

Night Crossing

Mystery · 13-character play · 7 women, 4 men, 2 either · 85 min · Advanced · Ages 12+

On the night ferry from Marseille to Bastia, at one in the morning, a teenage girl walks into the deck 6 bar holding a green coat she found on the rail. The passenger who wore it has vanished. Vera, the ship's purser, has until they dock at seven to tell the gendarmes whether she fell, jumped or was pushed. Twelve people spend the night in the bar, and every one of them has something to hide.

The deck 6 bar of the Calanca, a ferry of the Azur Levant line, one night in May, between Marseille and Bastia, the present day.

Casting

VERA (Female role, Adult) 49, purser of the Calanca, twenty years with the company.

ALMA (Female role, Adult) 34, accountant at Azur Levant head office, travelling alone, cabin 6012.

DIANE (Female role, Adult) 46, passenger in cabin 8003, on the Prestige deck.

CLAIRE (Female role, Adult) 38, chief officer of the Calanca.

ODETTE (Female role, Senior) 71, retired court clerk, makes the crossing every month.

MILA (Female role, Young adult) 24, cellist, cabin 6014, on her way to play at a festival.

INÈS (Female role, Teen) 15, travelling with her grandfather.

BRUNO (Male role, Adult) 58, director of operations at Azur Levant, cabin 8001.

MARCO (Male role, Adult) 44, lorry driver; his lorry is on the car deck, deck 3.

JOSEPH (Male role, Senior) 76, Inès's grandfather, going home to his village.

TIAGO (Male role, Young adult) 21, cabin steward, first season on board.

SAM (No gender marker, Adult) Forties, has run the deck 6 bar for twelve years.

CHARLIE (No gender marker, Adult) Thirties, writes for a Bastia daily paper.

ACT ONE: ONE O'CLOCK

SCENE 1: THE GREEN COAT

(The deck 6 bar. A counter, bar stools, tables bolted to the floor, a long banquette under the black portholes. Behind the counter, a narrow door marked "Storeroom", and a small door on the right, to the toilets. At the back, the glass door onto the passageway. A round clock says two minutes to one. The engine can be heard everywhere, all the time.)

(Sam is wiping the counter. Odette sits alone at a table, a crossword and a notebook in front of her. Diane, on the banquette by the porthole, a wool cardigan round her shoulders, is finishing a herbal tea. Marco, at the counter, stares into the bottom of his beer.)

SAM. We close in two minutes. Just saying, for anyone who's still thirsty.

MARCO. I'm still thirsty.

SAM. What you've still got is five hours of driving after Bastia.

MARCO. Four. I know a short cut over the pass.

SAM. I know your short cut. It goes past three bars.

(Sam takes Marco's glass away.)

ODETTE. Seven letters. "What the sea doesn't give back."

DIANE. Bodies?

ODETTE. That's six.

MARCO. Keys. I lost my lorry keys overboard once. The boss took them out of my wages.

ODETTE. "Keys", four. No.

(Odette slides the sugar lumps from her saucer into her bag.)

ODETTE. Do you want your sugars?

SAM. Keep them. I never take sugar. Not in coffee, not in life.

(The passageway door opens. Bruno comes in, a hotel bathrobe over his trousers. He smells of cigar.)

BRUNO. A cognac. The old one, not the one on the menu.

SAM. The bar closes in a minute and a half.

BRUNO. Then pour quickly.

SAM. The old one is for people who ask before midnight.

BRUNO. Do you know who I am?

SAM. The gentleman in 8001, who already had the old one at midnight. And who was smoking on deck 7, where it isn't allowed.

BRUNO. Who told you that?

SAM. Your bathrobe.

(Bruno sniffs his sleeve. Diane smiles into her cup.)

DIANE. Can't you sleep either?

BRUNO. I never sleep at sea. The engines. And you?

DIANE. Me, I can sleep anywhere. Except where I've been told to sleep.

ODETTE. "Wreckage." No, eight.

(The passageway door bursts open. At the same moment, a watch beeps twice, one high note, one low, and the clock reaches one. Inès comes in, out of breath, a green coat clutched against her and a woman's shoe in her hand.)

INÈS. We have to call someone. Who do we call?

SAM. Easy. What's going on?

INÈS. This was on the rail. Up top, at the back, where the lifeboats are. The coat was folded over the bar. And the shoe on the deck, next to it.

MARCO. Somebody forgot it.

INÈS. You don't forget a shoe. What, you just walk off in the other one, like that, on one foot?

(Sam takes the coat. Turns it over. Goes through the pockets.)

SAM. Nothing. No papers.

INÈS. I know her. I mean, I've seen her. The red-haired lady in the restaurant, the one on her own. She had this coat.

DIANE. Was there anyone up there?

INÈS. No one. Just the wind. And the sea down below, going all white behind the boat.

(A pause. Everyone looks at the black porthole. Sam looks at the storeroom door.)

BRUNO. She went back to her cabin. She got hot, she took her coat off. People do strange things at night.

INÈS. And her shoe? Her foot got hot?

SAM. She's right. We call.

(Sam picks up the wall phone behind the counter.)

SAM. Bridge? Sam here, deck 6 bar. I may have a person overboard. Deck 7 aft. A coat and a shoe on the rail. Yes. No, nobody saw anyone fall. Yes. I'm keeping them here.

(Sam hangs up. Almost at once, a long, deep alarm runs through the whole ship. A voice over the loudspeakers: "Man overboard, starboard aft. Man overboard." The engine changes its note. The floor slowly tilts.)

MARCO. He's turning her round.

ODETTE. We're turning round for a shoe?

SAM. We're turning round for the person who may be in the water. Nobody moves. The purser's on the way down.

(Sam lays both hands flat on the counter and stays absolutely still. The door opens. Joseph comes in, pyjamas under his raincoat.)

JOSEPH. Inès! You weren't in the cabin. I've looked for you everywhere.

INÈS. I was the one looking for you, Grandpa. You weren't in your bed.

