the Commonwealth.

AARON

What knoweth barristers and elders of life and death?

ISHMAEL

Aye, by appearance here, their skills in these matters are somewhat wanting. (Now to Haddie.) Dear Haddie, to which of thy lawful husbands is thee truly bound?

HADDIE

Nay, I am bound to no man, lawfully wedded or not. Speak to me not of laws but of passion for my heart will be my guide in this matter. For justice in her blindness hath rendered me no less than a bigamist, and had the tide delayed thy arrival by another day, no doubt there would be before thee standing a woman guilty of trigamy.

ISHMAEL

Nay, thou are neither bigamist nor trigamist in the eyes of God.

HADDIE

But in the eyes of man I will carry the weight of the least offensive of the two, and there is on this island no great distinction in that.

ISHMAEL

Before the acrimony in which we are engaged becomes something of a spectacle, Aaron, thy couldst administer a great balm by agreeing to free Haddie

ISHMAEL (continuing)

from the bond thee presently holds her to. Such wouldst be the wise and prudent course to take in these troubled waters.

AARON

Nay, Brother, I will make no such agreement. For thee couldst administer the same balm with a like gesture. And in all light of the common law invested in this affair, I hold prior claim on Haddie's affections.

ISHMAEL

But my claim is more recent.

AARON

Then be it for the elders and barristers to decide.

HADDIE

Pray what knoweth barristers and elders about a woman's feelings or inclinations? Injustice writ in the name of law is a plague upon women on this island and every other.

ISHMAEL

Aye, and more so on some than others. Pray, Aaron speak to me truly of the woman on the doorstep. Doth she be a trophy of thy whaling enterprise?

AARON

Nay, she is a servant girl come here to be in my service.

ISHMAEL

Aye, and the master she serves is apparent in her fair-haired offspring. (A few beats.) Are these bastard children not sufficient reason for thee to relinquish thy claim on Haddie so she might take her rightful place at my side?

AARON

Nay, Brother, before I so freely offer up my wife to thy apparent innocence, speak to me first of *thy* tribulations during thy absence. Did thee survive on a deserted island this long while, or was thy crucible considerably mitigated by the hospitable natives of an inhabited isle?

ISHMAEL

I can state with no fear of retribution that I remained to Haddie Starbuck true in my heart during my absence.

HADDIE

Am I to surmise from the preceding then, Ishmael, that thee too remained true to me *only* in thy heart and not elsewhere?

ISHMAEL

Thee can surmise, dear Haddie, that the absence of any offspring on my behalf speaks to thee of my fidelity.

AARON

Doth thou speakest from the heart on this matter, Brother?

ISHMAEL

Aye, the Quaker that left this small isle returneth today holding fast to the Truth of this existence.

AARON

Brother, thy words are laden with duplicity, and I can see no wrongdoing by their direct interpretation on your account. I find it difficult to accept these truths, however, when I would in thy place also manipulate words to my own advantage.

HADDIE

Thee would lie then in his place to seek your own advantage, Aaron?

AARON

Aye, dear Haddie, that is a direct way to put it. And I speak truly because I cannot hide the truth of my infidelity from thee. It stands in full view beyond yea door.

HADDIE

What sayeth thee to this honest revelation, Ishmael?

ISHMAEL

That truth lies between a man and his Maker. Nothing more.

HADDIE

Amen. *That* be true! (A few beats.) Truthfully, Ishmael, doth thou still desire me?

ISHMAEL

More than the stars, Dear One.

HADDIE

And thee, Aaron?

AARON

More than the stars and the moon and the sun and all else that hath God ordained.

HADDIE

In all truth, I cannot say the same for either of thee. I am grateful to God that He hath spared thee, but more for thy sake than for my own. I know not what to do or what I can do to save the sinking vessel on which I flounder. Pray give me a few moments alone to look into my heart and listen for the voice of God. Only He can calm this tumultuous sea.

ISHMAEL

Seek we will Fletcher's counsel on this matter for he is still once removed from thy intimacy.

HADDIE

Very well then. Take thy leave. I will in your absence attend to the island woman and her children.

(Ishmael starts for her.)

HADDIE

Nay, come near me not for I am in no mood for it. No man dare touch this being or bind this heart until this matter is settled to the satisfaction of all concerned both human and Divine.

AARON

Aye, with thy good graces then we take our leave. God be with thee.

HADDIE

And with thee . . . brothers and husbands.

(They exit. Haddie watches them from the window, then turns and moves down stage to address the audience.)

HADDIE

Perhaps the most powerful tenant of the Quaker movement is that of the Peace Testimony--the absolute disavowal against violence against other human beings, no matter what the cause or provocation. The testament has been with us since 1660, and it is an edict to which I am deeply and profoundly committed. I must admit, however, in cases such as the one before thee, the image of myself strangling the agents of my discontent is indeed a far from unsatisfying one.

HADDIE (continuing)

I find it paradoxical that this violence we so resolutely disavow against human beings is instead practiced upon the most noble and magnificent of God's creatures. Is there not in every man embedded a lust for killing that has to be satisfied? I wonder. If such a blood lust is inherent in our make-up, I wonder if it is not somehow satiated in Quakers by our slaughter of whales. For in all the world there is a no more bloody affair than whaling and it tests a man's courage and binds him one to another in much the same way as the great human conflicts of the recent past and those undoubtedly still to come.

Aye, but what perplexes me most about this slaughter in which we Quakers so willingly participate, is that behind this killing there is no noble cause or national purpose; no tyrant to be displaced; no people to be freed from the yoke of oppression; frontiers will not be opened up; freedom does not ring when whales die by Quaker hands. (A beat.) The only sound is that of coins in the counting houses. Money is our aim and the driving force behind the irons we bury in the backs of our quarry. Blood money it is, with no hint about it of remorse or accountability or reckoning for a harvest we so abundantly reap, but neither sow nor cultivate. How ironic it is that the economic gain fashioned from this killing allows this Society of Friends to insulate itself on this island from the world so that we might practice our faith of peace. This troubles me to no end. Too many nights I have been left alone to ponder this complexity in a room dimly lit, if not illuminated, by the oil . . . and blood of the great whales. (A few beats.) This killing is as perplexing to me as the human drama brewing about me presently, which, I fear, likewise has no clear solution. Perhaps the brothers three, in their combined wisdom, will find a way to free me from the heavy yoke of these many affections gone awry. Thee shall see.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN slowly with Haddie rocking in her chair, thinking. END ACT I.)

