

SAVING NINEVEH

Act 1

Scene 2

Setting: On the ship bound for Tarshish.

At Rise: We hear a terrible storm: wind howling in the rigging, crashing of waves, creaking of timber, muffled shouts of sailors. There are brilliant flashes of lightning followed by thunder. We view the ship as if standing in the middle of it, facing forward. Up center is the bow. Seated right, pulling together on one oar, are DYMAS and AGELAOS. To left, struggling alone with might and main, is SONICKSEN. Down stage are three or four wooden crates, a coil of rope, a heavy duffel bag, and one very large barrel.

CAPTAIN

Pull, men, pull! Put your heart into it, Agelaos! Dymas, ye're dragging! Pull, blast ye!

DYMAS

(A mere boy)

It's been seven hours, Captain!

SONICKSEN

(An old Norse seaman)

Hef you ever seed de like of it?

AGELAOS

(An unreclaimed pirate)

It's unnatural, I say! These seas in this month—a storm like this? Arrrr!

DELAMER

(Enters)

Ze water, she is coming in too fast, mon Capitan!

CAPTAIN

Keep the men at their buckets! They must bail faster!

DELAMER

Oui, mon Capitan!

(Exit)

AGELAOS

I smell a god in this somewhere—Zeus or Dagon or one of them rotters! Flay me if I'm wrong! Arrrr!

CAPTAIN

Well then pray, my lads! Pray to all the gods! Offer 'em anything! Dymas! Give a hand with this freight!

(DYMAS leaves AGELAOS at the oar to join the CAPTAIN.)

AGELAOS

First the freight and then the passengers, eh, Captain?

CAPTAIN

Dymas, ye ready? Heave!

(The CAPTAIN and DYMAS carry a crate to the side of the ship and throw it over.)

Pull and pray, men! I want prayers to Poseidon and Isis, Dagon and Ashtaroth. Make up a god, if you must, but keep praying! Dymas, the barrel!

(The CAPTAIN and DYMAS tackle the large barrel but find it too heavy to move.)

Agelaos! A hand!

(AGELAOS crosses to join them. The three MEN grasp the barrel and heave but still can't move it.)

Batter off the lid and empty it!

(THEY tear at the lid. To their surprise, it comes off in their hands without resistance. The CAPTAIN looks in the barrel.)

What! Jonah! Sound asleep! Out of there, my man!

(THEY dump over the barrel and JONAH tumbles out.)

JONAH

What! Phew! Ack! What's happening? It's raining!

CAPTAIN

Raining! Ye call this rain, is all?

JONAH

Okay, it's really heavy rain. Are we in danger?

CAPTAIN

Danger! Man, we're at our last gasp! If ye've got a god to call on, talk to him quick! Perhaps he'll spare us a thought and we won't all perish.

AGELAOS

Throw the barmy landsman overboard!

CAPTAIN

Dymas, roll it over the side and then toss whatever else you can find!

DYMAS

Aye aye, Captain!

(Hauls the barrel to the side to roll it over.)

CAPTAIN

Agelaos, back to your bench!

AGELAOS

(Pokes JONAH hard in the ribs.)

You're next, me pudgy! Boosh!

(Mimes a dive overboard, cackles at JONAH'S discomfiture, then returns to his oar.)

CAPTAIN

Jonah, there by Agelaos! You can pull an oar same as the rest!

JONAH

But what about . . . ?

CAPTAIN

Don't be minding Agelaos. If he so much as kills ye, I'll have him flogged!

SONICKSEN

Vun of de gods is be angry mit us, Captain. Mark my vords! Somevun has brought dis on us all!

CAPTAIN

Who, man? Do ye have any notion?

SONICKSEN

Ve must cast lots and de sooner de better.

CAPTAIN

I don't like it, Sonicksen. I don't like tampering with the gods in that fashion.

DELAMER

(Enters)

Ze sheep, she is on ze verzhe of breaking up, mon Capitan!

CAPTAIN

Delamer, get a coin from every man. Put them in your hat and bring them to me.

DELAMER

Oui, mon Capitan!