JOSEPH. I'd gone up for some air.

INÈS. So had I.

(They look at each other. Joseph sees the green coat in Sam's hands.)

JOSEPH. What's that?

INÈS. Nothing. It's a lady's coat.

SCENE 2: THE PURSER

(One twenty-five. The bar has filled up. Charlie, standing near the porthole, a camera on a shoulder strap. Mila, in a sweatshirt, a cello case beside her. Tiago, in a crew waistcoat, a list in his hand. The green coat

and the shoe lie on the counter. Vera comes in, followed by Claire, who carries a radio. Vera holds a tablet; round her neck, a lanyard with her badge and a small red USB key.)

VERA. Good evening. Good night, rather, or what's left of it. I'm Vera, the purser. This is Claire, chief officer. You're here because you were in the bar or on deck 7 between midnight and one. Or because you sleep next to cabin 6012.

MILA. I was asleep. Someone woke me up banging on my door.

TIAGO. That was me. Sorry.

VERA. Cabin 6012. Alma Ferri, thirty-four. Boarded at Marseille, alone, no vehicle. Claire?

CLAIRE. The captain turned back at two minutes past one. We're running back along our wake with the searchlights. The coastguard has taken charge of the rescue: a helicopter is taking off from Ajaccio, a patrol boat is on its way. We've called her name all over the ship. Nothing. We were due to dock at six; with the turn, not before seven. And the captain's assigned me to you until Bastia.

VERA. Her cabin?

CLAIRE. I opened it at ten past one. Empty. Bed not slept in, the turndown chocolate still on the pillow.

TIAGO. I put it there. At ten.

VERA. You knocked at five past one, before Claire?

TIAGO. I knocked. No one answered.

VERA. And you didn't open the door?

TIAGO. It's a lady's cabin. I don't open up without someone with me.

VERA. You've got a master key for that, Tiago. You open up, you call out "crew", and you look.

TIAGO. Yes. Next time.

VERA. Her phone?

CLAIRE. The number on the booking just rings and rings.

VERA. What's the water temperature?

CLAIRE. Fifteen degrees.

DIANE. At fifteen degrees, you last two hours. Three, if you're strong and you don't panic.

VERA. Are you a doctor?

DIANE. I've seen a lot of people pulled out of the water. Not all of them alive.

VERA. Right. The maritime gendarmes will board at Bastia, at seven. They're going to ask me three questions: did she fall, did she jump, or was she pushed. And I want the answer before they do. So: who saw her this evening?

INÈS. Me. In the restaurant, at nine. She was alone at a table, by the window. She had a lemon tea and she put three sugars in it. Three. I filmed her, well, not her, my plate, but she was in the background.

VERA. You film everything?

INÈS. For my account. I've got a hundred and twelve followers.

JOSEPH. A hundred and eleven. Not counting me.

INÈS. Then, around eleven, I saw her again up top, on deck 7. She was taking pictures of the lifeboats. Close up. The big machines that hold the lifeboats, the iron arms.

CLAIRE. The davits.

INÈS. She was photographing them like they were monuments.

VERA. And at five to one, you find the coat.

INÈS. Folded over the bar. Neatly folded, in half. And the shoe, not knocked over. Placed. Standing straight, next to it, like outside a door.

(Vera picks the shoe up from the counter and looks at it.)

VERA. Anyone else?

CHARLIE. I was on deck 7 from half past twelve. I wasn't asleep.

VERA. Your name?

CHARLIE. Charlie. Cabin 5021. At about twenty-five to one, someone was smoking near the lifeboats, a silhouette, a cigar, I could smell it from where I was. Twenty to one, I saw a green coat at the rail, right at the far end. Then I walked round the funnel, to the other side, out of the wind. Quarter to one: a scream. Short. And a splash.

VERA. A splash.

CHARLIE. Something heavy going into the water. And two minutes later, a second one. Smaller.

VERA. Two.

CHARLIE. Two. I walked round, I didn't see anyone. I thought someone was throwing bags over. It happens on boats, people dumping their rubbish. I went back to my cabin.

VERA. You heard a scream and two splashes, and you went back to your cabin.

CHARLIE. I didn't sleep. I closed my eyes.

(Bruno coughs. Everyone looks at him. He pulls his bathrobe tighter.)

VERA. And you, madam?

DIANE. Diane. Cabin 8003. I barely saw her. At dinner, a little brunette, alone at her table. I didn't pay attention.

ODETTE. Red.

DIANE. Sorry?

ODETTE. She had red hair. Carrot red. The girl has just said so.

DIANE. Red, brunette. In that restaurant lighting, everyone looks the same.

ODETTE. Not to me. I wrote it down. One twenty-eight: "a little brunette".

VERA. You write down what people say?

ODETTE. Forty years a court clerk in Marseille. I write down what people say, word for word, and where they sit. I don't know how to stop.

VERA. Then don't stop. Write everything down tonight. Who says what, and at what time.

ODETTE. I had no intention of doing anything else.

DIANE. If I may, Purser. I was a chief inspector with the Lyon murder squad for fifteen years. A woman who folds her coat and sets her shoe down straight doesn't fall. She's made a choice. People who fall don't have time to fold anything.

VERA. Are you still with the police?

DIANE. On leave.

MARCO. Pays well, does it, leave? The Prestige deck's three hundred euros a

night.

DIANE. I'm not the one paying.

VERA. And you, miss? Your cabin is 6014?

MILA. Mila. Yes. I didn't see anything. I had my headphones on, I was working on a score. I only came up here at midnight, for two minutes, to get hot water for my honey. And at about half past ten, someone knocked next door. At hers. Nobody said anything. Then a little sound, like paper sliding under a door.

VERA. Paper.

MILA. Maybe. The walls are thin, you hear everything. You even hear people brushing their teeth.

VERA. Did she come in here?

SAM. About half past eleven. A tea, not for long. Then she left.

VERA. Alone?

SAM. Alone.