THY BROTHER'S WIFE

by

David W. Christner

ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on the brothers three: Aaron, Ishmael and FLETCHER STARBUCK, 42, a dignified and practical man who has already found his fortune in the killing of whales. Under ordinary circumstances Fletcher is a clear and decisive thinker, but these circumstances are far from ordinary, and his judgment is clouded by his love for Haddie. They are seated at a plain oak table in a simple office overlooking the waterfront.

FLETCHER

Aye, brothers three, united again by God's will. Let us be thankful for it and mindful of His purpose.

AARON

Aye, Brothers, stand proud and tall for this is as it should be. Brother Ishmael, what sayeth thee of this blessed unification?

ISHMAEL

God's will it be or not, it be done, and the purpose of His design best be determined by clear thought and sound reason. What God hath brought together, let no woman put asunder.

AARON (lacking conviction)

Aye.

FLETCHER (*really* lacking conviction)

Aye, Brothers.

AARON

Brother Ishmael, didst thee acquaint thyself with an island concoction called Tapai during thy sojourn?

ISHMAEL

Nay, I imbibed no such drink, but I did during certain island rituals partake of a blend called Balou, which was by the native populous consumed in copious amounts--to fend off the island fever.

AARON

For a like reason was Tapai so consumed. And even if the fever did set in, if sufficient amounts of Tapai were consumed, one was unaware of the fever's iniquitous influence.

FLETCHER

Nay, these concoctions have to me the sound of common grog rather than some miracle elixir.

AARON

More than grog, Brother--the milk of island life. And there was no shame in the consumption thereof.

ISHMAEL (critically)

Nor is there any shame associated with the carnal aspects of island life one would gather from the brood thee has in tow.

AARON

Aye, let he who is without carnal knowledge cast the first stone, Brother. (A beat.) Speak to me truly, brother to brother, of thy conduct among the natives. Did thee not avail thyself to the pleasures of island society?

ISHMAEL (guilty as hell)

There is no evidence withstanding against me. Nay, Brother, why can thee not concede this point in my favor?

FLETCHER

Aye, Lord Byron expresses it far better than anyone of us:

What men call gallantry,
and the gods adultery,
is much more common
where the climate's sultry.

ISHMAEL

What do pretty poets know of these matters?

AARON

More than thee, Brother. More than thee.

ISHMAEL

Let us not dwell on these things carnal, but rather ascertain God's good purpose in our salvation and present reunification. Hath He not delivered us from the jaws of death so that we might in some way glorify His Holy name.

AARON

Aye, so be it. Then let us begin the ascertainment without further delay.

FLETCHER

Aye, let us sit in silence and listen for His voice.

(The three of them sit through a tortuous silence accompanied with a great deal of fidgeting and veiled glances at one another. Finally, Ishmael rises to speak.)

ISHMAEL

The Spirit had told me truly that I was saved so that I might reunite with Haddie Starbuck and have our union serve as a beacon of true love for all those who enter into the sacred state of matrimony.

(He sits. After a moment, Aaron rises.)

AARON

The Spirit had told me truly that I was saved so that I might reunite with Haddie Starbuck and have our union serve as a beacon of true love for all those who enter into the sacred state of matrimony.

(He sits. After a moment, Fletcher rises.)

FLETCHER

The Spirit had told *me* that thy purpose is to take Haddie Starbuck for *my* wife so our union might serve as a beacon of true love for all those who enter into the sacred state of matrimony and to prevent conflict and malicious intent between my brothers.

ISHMAEL

Amen.

AARON AND FLETCHER

Amen. Amen.

FLETCHER

By all that is holy, it appears as if the Spirit is speaking in the tongues of men rather than that of angels or the Almighty.

ISHMAEL

Nay, it was the Spirit that moved my voice.

AARON

As it was the Spirit that so instructed me in my revelation.

FLETCHER

Aye, then I fear the Spirit knows no better what to do in this matter than do we mortals. Let us then use the tools of reason and enlightened minds to come to an agreement.

ISHMAEL

Aye, reason will not fail us.

AARON

We are, after all, reasonable men, are we not?

FLETCHER

Aye, for God hath made us so. (A beat.) How then will He instruct us to apply reason in the resolution of this prickly matter?

AARON

Reason would lead one to follow the law. And by virtue of the law, Haddie Starbuck is my legal wife and my possession, therefore I should have her. Is that not a reasonable expression of the facts that lie before thee?

FLETCHER

Aye, on the surface such an argument has the sound of reason about it. But what dwelleth in the depths where the monsters lie?

ISHMAEL

And in the matter before us, Brother, as a consequence of the circumstances over which no man could have exercised reasonable control, Haddie Starbuck by law belongs to me. Bethinks the edict of recency overrules Aaron's claim of prior knowledge and bid for Haddie's affections.

FLETCHER

Aye, there is powerful reason behind this argument as well as that of thy brother Aaron.

ISHMAEL

And I need not even bring Aaron's native wife and island children into the polemic at this time to add further substance to my position.

AARON

I will remain in your debt, Brother Ishmael, for not bringing the island woman into this affair. For she is but a servant girl, not a wife.

ISHMAEL

And what master is she to serve upon *this* island?

AARON

Only to assist Haddie Starbuck with domestic chores and to raise her children as she would see fit.

FLETCHER

What thinks she of such an arrangement?

AARON

What thinks who?

FLETCHER

Haddie Starbuck.

AARON

She knows not yet of my thinking on this matter.

ISHMAEL

What thinks then this island woman of your contrivance?

AARON

She knows not yet of this arrangement either. But both are good obedient woman, and bethinks they will see the wisdom of it in good time.

ISHMAEL

Aye, Fletcher, upon the divulgence of this design, the problem before us will be immediately simplified for Brother Aaron will not, in my judgment, be long walking upon this earth. Pray, Brother, designate a burial site so that we might not be troubled hereafter. Wouldst thou prefer to be committed to the deep or

ISHMAEL (continuing)

laid beneath the cobblestones on yonder street so the island women might make sport of thy bones when walking over thee?