(DELAMER goes to DYMAS and SONICKSEN. Each fishes up a coin and drops it in his hat. When HE comes to JONAH, however, JONAH demurs, knowing he'll be found out.)

JONAH

I'm sorry. I don't seem to have . . .

AGELAOS

You better cough up a coin quick or it's over the side with you.

JONAH

(Finds a coin)

Oh, heh, well, what do you know? Here's one.

CAPTAIN

(Addressing the gods)

If it's one of ye that has unleashed this storm on us, at least let us know of it! We're men and haven't long in any case.

DELAMER

(Bringing his hat to the CAPTAIN)

Zey are all here, mon capitan!

CAPTAIN

Ye powers above, direct me now!

(HE plunges his hand into the hat and draws out a coin.)

Hebrew shekel, out of Israel!

JONAH

(To God)

You! You! You! You! You!

AGELAOS

Right all along!

CAPTAIN

You now, Jonah? Come, what is your business? Is there a god ye've offended?

JONAH

I am a Hebrew, and I worship Yahweh.

CAPTAIN

Have ye done wrong by Him?

JONAH

He sent me to Nineveh to denounce the city.

CAPTAIN

(Alarmed)

Nineveh!

SONICKSEN

(More than alarmed)

Nineveh!

DYMAS

(Terrified)

Nineveh!

AGELAOS

(Fondly)

Nineveh!

JONAH

But I got scared and fled for Tarshish instead. And that's what's causing all this! Because I won't do it!

(JONAH heads upstage to throw himself over.)

CAPTAIN

Stop him!

(AGELAOS and DELAMER leap from their benches and grab JONAH.)

DELAMER

Vat shall we do with heem, mon Capitan?

CAPTAIN

Jonah, what shall we do with ye? Can your god make the storm go down?

JONAH

(JONAH struggles to get free, but AGELAOS and DELAMER hold him.)

Throw me overboard! Feed me to the fishes and maybe He'll call off His dogs.

(To Heaven)

Let's do the job now and be done with it! Find some other idiot to send to the city!

AGELAOS

Into the drink with him!

(AGELAOS and DELAMER grab JONAH'S wrists and ankles and start swinging him.)

Ready, Delamer? A one, a two . . .

CAPTAIN

Unhand that man!

(AGELAOS and DELAMER drop JONAH.)

Back to your oars, both of you!

AGELAOS

Nay, Captain! Let us do his business!

CAPTAIN

(Threatening to strike AGELAOS)

To your oar, ye dog!

(To DELAMER)

Go below. Bring me a report!

(AGELAOS returns to his oar. DELAMER exits.)

So, Jonah, this God of yours made the ocean, did He?

JONAH

He did.

CAPTAIN

And ye thought ye'd hide from Him in a boat!

JONAH

I was scared! I'm sorry! You want me to jump, I'll jump!

CAPTAIN

No, I'll not have ye jump!

(To the CREW)

It's not a hanging offense, running from danger. And if his god won't show any mercy, I say we will!

(The SAILORS cheer—all except AGELAOS—and go to work with a will. DYMAS grabs the duffel bag. It is surprisingly heavy. For a while, whatever else is going on, DYMAS is tugging and jerking the bag toward the bow.)

CAPTAIN

This is the best ship and the best crew in the Great Sea. We're a match for any god!

(A searing flash and a boom. The storm doubles in intensity. The CAPTAIN, CREW, and JONAH are sent sprawling.)

Except maybe this one!

AGELAOS

Captain, these waves! They're mountainous!

DELAMER

(Enters)

Ze steering oar is shattered! Adieu, mes amis!

JONAH

This is folly, Captain! He wants me! And He'll take all of you to get me! I'm going over!

(JONAH starts to struggle toward the bow. DYMAS, meanwhile, is still tugging the duffel bag upstage.)

CAPTAIN

Jonah, no!

AGELAOS

Think of us for once, Captain! You want us all to die?

SONICKSEN

Ve hef got families vaiting for us in Tarshish!

CAPTAIN

I can't have all their lives on my head!

JONAH

Forget it! If it wasn't this, it'd be nine other things! Ask any Egyptian!

(JONAH crawls toward the bow. DYMAS, meanwhile, has almost reached the bow with the bag.)