VERA. Tiago, the crew searches the whole ship. Decks, passageways, toilets, car decks, machinery spaces. We don't skip a single cupboard.

SAM. The bar and the storeroom, I did myself. I looked everywhere, right round the back of the kegs. Nobody.

VERA. Good. Sir?

JOSEPH. Joseph. I didn't see anything. I was looking at the sea.

VERA. From where?

JOSEPH. From up top.

VERA. From deck 7. At what time?

JOSEPH. I don't have a watch. The sea doesn't keep time.

INÈS. He's nearly eighty. At night he can't see a thing.

JOSEPH. Seventy-six. And I can see perfectly well.

VERA. And you?

MARCO. Marco. I don't know her. I was here, at the counter, and then I had a

cigarette on deck 5, where you're allowed.

BRUNO. And I have nothing to say. I don't know her either. I'm Bruno, director of operations for this company. Your boss, Purser, if you count it up.

VERA. I know who you are, sir.

BRUNO. Then you know I need to sleep. I'm opening the new Bastia terminal at eleven.

VERA. No one leaves this bar without telling me. Not the passengers, not the crew, not the management.

SCENE 3: SEVEN O'CLOCK

(Ten to two. The passengers have scattered among the tables. Odette writes. Joseph and Inès, side by side, don't speak to each other. Tiago goes through his pockets, looks under the counter.)

TIAGO. You didn't find anything on the counter, earlier? A card?

SAM. What card?

TIAGO. Nothing. Forget it.

(Bruno takes Vera aside, near the glass door.)

BRUNO. Purser. Two minutes.

VERA. I'm listening.

BRUNO. A tired woman, travelling alone, who jumps off a ferry: it's sad. It happens. Three lines in the paper, a counselling team, we send flowers. A woman who was pushed: that's the front page. That's the insurers, that's an inquiry, that's the whole season collapsing in June.

VERA. And if she was pushed?

BRUNO. She wasn't.

VERA. You're sure of that.

BRUNO. Who would push an accountant overboard? What for?

VERA. How do you know she's an accountant?

BRUNO. You said so.

VERA. No. I said her name, her age and her cabin.

BRUNO. Then someone else said it. The girl, or that one over there with the camera.

ODETTE. Nobody said it. I'd have written it down.

(A pause.)

BRUNO. I want to call head office. There's a satellite phone on the bridge.

VERA. Claire will take you up.

CLAIRE. This way, sir.

BRUNO. I know the way. I'm the one who had it repainted.

(Bruno goes out with Claire. Diane comes over to Vera.)

DIANE. He's lying.

VERA. About what?

DIANE. About the accountant. About the cigar too: he's reeked of it since he walked in. I'm not telling you he pushed her. I'm telling you he's lying. Do you want some help? I know how to take a statement. I know when someone's reciting.

VERA. I have my own methods, madam.

DIANE. You have five hours and twelve suspects, counting yourself. Give me the passengers, you keep the crew.

VERA. We'll see. For now, I'm asking everyone for ID. I'll check it against the list.

DIANE. Mine is in my cabin. With my drops, for my heart, which I forgot to bring. May I go down?

VERA. Ten minutes.

DIANE. Five will do.

(Diane puts on her cardigan and goes out. Vera goes from table to table. People hand her ID cards, passports. She checks them against her tablet.)

CHARLIE. My ID is in my cabin, on deck 5. And my phone needs me too: two per cent. Can I go and get both?

VERA. Go on. Come straight back.

(Charlie goes out.)

VERA. Miss? Mila, is it?

MILA. My passport is in my cabin. In the front pocket of my suitcase. I need to go and get it.

VERA. You go too.

MILA. Can I leave the cello here?

SAM. I'll keep an eye on it. Nobody touches it.

(Mila goes out. Marco gets up.)

MARCO. I need to go down to the car deck. I left the window of the lorry open.

VERA. It'll stay open. The car deck is locked at night, you know that.

MARCO. I do this run three times a week. I know what's locked and what isn't.

VERA. Then have a cigarette on deck 5, if you like. Five minutes. And come back.

(Marco goes out. Vera stops in front of Joseph and Inès.)

VERA. Sir, you were on deck 7. So was your granddaughter. You didn't run into each other?

JOSEPH. It's a big boat.

INÈS. We missed each other.

VERA. An hour ago, that's not what you were saying. She was looking for you, you were looking for her. She went all the way up there to look for you, and she didn't find you?

INÈS. It was dark.

VERA. It was dark for everyone tonight. Tiago?

TIAGO. Yes?

VERA. You're coming with me. We'll go up and look at the rail on deck 7, and then down to 6012. I want to see her cabin with my own eyes.

TIAGO. Claire's already seen it.

VERA. Claire was looking for a woman. I'm looking for what she left behind.

(Vera goes out, Tiago behind her. Only Sam, Odette, Joseph and Inès are left in the bar. Sam looks at the storeroom door, then goes back to wiping the counter. Odette writes.)

ODETTE. One fifty-six. Everyone goes out. Everyone lies a little.

ACT TWO: TWO O'CLOCK

SCENE 1: CABIN 6012

(Twenty-five past two. The engine is back to its cruising hum. Everyone has returned. Diane, on the banquette, by the porthole. Mila, at the other end of the same banquette, the cello case standing upright between them. Charlie's phone is charging at a socket. Marco is at the counter, his red cap on his head. Vera comes in with Tiago. She is holding a clear plastic bag.)

VERA. The coastguard has released us. We're back on course. The helicopter and the patrol boat stay on the search area until daylight.

INÈS. We're going on? What about her?

JOSEPH. The boat can't stay, sweetheart.

TIAGO. They've got cameras that can see the heat of a body in the water. All we've got is searchlights.

INÈS. And if they don't see anything?

TIAGO. Then there's nothing to see.

VERA. Or nothing left. Someone has been inside her cabin.

SAM. Claire found it empty.