FLETCHER

Aye, Aaron, my position is alongside that of Ishmael. I know nothing of women, but such a contrivance as thee proposes will most certainly place thee in great peril not only with the women so included, but with the Meeting elders here and, no doubt, in heaven above. Thy plan is without reason or goodness on *any* account.

AARON

Then what wouldst thou have me do, Brother?

ISHMAEL

Render thy claim on Haddie invalid so that I might make an honorable woman of her.

FLETCHER

Nay, Haddie's honor is her own; it comes not from without, but is a gift from within. We can neither giveth or taketh away that which is hers. And thy claim on her has too long since been rendered invalid. Nor are the affections in her heart any longer for thee.

ISHMAEL

How knowest this thee, Brother Fletcher?

FLETCHER

Because from the heart of this good woman who thought her husbands both dead, have her affections fled to the living. This I know from her heart and from my own.

AARON

But had she knoweth I liveth, her affections would have remained anchored steadfastly.

ISHMAEL

Aye, the same is true with her affections for myself. Bethinks *thy* affections, Brother Fletcher, from the dear one are misbegotten.

FLETCHER

Nay, Brothers, they were come by honestly and they remain deeply felt. And in having such a deep regard for Haddie Starbuck myself, I knowest how thee must

FLETCHER (continuing)

love her still. I am deeply trouble by the complexity of this dilemma. Pray even the voice of the Spirit wavers. I know not what to do.

ISHMAEL

Let us think on this matter logically and with no malice in our hearts one towards another.

FLETCHER

Aye, for it is a matter of common concern that we face. Through the application of sound reasoning a solution will come.

(They think for a moment in silence.)

ISHMAEL

Were she but a piece of Huckleberry pie, would we not divide her in three equal parts and be done with it? And our common objective would be satisfied.

FLETCHER

Haddie Starbuck be a fine woman, not a piece of Huckleberry pie!

AARON

Were she a ship with three masters, how would we resolve the dilemma?

FLETCHER

Nay, there would be no resolution, only chaos: no ship can sail under three masters.

ISHMAEL

But were she a ship with three masters, how could she best accommodate all three and the three thee?

FLETCHER

No ship *can* sail with three masters, Brother. This I know from experience.

AARON

Aye, that is true, however--a ship can sail with only one master *at a time*.

FLETCHER

Aye, that is so. The ship can be maintained at sea while one master is afloat and the other ashore.

ISHMAEL

Now, Brother, apply a similar principle to the perplexity before us.

(Fletcher ruminates in silence as the others look anxiously on. After a moment Fletcher begins to nod slowly, but he is by no means convinced of the merit of the proposal at this point.)

ISHMAEL

Aye. Aye!

AARON

Aye. Aye. Is Ishmael not the wise one? (A beat.) There can be little doubt of that.

FLETCHER

Nay, Haddie is a woman of flesh and blood, not a ship. Thy reasoning is not applicable in this matter.

ISHMAEL

Brother, deceive thyself not. Logic is logic whether applied to ships or wives or Huckleberry pie. The rules of logical thought apply in a like manner.

FLETCHER

But a ship need not be convinced of such logic.

ISHMAEL

Aye, when that line comes under a strain we will tend it. Until then think on the application of the logical principles and how we can apply them to our common benefit.

AARON

The application is clear, Brothers: We do nothing more than turn the tide on the principle of a ship going to sea with a single master. Two of we brothers remain at sea on a rotating basis, leaving behind a single master to administer to the needs of our common love. When one captain returneth from a voyage, then another depart. In this matter, Haddie need not ever be without the companionship of a mate, and we can in our small fashion, make up for the loneliness of our six year absence. She nevermore need spend a lonely night. What sayeth thee, Brothers, to such a grand design?

ISHMAEL

Aye, the plan is without fault.

FLETCHER

Hath thy rigging come completely undone? No woman of any repute is going to accept such an outrageous, even if, logical proposal. And the Meeting elders would have the lot of us disowned. Are thee ready to accept the tenants of Congregationalism?

ISHMAEL

Aye, the plan is not yet perfect in every respect; but the foundation of our reasoning is sound. The details will come to us as we move to execute this proposal. And think of it not as being to our own advantage; think of it as what it does for our beloved. Such will be our selling point of the design's merits both to Haddie and the elders.

FLETCHER

In God's name I can be no part of this design.

AARON

Nay, brother, thee are already hooked in by the heart. Doth thee not love and desire one Haddie Starbuck.

FLETCHER

More than all the whales in the sea, Brother.

ISHMAEL

Then thou must reasonably see how this is the *only* way to have her, if only in part.

AARON

Were thou to remain a whaler, thee would see no more of her than in a plan of this design.

FLETCHER

Nay, I was going to make a final voyage with her at my side.

AARON

Aye, and command a hen-frigate? I would never have thought that of thee, Brother Fletcher--to take with thee a woman into a man's world.

ISHMAEL

Thou must remain a whaler now, Fletcher, for the common bond of our brotherhood is a binding tie of blood. And under this design thee can be true to thy brothers and to thy wife.

FLETCHER

And thy brother's wife.

ISHMAEL

Nay, only thy wife when thee shares her bed. It will be as before: we two will be at the far ends of the earth, and thee honestly will know not whether we live or die.

FLETCHER

Pray, is there no other way to settle this matter?

AARON

This design came not from me for I have not the gift of intellect so abundantly endowed upon my brothers, therefore I can only assume the plan came from the Spirit who chose me as His messenger.

ISHMAEL

Aye, it is God's voice speaking.

FLETCHER

Nay, the God I know has made no proposals such as this previously.

ISHMAEL

Nor has He ever before had to consider such a vexing enigma. This perplexity is by His hand assembled, and it is by His design that it will be undone. Is this not the case, Brother Aaron?

AARON

Aye, what thee speaks is true. (A beat.) Fletcher, if thee truly loves Haddie Starbuck, then thou must see that this remains the only way to have her.

FLETCHER (confused)

Aye, I think it so.

ISHMAEL

Good then, it is agreed upon?

AARON

Aye, Brother.

FLETCHER (quietly)

Aye, it is agreed.

AARON

All that remains then is that someone needeth to bear the wisdom of our mutual reasoning to our beloved.

ISHMAEL

Aye.

AARON

Then thou will bear the glad tidings, Brother?

ISHMAEL

Nay, not I. Thou wast her first love; thou should bear her the good news.