CAPTAIN

O God, unknown to us before, we know we're cowards and we're doing wrong. But do not charge us with the death of an innocent man. All of this, Lord, is Thy set purpose.

(DYMAS has reached the bow and is struggling to heft the sack. HE does not notice JONAH, who has also now reached the bow.)

JONAH

Here I am, Lord! You want me? You got me! And much good may it do You!

(JONAH stands on the verge and tries to fling himself over, but his feet refuse to budge. DYMAS has the bag up on his knees, ready for his great effort. JONAH turns back to the CAPTAIN.)

I can't do it!

(At that instant, DYMAS turns and blindly flings the bag right into the arms of JONAH, knocking him backwards off the ship with a petulant, despairing "Oy!" Splash! And the storm stops. Over. Bang. Finished. Suddenly, sunshine, blue sky, a calm breeze, the gentle lapping of waves on the hull, the cry of gulls.)

DYMAS

I'm sorry!

(The CAPTAIN and SAILORS are stunned by the change in the weather. THEY stare at the sky, the sea, and each other, wide-eyed. DELAMER is the first to stir out of his astonishment. HE leans over the rail and starts searching the surface of the sea.)

DELAMER

Zhonah? Zhonah? Mon ami!

SONICKSEN AND DYMAS

(BOTH rush to the side of the ship)

Jonah! Jonah, you there? Yoner! Yoner! Yoo-hooo!

("Yoner" is Sonicksen's pronunciation throughout.)

AGELAOS

(Delighted)

And into the drink he went! Arrrrr!

CAPTAIN

Any luck, men?

DYMAS

None, sir. It's like, he's vanished.

AGELAOS

Down to the roots of the mountains! Glub glub glub glub glub!

CAPTAIN

Keep calling. He can't have gone far. Meanwhile, I'll start trying to piece this rickety tub back toge--

(The CAPTAIN trails off, staring wide-eyed off to sea. RAPHAEL walks over the sea to the ship, delicately wipes the soles of his feet, and steps on deck, not at all ruffled or even damp. The CAPTAIN, stunned, makes a slight nod. RAPHAEL bows in turn. As the CAPTAIN watches, RAPHAEL turns to the sea and whistles as if hailing a cab. To the CAPTAIN'S surprise, his CREW do not hear him. The ANGEL has manifested himself to the CAPTAIN alone. RAPHAEL waits a moment and then motions toward the sea.)

DYMAS

Look there! Is that . . .? Do you see what I see?

SONICKSEN

Dat is, for shore, de biggest fish I ever see in fifty years!

DELAMER

C'est fantastique!

AGELAOS

Do you think we could catch it?

SONICKSEN

And lookie dere! It's a hand! It's him! It's old Yoner!

AGELAOS

And the fish is after him! Now me pretty one's in for it! Arrr!

DYMAS

I can't look! I can't . . .

DELAMER

Zhonah! Don't thrash about so! Zey can smell fear!

SONICKSEN AND DELAMER

Yoner, behind you! Yoner! Zhonah, watch out! Zhonah! Yoner!

AGELAOS

Bye bye, me hearty!

(SONICKSEN and DELAMER turn away at the climactic moment. Only AGELAOS can watch.)

Gu-u-u-ulp! And down—he—goes!

DYMAS

Did . . . did it . . . swallow him?

AGELAOS

Jonah of Galilee sleeps in the fishes.

SONICKSEN

You mean, mit de fishes.

AGELAOS

I said what I said.

(The SAILORS remove their caps. RAPHAEL turns to the
CAPTAIN and smiles.)

CAPTAIN

Men, what was the name of that old deity Jonah worshipped?

DYMAS

Yahoo?

SONICKSEN

Yovay?

DELAMER

Yoplait?

AGELAOS

No way!

DYMAS

Yahweh?

(RAPHAEL snaps his finger and points to DYMAS.)

CAPTAIN

That was it. Yahweh. Men, let's gather in a circle a moment, if you would.

(The SAILORS gather around the CAPTAIN. RAPHAEL nods graciously to him. BLACK OUT)

End of Act I, Scene 2