VERA. At ten past one, yes. Empty and tidy. Bed made, chocolate on the pillow. Now the drawers are on the floor, the mattress has been lifted, the wash bag has been tipped out into the basin. Someone was looking for something. After ten past one.

CHARLIE. While we were all in here.

VERA. Not all. Odette?

ODETTE. Ten to two, the director, to the bridge, with the chief officer. Five to two: Diane, her drops. Charlie, the charger. The cellist, her passport. Four minutes to two: Marco, his cigarette. And you, with the young man. That left Sam, the gentleman, the girl and me. Back again: nine minutes

past two, Charlie. Ten past two, Diane, and the cellist just behind her. Fourteen minutes past two, Marco, smelling more of diesel than of cigarette.

MARCO. That's my aftershave. Twenty years of lorries.

VERA. And there's no suitcase.

TIAGO. She had one, at ten o'clock. Small, red, on wheels. At the foot of the bed. I nearly tripped over it putting the chocolate down.

VERA. Claire didn't see it at ten past one. Nobody has seen it since ten. So she took it with her, or someone took it for her.

ODETTE. You don't jump with your suitcase.

MARCO. Depends where you're going.

VERA. And there was this. In the bathroom bin, screwed up into a ball.

(Vera takes a crumpled sheet of paper out of the bag and smooths it out.)

VERA. "You will not get off at Bastia with what you have taken." In capitals. Ballpoint pen.

(A silence. The engine.)

INÈS. That's a threat, that is.

MILA. It's the paper. The paper under the door, at half past ten.

VERA. "Azur Levant. Prestige Deck." Tiago?

TIAGO. Pads like that, there's one in each of the two cabins on deck 8 that are occupied tonight, 8001 and 8003. And a stack in the Prestige lounge, on the reception desk. The lounge doesn't close at night. People go up there for the view.

DIANE. So anyone on this boat could have written on that paper. Me included. The director too.

VERA. This isn't an accident any more. Someone on this boat has been frightening her since half past ten.

JOSEPH. She was frightened, and she went up there all on her own, in the dark?

VERA. Or she didn't go up there alone.

MILA. Purser. There was someone in her cabin. When I went to get my passport.

VERA. You saw them?

MILA. Heard. Through the wall. Drawers being pulled out, something falling. Someone walking without making a sound, well, trying to. And a little electronic noise, twice. I don't know what it was.

VERA. What time?

MILA. Two o'clock, more or less. I turned my light off and didn't move. I waited for them to leave. I heard the door, and footsteps, in the passageway. After that, I came back here.

MARCO. An electronic noise, that's the lock. Card locks, they beep.

TIAGO. Not ours. Ours light up green, that's all.

VERA. And your passport? In the pocket of your suitcase?

MILA. It wasn't there.

VERA. Cabin 6014. Léa Morand. Twenty-six.

(A pause. Mila looks at the cello case.)

MILA. That's my sister.

VERA. Your sister is not on board.

MILA. She broke her wrist ten days ago. Getting off a bus. She was meant to play in Calvi, at the festival, a whole concert, with a quartet. The first one they've ever given her. She gave me her ticket, and her concert with it. We look the same in photos, almost. And we play the same, well, she plays better.

VERA. You knew your passport wasn't in the suitcase. So why go down?

MILA. To buy ten minutes. To work out how to tell you.

DIANE. Purser. Let me do your job for a second, you'll forgive me. She leaves the bar at the same minute as the search. She sleeps next door to the cabin. She lies to you about her name, then about her passport. And she comes back with a noise nobody else heard.

MILA. I didn't search anything at all.

DIANE. I didn't say you did. I said what a gendarme will say at seven.

VERA. I don't accuse anyone until I've got everything. But I'm noting it.

ODETTE. So am I.

(Odette writes.)

ODETTE. Two thirty-one. "What a gendarme will say."

SCENE 2: ODETTE'S BAG

(Twenty to three. Claire comes in, followed by Bruno, who has put a jacket on over his bathrobe.)

CLAIRE. The lock log. Before your visit, 6012 was opened three times tonight. At ten, for the turndown. At ten past one, by me. And at three minutes to two.

VERA. With which card?

CLAIRE. Master key number 14.

(Everyone turns to Tiago.)

TIAGO. At three minutes to two, I was with you. We were going up to deck 7.

VERA. I know. That's exactly the problem. Where's your master key, Tiago?

TIAGO. I haven't got it any more.

VERA. Since when?

TIAGO. Midnight. I put it down on the counter to count out a customer's change. I turned round, it was gone. I thought it had fallen behind. I looked. I thought I'd find it before anyone knew.

DIANE. Purser, there's a simple way to find out. Empty your pockets. Bags. Everyone, here, now. Me first.

(Diane turns out her pockets on the table: a handkerchief, a tin of pastilles, a small bottle of drops, her cabin card.)

BRUNO. I'm not emptying anything. I'm the director of this company.

CLAIRE. Then you'll be the director with empty pockets, sir.

(One by one, they empty their pockets and bags onto the tables. Marco, a lighter and lorry keys. Charlie, the camera, a notebook, a charger. Mila, a box of rosin and a jar of honey. Joseph, a folded handkerchief and a small metal lid, which he puts straight back in his pocket. Bruno, a cigar case. Odette doesn't move.)

VERA. Odette?

ODETTE. My bag is my bag.

VERA. Tonight, your bag is mine.

(Odette puts her bag on the table. Vera opens it and takes things out, one by one: sugar lumps, a little spoon from the restaurant, two lighters, a child's hair clip, a pen with the Azur Levant logo, a phone in a green case. And a white card, with a number on it.)

TIAGO. My master key! That's 14.

VERA. And this, whose is this?

INÈS. It's hers. The lady's. The green case, like her coat. I saw it in the restaurant.

VERA. Odette.

ODETTE. The key, I picked up under the banquette. There. At a quarter past two, when I got up to stretch my legs. It was on the floor, right under the cello case. Diane on one side, the cellist on the other. I took it.