AARON

Nay, Brother, I have fallen in her estimation. And I fear her confidence in my veracity is compromised by the infidelity from afar that cannot be hidden. Since I would mux the job, I think it should fall upon good Brother Fletcher to bend her ear.

FLETCHER

Nay, Brothers, I remain her betrothed only, never a husband. This unburdening should fall upon one of thee, who is more familiar with her rigging.

ISHMAEL

Nay, Brother. We are in her eyes and heart long since departed. Thee has convinced us of this fact.

AARON

Only thee now holds her affection and her ear.

ISHMAEL

Aye, and she regards thee as a wise and prudent man.

FLETCHER

If Haddie regards thee both as dead, then why doth thee not remain so and relieve me of this arduous task?

ISHMAEL

It is by God's will alone, Brother, that we live, and it is through His will that we came by this design to accommodate our mutual desire for Haddie's happiness.

FLETCHER

Aye, then God can tell her. For He is safe in His harbor far above the earth. I still have to walk upon it.

AARON

Thou doth protest too much. Haddie Starbuck is but a single woman.

FLETCHER

Nay, far from it, Brothers. She is married twice, and we propose to add another husband to her store.

AARON

She is but *one* woman against the brothers three. What mischief could she contrive?

FLETCHER

An iron through thy heart, Brother. A fid driven through in one ear and out the other.

ISHMAEL

Doth thee fear this gentle woman?

FLETCHER

More than the great leviathans of the deep, Brother.

AARON

Very well, then. Be it up to me to calm this sea of turmoil with smooth words of great affection and reason combined.

ISHMAEL

How will thee put it to her, Brother?

AARON (thinks, then)

Haddie Dearest . . . Dearest Haddie . . . Haddie . . . Dearest. I know not how to put it! Thou, Ishmael, art the one with the gifted tongue.

ISHMAEL

Nay, Haddie has already witnessed my attempt to bend words to my own advantage; Brother Fletcher, it is up to thee.

FLETCHER

Why me?

ISHMAEL

When asked of God such a question is seldom, if ever, answered, but to this end, the reason is clear: Haddie doth trust thy wisdom and good intent. That sufficient reason be.

AARON

And what disadvantage can come from such good tidings?

FLETCHER

I know not . . . yet, Brothers. I know not yet.

ISHMAEL

Then thou will tell her?

FLETCHER

Only in thy presence, Brothers. What wrath might befall me, I wish to share equally with the architects of this design.

AARON

We will be behind thee, Brother.

FLETCHER (skeptically)

How far?

ISHMAEL

Nay, we will stand *beside* thee brother, unified and with honorable purpose and good intent.

FLETCHER

Aye, then let us proceed so this madness can be brought to a swift conclusion.

BROTHERS

Aye. Aye.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on the brothers three in Haddie's sitting room. They are nervously awaiting her arrival. When she enters, they stumble all over one another trying to get her a chair.

HADDIE

Stand clear; I need not a pilot to find a berth.

ISHMAEL

Aye, Brothers, give her some space to maneuver, lest we all end up on a shoal.

(Haddie finally gets settled, and the men stand anxiously around her.)

HADDIE

Wouldst thou gentlemen care for some tea?

BROTHERS

Nay. Nay. Nay.

HADDIE

Some grog then perhaps?

AARON

Nay!

FLETCHER

The only Spirit with which we wish to fill ourselves comes from above.

HADDIE

Nay, the scuttlebutt about this island is that Quaker whalers are only all too willing to be filled with the spirits of another kind when off island.

ISHMAEL

For medicinal purposes only, Dear One.

AARON

Aye. The island fever is a frightening thing.

HADDIE

And island spirits diminish the symptoms?

AARON

And break the fever as well.

HADDIE

Doth thy brothers speak truly, Fletcher?

FLETCHER (evasively)

Aye, I have seen the spirits break many a man.

HADDIE

And the fever along with them?

FLETCHER

Aye, when one is broken, so follows the other in close order.

HADDIE

Aye, and what is the remedy for the fever of this island?

ISHMAEL

There is no fever here.

HADDIE

Aye, not for those who can leave it.

AARON

Why would one wish to leave this island of tranquility?

HADDIE

Indeed, why?

(They think about this.)

ISHMAEL

Bethinks men leave this island in search of something greater than ourselves.
There is no mystery about it.

HADDIE

Aye, the great whale . . . the one that lies within or without?

ISHMAEL

Speak clearly, Haddie Starbuck, for I know not what course thee steers.

HADDIE

Aye, I will speak truly from the heart on this matter. (A few beats.) What thee whalers fail to comprehend is that it is the beast within over which thee must seek dominion, not the leviathans thee so savagely pursues to the far corners of the earth.

In a score and four years I have not left the confines of this small island world, and yet I found my true self by searching the inner recesses of my heart and mind. There is much still to learn about myself, but the rebirth of my two "lost" husbands has done much to clear my mind as well as perplex it. I believe I am now able to venture forth into the world as a whole woman and discover where I fit while always holding in my heart the core of decency and common good implanted in me here.

Thee whalers experience this island and the world in a different manner. Thee hath the entire planet as a playground on which to roam at will and discover thy true self, but, nay, instead thee goes about killing whales and bearing children and drinking grog as if such were the purposes for which God hath made thee. I have learned that thee need not look beyond this island to find your soul; it lies within.

FLETCHER (thinks, then)

Aye, Haddie, what thee says is true to some degree, but economic necessity drives our irons into whale flesh. The world depends on our labors for light.

HADDIE

The world would not go dark without whale oil.

AARON

Our world would.

HADDIE

Aye, and there thee hast the paradox. For the Master tells us:

Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your *good* works,
and glorify your Father
which is in heaven.

ISHMAEL

Enough of this talk of light and heaven. The circumstances before us are of *this* world.

HADDIE

Aye, the paradox before thee is born of flesh and blood. Hast thee in thy common wisdom found a means to calm this storm?

ISHMAEL

Aye, we have a proposal we wish to put before thee.

HADDIE

Proposal? Nay, I have had three of them already from the brothers, and to my downfall they are directly associated. I will hear no more proposals.

AARON

It is not a proposal of marriage . . . as thee knows it.

HADDIE

I am intrigued then. Enlighten me with the wisdom of thy common reason.