MILA. It isn't mine.

DIANE. Nor mine.

ODETTE. Nobody ever says it's theirs.

VERA. And the phone?

ODETTE. On the bench on deck 7, near the lifeboats. It was just lying there, all by itself. At about ten to one. I take a turn round the deck every night, at that time, for my legs.

VERA. You were on deck 7 at ten to one. And you didn't say.

ODETTE. You didn't ask me. You asked me to write things down.

VERA. And the coat, on the rail, did you see it?

ODETTE. I saw it. A coat doesn't fit in a bag.

JOSEPH. And the hair clip, that's Inès's. She's been looking for it since Marseille.

(Inès takes back her hair clip.)

ODETTE. I pick things up. I always have. The things people leave behind them. I don't steal them: I keep them. Someone who forgets a lighter didn't really want it any more. My husband said I had the soul of a court clerk: I

keep the exhibits.

VERA. Do you give them back?

ODETTE. Nobody ever asks me for them.

(Vera presses the phone. The screen lights up.)

VERA. Locked. Seventeen missed calls, that's us. And a message, came in over the ship's wifi at half past twelve. It hasn't been read.

CLAIRE. Who from?

VERA. "C." Just one letter. "I can see you. I'm keeping my distance. Bastia, nine o'clock, as planned."

(A pause.)

MARCO. "I can see you."

INÈS. That's horrible.

CLAIRE. Don't look at me. My name starts with a C, I know. I don't have her number.

VERA. Who else in here starts with a C?

(Everyone turns to Charlie.)

CHARLIE. Can I see the phone?

VERA. No.

CHARLIE. Then I've got nothing to say for the moment.

VERA. "For the moment." Odette, are you getting this?

ODETTE. Two forty-eight. "For the moment."

SCENE 3: THE LORRY

(Ten to three. Vera has sat down opposite Charlie.)

VERA. You were on deck 7 from half past twelve, you said.

CHARLIE. Yes.

VERA. And before that?

CHARLIE. Before that too. On and off. I'll tell you one thing I know, while

I wait to tell you the things I can't. At eleven, she wasn't alone up there. She was talking to someone, at the top of the stairs that go down to the car deck. Voices were raised.

VERA. Who with?

CHARLIE. With him.

(Charlie points at Marco.)

MARCO. I had a cigarette on deck 5.

CHARLIE. In a red cap that says "Transports Rinaldi". There aren't two of those on this boat.

(Marco takes his cap off and puts it on the table.)

VERA. Marco.

MARCO. She saw me at dinner. My cap, my lorry keys. She followed me up there. She asked if I could hide her in the cab of the lorry, in the back, on the bunk, to get off at Bastia. She was offering me five hundred euros. Cash, right then.

VERA. To get off without going down the gangway.

MARCO. Without anyone seeing her get off. That's what she said. "If I go down the gangway, I don't get off." I thought she was mad. Or that she'd stolen something.

BRUNO. Perhaps she had stolen something.

VERA. You said no.

MARCO. I said no. At the port, they put the lorries through the scanner. A person in a cab, that's my licence, that's my boss, that's thirty years on the road in the bin. I've got two kids. So I said no.

VERA. And voices were raised.

MARCO. She kept on. She grabbed my arm. I told her to go and cry somewhere else, that I wasn't the Salvation Army. I left her there.

CHARLIE. She stayed at the rail for a long time, afterwards. Without moving.

MARCO. I didn't lie for my own sake, Purser. Well, I did. An hour later, her coat was on the rail. And the last thing anyone said to her on this boat, maybe it was me who said it. "Go and cry somewhere else."

VERA. And at two o'clock? Your cigarette, on deck 5?

MARCO. I smoked it.

TIAGO. The purser went along deck 5 on purpose at five past two, on the way down from 7. There was nobody in the smoking corner.

MARCO. I was smoking further along.

VERA. Further along, on deck 5, is the sea.

MARCO. Then I was smoking over the sea. I won't say anything else.

(Marco puts his cap back on. A pause. Nobody speaks.)

DIANE. She wanted to disappear. She couldn't find a lorry. So she found another way.

VERA. Or someone found another way for her.

DIANE. You have a threatening note and a woman begging a lorry driver to hide her. That adds up to a woman who's frightened. Frightened people jump.

VERA. Frightened people hide.

ODETTE. "Frightened people hide."

SCENE 4: TWO SPLASHES

(Five to three. Vera stops in front of Joseph.)

VERA. Sir. Earlier, when you emptied your pockets, there was a lid. A metal one.

JOSEPH. It's a keepsake.

VERA. May I see it?

INÈS. He hasn't done anything.

VERA. I didn't say he'd done anything.

INÈS. You're looking at him like he has.

(Joseph takes the lid out of his pocket. A round brass lid, engraved.)

VERA. "Lucienne."

JOSEPH. My wife. Forty-nine years married. She died in February.

INÈS. Grandpa, you don't have to.

JOSEPH. Yes, I do, sweetheart. There's a woman who may be in the water, and I threw something into the water. So I have to. Lucienne wanted the sea. Not the island, not Marseille: in between. She said it a hundred times. "Throw me in the middle, so I don't have to choose." Our daughter bought a plot in the village cemetery. A lovely plot, against the wall, in the sun. She had the stone engraved. And I promised them both.

VERA. You scattered the ashes.

JOSEPH. Over the rail, by lifeboat number 4. The wind took them straight away. She'd have laughed. And the urn, I couldn't bring it back to my daughter empty. So I threw that in too. The lid, I had it in my hand, I didn't think about it.

CHARLIE. The second splash. The small one.

JOSEPH. What time, I don't know.

INÈS. Thirteen minutes to one.

(Everyone looks at her.)

INÈS. I saw you, Grandpa. I was filming the sea, for the moon on the water. And you were in the shot, tiny, at the end. You lifted your arms and you threw something. I thought you'd done something stupid. Really stupid. So I lied. Then I found the coat, and I was scared it was you.

JOSEPH. That what was me?

INÈS. I don't know. I didn't know what you were throwing.

(Inès holds out her phone to Vera. Vera watches the video.)

VERA. Thirteen minutes to one. The coat is already on the bar. There's no one beside it.

CHARLIE. So she was already gone.

INÈS. Mum's going to kill you.

JOSEPH. Your mother will have her grave. Your grandmother has the sea. Each of them gets her own.

INÈS. And what goes in the grave?

JOSEPH. This. It's already a bit of her. She always screwed it on too tight.

(Vera gives the lid back to Joseph.)

VERA. One splash is you. The small one. And the big one, the first? Heavier,

you said.

CHARLIE. Much heavier.

VERA. A red suitcase, on wheels. Or a woman.

(Blackout.)

ACT THREE: THREE O'CLOCK

SCENE 1: THE REPORTS

(Three o'clock. Claire comes back from the bridge, Bruno behind her. Marco drags a chair over to sit down; two muffled beeps are lost under the scraping. Claire wears the same lanyard round her neck as Vera, with the same little red key.)

VERA. Claire. Deck 7 aft has a camera. I want the footage from quarter to one.

CLAIRE. There isn't any footage.

VERA. Why not?

CLAIRE. Because the deck 7 aft camera has been out of order for three weeks. I filed a report on the first day. A second one after a week. A third. A fourth on Monday, marked "urgent" in red. Head office's answer: no budget until the end of the season. I've kept every one of them, on this.

(Claire shows the red key round her neck.)

CLAIRE. The key the company gives every officer. Vera has the same one. Everybody has the same one. Nobody reads what's on them.

BRUNO. That's not the point.

CLAIRE. There's a woman who may have been pushed overboard in front of a camera that doesn't film. That is exactly the point.

BRUNO. You're speaking to the director of operations, Captain.

CLAIRE. Chief officer. And at three minutes to two, the director of operations was on the bridge, with me, on the satellite phone. From ten to two until twenty past. He shouted the whole time. The captain had to step outside.

VERA. So you didn't open cabin 6012.

BRUNO. I told you so.

VERA. You've told me a lot of things. Charlie. The message. "I can see you."

CHARLIE. That was me. I sent that message at half past twelve.

MARCO. I knew it.

CHARLIE. I write for a daily paper in Bastia. Three months ago, an accountant at Azur Levant head office wrote to me. She didn't sign her name. She'd found some invoices. An inspection of the Calanca's davits, paid for, stamped, certified. And never carried out. Nobody ever came. The certificates were signed anyway.

ODETTE. The davits.

INÈS. The iron arms. The lifeboat ones. She was taking pictures of them.

CHARLIE. She wanted recent photos. She was bringing me the rest in Bastia: the invoices, the certificates, the emails. All on a USB key. Meeting at nine, in a café on the old port. We'd only ever written to each other. She'd told me just one thing: "I'll be wearing a green coat." So I took the same boat as her, without telling her, and all evening I followed a green coat. From a distance.

VERA. From a long distance. Far enough to hear her scream and go back to your cabin.

CHARLIE. I didn't see anything. I was on the other side of the funnel. If I'd been standing next to her, do you think I'd have sent that message?

VERA. And at two o'clock, your charger?

CHARLIE. I was in my cabin, on deck 5. Writing to my editor that my source might have disappeared.

VERA. Nobody can confirm that.

CHARLIE. The ship's wifi, maybe. My phone was connected to it.

CLAIRE. I can ask the bridge.

VERA. Later.

MARCO. Hang on. These lifeboats that don't hold, that's on this boat?

CLAIRE. On this boat.

MARCO. We're on it. Here. Now.

ODETTE. I've made this crossing every month for nine years.

BRUNO. This is defamation. This ship has all its certificates.

CLAIRE. On the 14th of March, at the evacuation drill, the davit cable on lifeboat 4 gave way. The boat dropped two metres, with a deckhand in it. Leg broken in three places. I was the officer in charge of the drill.

(Sam puts a glass down on the counter, a little too hard.)

BRUNO. An incident. It was dealt with.

CLAIRE. The drill report says "compliant".

(Vera says nothing. Sam looks at her.)

SCENE 2: THE CIGAR

(Quarter past three. Vera and Bruno, face to face, at a table. The others have stayed where they are.)

VERA. Accountant. Cigar. Prestige deck. You knew her.

BRUNO. I recognised her at dinner. By her voice. She asked the waiter for a lemon tea, and I recognised the voice. I'd come across her at head office, two or three times, in the canteen. At head office, she was a brunette. With that red hair, I wouldn't have known her from a distance.

VERA. And you went up to see her on deck 7.

BRUNO. Head office knew there was a leak in accounts. We didn't know who. When I saw her on this boat, in disguise, photographing the davits, I understood. I went up. I smoked a cigar next to her. I talked to her.

VERA. What did you say to her?

BRUNO. That everything could be sorted out. That perhaps she'd got her figures wrong. That there was a post going at the Bastia office, with a company flat, sea view. That we'd forget all this business about a leak.

CHARLIE. You offered to pay her off.

BRUNO. I offered her a promotion. That's different.

VERA. And what did she say?

BRUNO. She looked at me. She said: "You look like a man who never sleeps at sea." And she turned her back on me. I went back down. It was twenty to one. She was alive, leaning on the rail, with her coat on.

VERA. And the note under her door, at half past ten? On paper from your deck?

BRUNO. I don't write threats, Purser. I have lawyers for that.

(A pause.)

DIANE. Lawyers rarely write on Prestige deck paper.

BRUNO. And you, madam, who exactly are you? You were at dinner, you were at the counter, you're everywhere.

DIANE. A former policewoman who doesn't sleep. Since I went on leave, I've been teaching first aid to company staff. Méridien Conseil, in Marseille, is sending me to train their people at the Bastia office. The Prestige deck is their taste, not mine. It's still less serious than a director who buys his accountants.