(She waits.)

HADDIE

Is one of thee to tell me true of thy reasoning, or am I to wait for enlightenment from the Spirit?

(The brothers elbow Fletcher.)

ISHMAEL

Fletcher, enlighten thy love.

FLETCHER

Enlighten perhaps places too large a burden on this task and thee might better think on it solely as the presentation of a path by which our common goals might best be achieved.

HADDIE

These common goals of which thee speaks: to whom are they common?

ISHMAEL

We three . . .

AARON

And thee? And upon hearing the design, Haddie, thou will see the wisdom of it. For it was in our heart to care for thee.

HADDIE

Then what mischief could come from this design?

ISHMAEL

Indeed, what? For it is well thought out. And in it there is no malice, only forethought.

HADDIE

Very well, then. Lay thy plan before me.

(Again, Fletcher is very reluctant to go on.
The brothers have to urge him on.)

HADDIE

Doth thee have reservations about this design, Fletcher?

FLETCHER

Nay, I am to the design, in theory, committed in full, but I know not how best to explain the complexities of the enterprise, for, as thou art well aware, these are uncharted waters.

HADDIE

And by all appearances: treacherous ones.

FLETCHER

Aye. (A few beats.) Dear One, be forever mindful that *thy* welfare was paramount in the thinking that gave birth to this proposal and that we three sought the Spirit's guidance in the formulation thereof.

HADDIE

I will remain mindful of the Creator's part in this design.

FLETCHER

And bear in mind as well that a common love of thee lies at the foundation of the design.

HADDIE

Aye, Fletcher, the birth, the conception, the formulation and the foundation upon which this design is constructed is duly noted. Now that the keel is laid, pray build something upon it.

FLETCHER (hesitates, then)
Perhaps Brother Ishmael, at this point, doth desire to add the first rib?

ISHMAEL
Nay, Brother, the course thee steers looks to be true.

FLETCHER
Aye. (A beat.) Dearest Haddie, hath thee the faint memory still of how it was upon thy union with these wonderful brothers to share with them thy intimate moments and look forward to a future not alone but with thy beloved at thy side?

HADDIE (skeptically)
Aye, that door in my heart is now closed, but I can, when I desire to do so, open it and look in with some fondness.

FLETCHER (encouraged)
And doth thee recall the joy thee felt upon their return from a long voyage?

HADDIE
Nay, I have no such recollection. Not until this day did either of these lost ones return, and what I feel is far more akin to consternation than any joy I have thus far experienced.

(This is not what the brothers wanted to hear. They are anxious now. Things are not going well.)

FLETCHER
Aye, forgive me, for I flounder about in this uncharted sea. (A few beats.) This design in which we have invested much arduous reasoning has within it the means by which thy security and desire for a loving companion would never again be left wanting.

HADDIE (puzzled)
How couldst such an elusive goal as this be achieved?

ISHMAEL (enthusiastically)
Herein lies the beauty of the design.

HADDIE
The beauty of it remains to be seen by this beholder.

FLETCHER

Dearest Haddie, we brothers three have formulated this plan to accommodate our common goal of providing for thy happiness and security.

HADDIE

Those are not the affairs of the brothers three, but I am anxious to hear how thee would propose to achieve it nonetheless.

FLETCHER

Dearest Haddie, thy continued scrutiny of this enterprise maketh it all the more difficult for me to set the sail.

HADDIE

Aye, I will allow thee to set it in peace then. Haul away, Oh, Captain.

ISHMAEL

Pray, Haddie, thee need not make a mockery of these proceedings. It is with diligence and on account of our mutual concern for thee that we undergo this crucible.

HADDIE

Then pray tell me what I know not, for by this design our future is to be tightly bound.

FLETCHER

Aye, Haddie, pray listen to the design in its wholeness before commenting on --

ISHMAEL (anxiously)

-- the wisdom of it.

FLETCHER

Brother Ishmael, I will gladly hand over the helm to thee if thee desires that I do so.

ISHMAEL

Nay, hold fast to the present course. Thee are bound for glory.

FLETCHER

Since we are brothers three, bound by blood as well as duty, our goal was to formulate a design that while providing for thee first and foremost would also make an accommodation for our mutual desire for thee as a mate. (He lets this sink in.) With that as our goal, a design modeled upon a ship with three captains was in our minds' eye laid out. Think of thyself as the ship, which on alternate

FLETCHER (continuing)

voyages is commanded by different masters. (Haddie is not sold on this idea, but she continues to listen quietly.) The ship in this design, however, remains island bound while it is the captains who embark upon long voyages to distant ports, always, however, leaving one captain at home on the mother ship. (She nods.) We brothers three rotate back to the mother ship on a continuing basis to satisfy thy longings for security and companionship.

(He pauses and looks to his brothers.)

FLETCHER

Brothers, do I present thy case in a manner that gives thee credit.

AARON/ISHMAEL

Aye. Aye. As it does to thyself.

FLETCHER

In this way, Haddie, thee will always have a mate beside thee and the security of *three* whalers to provide for thy comfort and needs. (A beat.) What thinks thee of this design?

(Haddie studies each of them and then lets her gaze settle on Fletcher.)

HADDIE (icily)

Fletcher, tell me truly that thee had no part in this insidious plot for my ruination.

FLETCHER (thinks, then panics)

Aye, Haddie, I tell thee truly: I had no part in it!

ISHMAEL

Nay, thou were the primary architect of this design.

FLETCHER

Nay, Aaron hatched the fledgling and upon thy contribution it sprouted wings and hath now flown into this forbidding sky. I am with its design unaccountable.

HADDIE

This is no fine bird of flight but a serpent slithering through the underbrush!

AARON

Dear One, we acknowledge that it is not yet a perfect plan. There remain many lines to be tended in due course.

HADDIE

Nay, there are so many lines already under a great strain that their attendance will undoubtedly be greeted with a great parting and its attendant disastrous consequences.

AARON

Pray, listen to the design in its entirety.

ISHMAEL

Haddie, if thou didst once love each of us of thine own accord and for our individual merits, why then canst thee love the three of us at once?

HADDIE

By this reckoning couldst I not just as well love every other whaler on this island and at the same time remain a virtuous woman?

AARON (under his breath)

Aye, this woman is too clever for us.