VERA. 8003. Booked on Monday. Paid for by Méridien Conseil.

DIANE. You see. I'm not lying to you.

VERA. You were prepared to do anything, sir, to stop her getting off at Bastia with what she had.

BRUNO. I was prepared to give her a flat. Not to throw her into the sea. I'm not a murderer. I'm a man who signed papers he shouldn't have signed. It's not the same thing.

SAM. For Nico, it's the same thing.

BRUNO. Who's Nico?

SAM. The deckhand in lifeboat 4.

(Nobody speaks.)

SCENE 3: THE RECONSTRUCTION

(Twenty-five past three. Diane has stood up. She moves two chairs apart.)

DIANE. Purser. We have no footage and no witness who saw everything. So we rebuild deck 7. Here. Everyone where they were, to the minute. On the murder squad, we called it walking the dead.

VERA. She isn't dead.

DIANE. We don't know that. All the more reason.

VERA. Go ahead. I'm watching.

DIANE. The counter is the aft rail. The tables are the lifeboats. The pillar is the funnel. The glass door is the main staircase. Charlie?

CHARLIE. Half past twelve, I come up the main staircase. I settle here, against the funnel.

(Charlie goes and leans against the pillar.)

DIANE. Director. Your cigar.

BRUNO. I'm not playing this game.

CLAIRE. You'll be playing it for the gendarmes. Might as well rehearse.

(Bruno goes and stands by a table.)

BRUNO. Twenty-five to one. I'm smoking. She's there, at the rail. I talk to her. Twenty to one, I go back down the main staircase.

ODETTE. That's true. I passed him on the main staircase, at twenty to one, on my way up for my walk. It takes me ten minutes to climb it, with my legs. He was in his bathrobe, with his cigar gone out. He said "good evening, madam" the way you'd say "goodbye".

DIANE. We need someone for her. For the coat.

INÈS. Me.

JOSEPH. Inès.

INÈS. I carried it all the way here, Grandpa. I know how it hangs.

(Inès puts on the green coat. It's too big for her. She goes and leans on the counter.)

DIANE. Twenty to one, she's alone at the rail. Charlie, can you see her?

CHARLIE. I can see her. Then I walk round the funnel, and I can't see her any more.

(Charlie goes behind the pillar.)

DIANE. Quarter to one.

INÈS. Do I scream?

VERA. No. We've had enough screaming for one night.

CHARLIE. A scream. A splash. The big one.

DIANE. Thirteen minutes to one. Joseph.

JOSEPH. I come up the forward stairs, over there. I go to lifeboat 4. I don't look at anyone. I've got Lucienne in my arms.

(Joseph goes to a table on the other side. He raises his arms, slowly, as if throwing something.)

CHARLIE. The small splash.

VERA. Did you see the coat, at that moment?

JOSEPH. I saw something green, on the bar, at the far end. I thought it was a lifebuoy.

DIANE. Ten to one. Odette.

ODETTE. The main staircase. The bench. The phone. I pick it up, I go back down.

(Odette crosses, mimes picking something up, goes back towards the glass door.)

DIANE. Five to one, the girl. And at one o'clock, everybody in here.

(Inès takes off the coat and puts it, folded, on the counter. Nobody speaks.)

MARCO. And her? Between the scream and the coat on its own? Where does she go?

CHARLIE. Not by the main staircase. Odette was coming up. Not by the forward stairs. Joseph was coming up.

DIANE. So either she's in the water, or there's a third way out.

TIAGO. There's the service stairs. Behind lifeboat 6, right at the end. You can't see them, there's a life-jacket locker in front.

VERA. Where do they go down to?

TIAGO. Deck 6, the crew corridor. The linen room, the back of the kitchen, and the back door of that storeroom.

SAM. That door's been out of use for two years. There's a linen trolley in front of it.

TIAGO. I pushed the trolley out of the way yesterday, to get through.

SAM. And you put it back.

TIAGO. I think so.

(Diane looks at the storeroom door. Then at Sam.)

DIANE. And all that time, I was in here, with my herbal tea. Sam can tell you.

SAM. Madam didn't leave this bar between midnight and one. The counter, then the banquette.

DIANE. You see. There's at least one person in this bar who wasn't on deck 7.

ODETTE. Three thirty-two. "At least one person."

SCENE 4: B FLAT

(Twenty-five to four. Bruno has turned to Tiago.)

BRUNO. And you. A master key, left on a bar counter, in the middle of the passengers. Do you know what that is, in the regulations?

TIAGO. Gross misconduct.

BRUNO. You're seasonal staff. You won't finish the season.

TIAGO. All right.

BRUNO. What do you mean, all right?

TIAGO. All right, I won't finish the season. But do you want to know who was at the counter at midnight, when I put it down? I'll tell you, since nobody's asking me. There was you, sir, with the old cognac. Diane, with her herbal tea. Marco, with his beer. And the young lady with the cello, waiting for her hot water. I turned round to give a table their change, I turned back again, and no key.

SAM. It's true. There were four of them. Elbow to elbow.

MARCO. I don't even know what a master key looks like. I thought it was a loyalty card.

BRUNO. I didn't touch your card.

MILA. Nor did I.

DIANE. Nor did I. But I understand why you're asking. In your place, I'd ask

all four.

VERA. I'm asking all four. And I've got four answers that say no.

(In the distance, a ship's horn, long. Another vessel is passing the Calanca in the night.)

MILA. B flat.

INÈS. What?

MILA. The horn. A B flat, slightly flat. Sorry. It just comes out.

INÈS. You hear the notes, just like that?

MILA. Everything. Glasses, doorbells, doors that creak. This boat's engine has been humming an A since Marseille, slightly flat as well. It's called perfect pitch. My sister says it's an illness.

(Inès takes a teaspoon and taps a glass on the counter. She takes out her phone.)

INÈS. I've got a tuner app. For the guitar I never learned. Go on.

MILA. C. A bit sharp.