ISHMAEL

Pray listen to the balance of the design.

HADDIE

Nay, I have heard enough to surmise for whose purpose it was writ, and I will have no part in it. Thee brothers three have with malice and forethought plotted my destruction.

ISHMAEL

Nay, Haddie, such was not our intent.

HADDIE

Nay, the design speaks of thy intent.

AARON

Nay, thou misinterprets our design; it was but to serve thee, Dearest.

HADDIE

Aye, while I at the same time serve the wonderful brothers three one after the other in succession like a common jadehopper! What of any children born to such a design? Didst thee cover such an eventuality? Fletcher, speak thee truly.

FLETCHER

Nay, not all the particulars of the design are formulated at his point for it is still in its infancy.

HADDIE

And what of the day when whaling no longer calls thee away to the sea? Would I then have three husbands on hand to stumble over and with which to contend?

AARON

These lines will all be tended in good time, Dearest.

HADDIE

Set this in thy mind like a main sail, Aaron: thy "Dearest" lies behind yea door with thy fair-haired brood; she stands not before thee here!

AARON

Aye, thy position is well taken.

HADDIE

Were I not a Quaker I would drive an iron through the hearts of thee and end this sorry affair. I regret the day I took up the Starbuck name.

FLETCHER

Haddie, our intent for thy welfare was true for we brothers three hold ourselves accountable for it.

HADDIE

Then how can thee in good conscience, Fletcher Starbuck, condemn me to live the life of a harlot in this . . . the grim world of the brothers wonderful?

FLETCHER (thinks, then)

Brothers, we have erred badly in our handling of this affair. Bethinks it should be addressed by the elders in counsel, and that we three should pledge to abide by the wisdom of whatever decision they come to.

ISHMAEL

Aye, thee speaks the truth. I will so abide. Aaron?

AARON

Aye, I will so abide, but bethinks there is still much of merit in the current design.

FLETCHER

What merit, if any, there is in it will be seen by the elders and addressed. (A beat.) Haddie Starbuck, will thee trust this affair to be settled by the elders?

HADDIE

I will hear the elders for I know in my heart that their search for Truth is genuine, but I fear their thinking is more influenced by what hath always been, more than by what could be; therefore in the resolution of this matter I must follow my own heart and mind.

FLETCHER

Aye, that is as it should be. It is even in the heart where the hunter finally finds a home.

HADDIE

Aye, that is a great truth which is too often spoken and too seldom heard.

ISHMAEL

Nay, one's individual truth must be reflected in the light of our island Society for it is this common bond that binds us one to another.

HADDIE

In truth, I will be bound no more except by a Truth that sets all people, men and women alike, free in practice as well as in word.

ISHMAEL

Let us seek the counsel of the elders.

FLETCHER

I will fetch them and lay before them this perplexity for a swift resolution.

AARON

Aye.

ISHMAEL

Aye. Be on thy way.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE III

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on FIVE ELDERS. (This is the entire cast assembled in a plain room and dressed as Quaker elders. They are sitting silently in proper Quaker fashion waiting for the Spirit to move them to speak some wisdom on the difficult matter before them. They are shaking their heads back and forth, nodding, talking quietly to themselves and obviously laboring hard to find some resolution. Finally, an elder rises, makes some hand gestures, starts to speak, shakes his head and then sits back down, perplexed, without speaking. After a moment another Elder does the same. And then a third. After another silent period, an Elder finally stands.

ELDER

Dearest God, pray, show us the light in this difficult matter.

(As he sits and waits, the LIGHTS BEGIN TO COME DOWN SLOWLY to complete darkness.)

ELDER (in the darkness)

Hath anyone a lamp?

(END SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on Haddie and Abigail in Haddie's sitting room. Haddie is packing a small bag while Abigail stands by watching anxiously.

ABIGAIL

Dear Sister, thee need not leave this island to find thy happiness.

HADDIE

Peace, not happiness, is what I seek Dear Abigail. There will none of that for me here now on any account.

ABIGAIL

Thou hast no knowledge of the ways of the world.

HADDIE

And it is for that very reason also that I must go.

ABIGAIL

Nay, thou will be devoured on the Continent.

HADDIE

Nay, Sister, the Continent is not inhabited by cannibals. It is on this island where I would perish for there is no longer a proper place for me. Since the elders found no solution to this matter from the Spirit, they will, by necessity, turn to the law where I will by definition be labeled a bigamist, circumstances notwithstanding. Even though I am not at fault in this matter I am bound by the law legally and morally to two men, neither one for whom I any longer hold any affection.

ABIGAIL

What then of Fletcher? He be not a fool like the other two, and his affection for thee is heartfelt.

HADDIE (reflectively)

Aye, Fletcher . . .

ABIGAIL

Doth thee deny that Fletcher Starbuck still holds a tender place in thy heart?

HADDIE

Nay, I deny it not, but that tender place be not as welcoming as it once was. It hath been tempered by the hot iron of deceit for his part in the design of the brothers three to discredit me.

(Abigail rushes to embrace her.)

ABIGAIL

Haddie, pray, do not leave this island of peace and good will.

HADDIE

Sister, I must. Circumstances demand it, and my own survival depends on it. And I will carry with me the peace and good will of this island in my heart.

ABIGAIL

But what will thee do? Neither good will nor peace will protect thee from winter's blast nor fill an empty stomach.

HADDIE

Of this I am well aware. So I will listen to my heart and to the inner voice of the Spirit. I have been blessed with many talents--a good mind and many useful skills with which I can make my own way.

(Distressed, Abigail begins to unpack Haddie's bag.)

ABIGAIL

Nay, thou shalt not go. I forbid it.

HADDIE

Dear Sister, do our men not leave this island and go into the world so they might kill whales?

ABIGAIL

Aye, that be true. It is our way of life.

HADDIE

And in the killing do they not define themselves as whalers, as men, and even as Quakers?

ABIGAIL

Aye.

HADDIE

And we women are left here confined on this island, wonderful though it be, to *be* defined by our men as the wives and sisters and mothers of whalers, and all the while being told we are equal in our Society of Friends. And yet are we not forbidden from taking part in the business affairs of this Society? Nay, I tell thee, we women are a world apart, and I know in my heart that I must find my own place in the world individually just as we Quakers must find our place in the world at large. Lest we are all lost. We cannot remain in seclusion on this island for all time.

ABIGAIL

Haddie, this thing of which thee speaketh is a frightening prospect.

HADDIE

It is frightening to me as well. But I only wish to be free to do what our men have always been free to do--to find my own place in the world.

ABIGAIL

Haddie, I fear for thee.

HADDIE

Overcoming fear is the most difficult part of any journey.

ABIGAIL

Is there nothing I can do make thee change thy course?

HADDIE

Nay, my course is set. I need but to cast off the last line.

ABIGAIL

Aye, Fletcher Starbuck.

(There is a KNOCK at the door.)

HADDIE

That would be Fletcher now. Will thou take thy leave, Sister?

ABIGAIL

Aye, I will admit him and take my leave.

(They both move into the sitting room. Abigail exits, admitting Fletcher on her way out. He and Haddie stare at one another for a moment.)

HADDIE

Pray, sit thee down Fletcher Starbuck and ease the burden of thy weight from thy feet.

FLETCHER (sitting)

I only wish the burden on my heart and soul could likewise be so easily alleviated.

HADDIE

What burden doth thee carry on thy heart and soul?

FLETCHER

Haddie, toy with me not for I know I hath deeply offended thee. I am not a stupid man in all matters.

HADDIE

Nay, in all things I have always held thee in the highest regard and looked on thee as a man of sound judgment and solid enterprise.

FLETCHER

Nay, events of the immediate past of which we are both all too familiar prove me otherwise.

HADDIE

I will not dispute your judgment on that matter nor do I seek any mitigation on your behalf.

FLETCHER

I offer only on my behalf the most sincere apology for what, in retrospect, was so grievous a mistake on my part. For such a disreputable design against thee, I am truly ashamed.

HADDIE

Your apology is accepted.

FLETCHER

Trust that my judgment was clouded by heart-felt feelings of affection for thee. In my distress at the prospect of losing thee for good, I reasoned it better to have thee in part than to not have thee at all.

HADDIE

If thee were to have me Fletcher, it would not have been by some design, but rather because I wished it to be so, which until I heard of this design, I did.

FLETCHER

Haddie, I am but a stupid man, and there is no excuse for it. But doth thou doubt my love for thee?

HADDIE (thinks, then)

Nay, I doubt it not. It is written on thy countenance.

FLETCHER

Can thee forgive me then my part in this design as well? I was by love and my brothers led into this foolish enterprise.

HADDIE

Aye, Fletcher, thou are forgiven. Thou are not the first man to be made a fool of by love, nor will thee be the last. I carry no malice for thee in my heart.

FLETCHER

I thank thee, Haddie Starbuck. Thou art a good woman.

HADDIE

Far from it Fletcher Starbuck. For while I find it not difficult to forgive thee, I find it very difficult to find charity in my heart for thy brothers.

FLETCHER

Neither will they seek thy charity, Haddie, for in their minds thee still to each of them are bound.

HADDIE

They would be ill advised to promulgate such a belief for I am of my own heart and mind on this matter. They remain for me departed from this world, and there is no possibility that either of those unions, even if honored by the courts, will be so honored by Haddie Starbuck.

FLETCHER

Aye, and that is as it should be. And I will try to convince them of the folly of their aims. But for thee, sailing on this tack will undoubtedly put thee on a collision course with our Meeting elders.

HADDIE

This I have taken into account, and I have no doubt that since barristers will settle this matter because the elders can't, there will be no alternative but for

HADDIE (continuing)

this Society of Friends to disown me by reason of bigamy. (A beat.) I can be disowned by the Meeting elders in this fashion, but the peace that inhabits this heart can never be excommunicated.

FLETCHER

Then thou art steadfast in thy resolve to go into the world?

HADDIE

Aye, rather than walk down the aisle with thee, I must walk away from this isle. Rather than seeking my happiness in another, I must find the fullness of myself in the woman this adversity hath wrought. My being has been tempered with the hot iron of passion and the cold sorrow of endless tears and finally ignited again with an inner calm that calls me to a new and in all likelihood difficult path to . . . I knoweth not where.

FLETCHER (thinks, then)

When I left this island as a young man to kill whales and find whatever it was I was searching for, I departed with full knowledge that this bedrock of peace and good will would be here for me always, waiting, upon my return. (A beat.) Haddie, thou departest with no such knowledge.

HADDIE

Nay, I depart with the good of this island embedded in my heart. I take it with me instead of leaving it behind to return to of my own accord. Had Aaron done likewise, he would not have returned here with an island woman and three children. What knoweth thee men of solidarity in the soul?

FLETCHER

Aye, thou attaches the bedrock to thy soul and carries it with thee.

HADDIE

It is the compass that keepeth thee from losing the way.

FLETCHER

Haddie Starbuck, speak to me truly: Doth the heart of this weak creature before thee go with thee as well?

HADDIE

Aye, there is a place for thee in my heart, but where thou goest is the affair of thine own heart. Where doth it find a home?

FLETCHER

Until this wretched affair, it was with thee. Now, I knoweth not. (A beat.)
Wouldst thou have me walk with thee?

HADDIE

Not because I *need* thee.

FLETCHER

Then because *I* need thee?

HADDIE

Thou needs to knoweth thyself before walking with anyone.

FLETCHER

I knoweth this much of myself, Haddie Starbuck: I knoweth not myself at all, but I see not God's purpose for me any longer in the killing of whales.

HADDIE

That is a beginning.

FLETCHER

But in our Society we are so much more concerned with ends.

HADDIE

Aye, that be true.

FLETCHER

And I am bound by blood to this island and to this way of life.

HADDIE

Aye, bound to this island by the blood of brothers and whales alike. The blood of one is shed to provide the lifeblood of the other. To this way of life this island is inexorably bound.

FLETCHER (bitterly)

Bless be the ties that binds.

HADDIE

Nay, for they also choke and restrict freedom.

FLETCHER

Aye, but freedom is a scary thing.

And costly. HADDIE

I knoweth not if I want to be so free. FLETCHER

That is for thee to decide. That yoke was forced upon me; now I embrace it, for I feel about me the air of a new world opening before me. HADDIE

A new beginning? FLETCHER

Aye. HADDIE

With no end in sight? FLETCHER

Only that I will be true to myself in it. HADDIE

Haddie Starbuck, thee hath healed my damaged heart with thy wit and wisdom and built hope where there was none. Thee shall remain in my heart forevermore. FLETCHER

As thou will remain so in mine. HADDIE

I thank thee for that knowledge because I could not have long borne the burden of thy disfavor. FLETCHER

Then without such a burden, thou can find thy way in the world. HADDIE

Aye, if that be the will of God. FLETCHER

Nay, it is God's way to lay before us many paths; it is for us to chose the one on which to set our course. HADDIE

FLETCHER

Then I must choose of my own accord?

HADDIE

Thee has set a course many times before--to the far reaches of the earth.

FLETCHER

Aye, but my course was always set with the lives of my crew in mind. Setting one's individual course is a more difficult matter.

HADDIE

I cannot help thee in this respect.

FLETCHER

Then I pray God will guide me.

HADDIE

Listen to thy heart; from it will come God's will.

FLETCHER

Nay, it is the heart of a killer, and hath done so in God's name.

HADDIE

I think that is not to be the case in the future.

FLETCHER

Nay, I know not what path to follow. The path of my past secures my future. While the path of an unknown future relinquishes my past. (A beat.) Where doth thee find the strength to take this walk?

HADDIE

From within. (A beat.) Thou will see me off on the tide?

FLETCHER

Aye, if thou must go.

HADDIE

I must.

FLETCHER

Then I shall see thee off.

(Haddie crosses to him and kisses him with infinite tenderness. Then he holds her for a long time. The LIGHTS BECOME TO COME DOWN SLOWLY.)

HADDIE

Fletcher Starbuck, thee art the one I loved truly from the depths of my heart.

(END SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE V

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on the dock where a prow is elevated slightly to permit access to a moored sailing vessel. Haddie is at the base of the prow, saying a final farewell to Abigail. Aaron and Ishmael are off to one side; Fletcher is nowhere in sight. Haddie embraces Abigail, who is overcome with grief at their parting.

HADDIE

Shed not any tears for me, Sister, for it is by choice that I embark upon this journey.

ABIGAIL

These tears fall not for thee, Dear Sister, but for me. These tears fall to fill the void in my heart left by thy parting.

HADDIE

Abigail, it is a good thing that hearts are resilient lest none of us would survive. (A few beats.) I will miss thee, Sister, and, I know, long for thy good company and pleasing manner on many occasions to come.

ABIGAIL

Had I not a mate returning to this island, I would walk with thee. But alas . . .

(They embrace affectionately a final time, and then Abigail moves aside as Ishmael and Aaron approach Haddie.)

HADDIE

Brothers and husbands, I will miss thee no more for I have had my fill of it previously. Nonetheless, I wish thee well.

ISHMAEL

Haddie Starbuck, how doth thee leave two good husbands?

HADDIE

On this vessel, Brothers Starbuck.

ISHMAEL

Mock us no more. Two good husbands remain behind thee.

HADDIE

Nay, I have taken stock of everything I leave behind, and by my own reckoning, I leave no husbands behind and certainly not too *good* ones.

AARON

Fair enough, Haddie Starbuck. Your position is well fortified by my accounting, and I leave thee to it. I wish thee well and will not hold over thee our brief union. For thy good will, I will with the counsel of a barrister break this tie with thee for it is my intent to return with my native wife and fair-haired brood to the island where her heart calls home.

HADDIE

Aye?

AARON

They are ill suited for life on this island and understand not this world of commerce and killing.

HADDIE

Then may God go with thee. (A few beat.) And what of thee Ishmael? How doth thee bid me fare?

ISHMAEL

Fletcher hath prevailed upon me to set a new course, so, Haddie Starbuck, I cannot in good conscience hold thee to a bond that hath so long been broken in thy heart, nor do I intend to do so. Thou can depart with my best wishes for a successful voyage.

HADDIE

Aye, Ishmael, I would not have thought this of thee.

AARON

If the truth be known, the widow Percy Coffin hath scorned him so he must have her.

HADDIE

Aye?

ISHMAEL

It is my nature to have what I cannot, except for thee. Had my affection for thee been not so adamantly refused, I would not have sought out the comfort of the window Coffin in any case.

HADDIE

Trouble yourself not with such mitigation for I have no interest in it. Tend thine own lines, and I will do likewise. Just speak to me on this subject: doth thee intend to have a barrister oversee the dissolution of our union?

ISHMAEL

Aye, for thy sake and mine.

HADDIE

Aye. I thank thee.

ABIGAIL

This design be but by God, Haddie Starbuck, for He hath set thee free. Thou hast no good purpose to take thy leave.

HADDIE

Nay, the purpose remains unchanged and go I must still. Except for thee, I have no calling on this island anymore. I must embark.

(There is a final embrace with Abigail then Haddie starts up the prow. Halfway up she pauses when Fletcher appears with a sea bag thrown over his shoulder. He stops, sets the bag down at the bottom of the prow and looks up at her.)

HADDIE

I'm underway with the tide.

FLETCHER

Aye. I see that you are.

HADDIE

Thee nearly missed my departure.

FLETCHER

Nay, I know when the tide turns. There is time still.

HADDIE

Thee knows the tides, aye.

FLETCHER

And little else. (A few beats.) Didst these two brothers of mine tell thee of their fortunes?

HADDIE

Aye, that they did, and as a consequence, they are, if not held in high esteem, at least raised some small amount in my estimation.

FLETCHER

And with such knowledge, thou chooses to embark nonetheless?

HADDIE

Aye, my heart is set on this course. There is no turning back now.

FLETCHER

Aye, the open sea beckons thee?

HADDIE

Thou knowest the strength of her call well.

FLETCHER

Aye, but it is a long and perilous voyage on which thee embarks.

HADDIE

If it were not so, it would not be worth the taking.

FLETCHER

Aye. (A few beats.) Fare thee well then, Haddie Starbuck. My love goeth with thee.

(Haddie turns, walks to the top of the prow then turns and looks back at Fletcher.)

HADDIE

Fletcher Starbuck, if thou desires to walk with me, then take up thy sea bag and embark, for the tide will not turn for thee a second time.

(She stretches out a hand to him and waits as the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. BLACKOUT.)

David W. Christner
PO Box 103
Slocum, RI 02877-0103
Email: playwright@excite.com
playwright43@gmail.com