INÈS. C. A bit sharp.

(Inès taps another glass.)

MILA. G sharp.

INÈS. G sharp. That's insane.

JOSEPH. Lucienne would have loved that. She sang out of tune, she knew it, and she sang anyway.

DIANE. Perfect pitch. How convenient. She hears what nobody else hears, and nobody can check. Purser, I'll put it with the rest: she was at the counter at midnight, next to the key, and the key turns up under her case.

MILA. What would I be looking for in that cabin? I don't know her. I don't even know what she took. The only thing I've taken tonight is my sister's ticket.

DIANE. That's what I'd say, in your place.

MILA. You're often in other people's place.

VERA. That's enough. Nobody in this bar gets accused until I've got

everything.

BRUNO. I've been accused for an hour and a half.

VERA. You, sir, are different. You, we know.

SCENE 5: THREE SUGARS

(Quarter to four. Vera turns to Tiago.)

VERA. Tiago. Bring me some ice. For Odette, her legs are hurting.

ODETTE. I never said that.

VERA. You will.

ODETTE. My legs are hurting.

(Tiago goes behind the counter, towards the storeroom door. Sam steps in the way.)

SAM. The ice machine's broken.

TIAGO. It was working at midnight. I got ice for the gentleman's cognac.

SAM. It broke after that.

TIAGO. And the sandwiches? There are two missing from the cabinet. Tuna and chicken. You always count them, Sam, one by one, you made me count them three times at closing yesterday.

SAM. I ate them.

TIAGO. Both of them?

SAM. It's a long night.

(Sam fills the kettle, puts a tea bag in a cup, cuts a slice of lemon with the little bar knife. Inès follows every move. Sam puts in one sugar. Then a second. Then a third.)

ODETTE. You told me you never took sugar.

SAM. Sorry?

ODETTE. Two minutes to one. "I never take sugar. Not in coffee, not in life."

SAM. Tonight, I need sugar.

INÈS. Three sugars and lemon. Like her.

(Sam puts the cup down on the counter and doesn't touch it again. Diane has stood up. She unfolds an evacuation plan taken down from the wall.)

DIANE. Purser. You said it yourself: frightened people hide. She tried to hide in a lorry. If she didn't jump, she's somewhere on this boat. Hurt, perhaps. We have to find her alive, and now.

VERA. Two hours ago, you were saying she jumped.

DIANE. Two hours ago, I didn't know she'd begged a lorry driver to hide her. I change my mind when the facts change. That was my job.

CLAIRE. The crew has already opened everything.

DIANE. The crew was looking for a body. I'm looking for someone who doesn't want to be found. It's not the same kind of search. And we start here. With this storeroom. The service stairs come down to it, the young man just said so.

BRUNO. For once, I agree with madam.

SAM. I searched it myself. At ten past one.

DIANE. Exactly. You searched it yourself.

SAM. It's my bar.

CLAIRE. It's the captain's ship, Sam. Nothing belongs to anyone, on a ship.

MILA. And if she's in there, and she doesn't want us to open it?

DIANE. Then she needs us to open it all the more.

(While they talk, Inès has slipped behind the counter. She picks up the cup of tea. Sam is watching Diane and doesn't see Inès.)

SAM. Nobody opens my storeroom without an order from the purser.

VERA. Nobody leaves here without me, and nobody opens anything without me.

DIANE. Then give the order. It's nearly four.

(Inès pushes open the storeroom door. Sam turns round.)

SAM. Inès, no!

(The door opens. In the storeroom, between the kegs and the boxes, a woman is sitting on the floor, wrapped in a blanket from the bar, her dark hair

loose, her left hand bound in a tea towel. She has only one shoe on. She looks at Inès, then at the cup.)

INÈS. This is for you. Three sugars.

(The whole bar is on its feet.)

ALMA. Shut the door.

(Nobody moves. Blackout.)

ACT FOUR: FOUR O'CLOCK

SCENE 1: THE MISSING WOMAN

(Four o'clock. Alma sits on a stool at the end of the counter, the blanket round her shoulders, the cup in her hands. The others keep their distance, standing. Sam is beside her. Claire has her radio in her hand.)

VERA. Claire. The bridge. Right now.

CLAIRE. Bridge, this is Claire. The passenger from 6012 is on board. Alive. I repeat: alive, on board. Tell the coastguard, have them recall the helicopter.

(A crackle. A distant voice answers. Under the crackle, two muffled beeps. The clock says four. Claire lowers the radio.)

VERA. There's been a helicopter over that black water for three hours. Four people in it, leaning out with searchlights over a sea at fifteen degrees. A patrol boat. A captain who turned round with a thousand passengers aboard. For a woman eating a tuna sandwich in my storeroom.

ALMA. Chicken. The tuna was for Sam.

VERA. I don't find that funny.

ALMA. Neither do I. Nobody was supposed to turn round.

CLAIRE. We always turn round. It's the one law of the sea everybody knows.

ALMA. I'm an accountant. The laws I know best are the ones nobody keeps.

VERA. Tell us.

ALMA. At half past ten, someone slid a piece of paper under my door. You've read it. I read it ten times. It meant: someone on this boat knows who I am, knows what I've got, and knows I'm getting off at Bastia. I didn't know who.

I still don't.

VERA. You should have come to me.

ALMA. You're the purser for Azur Levant. The captain is Azur Levant. The certificates I'm carrying, Azur Levant signed them. I didn't know who I could talk to on this boat without talking to the company.

VERA. So you went to a lorry driver.

ALMA. He said no. He was right.

MARCO. I wasn't right.

ALMA. Then I came here. Sam had written to head office six months ago. Sam's brother, a deckhand on the Calanca, said nobody ever came to inspect the davits. A letter filed and forgotten, at the bottom of a box of archives. Reading it was what made me start digging. We only knew each other in writing. I came in, I ordered a tea, I said my name very quietly.

SAM. She showed me the note. We had half an hour to come up with something.

VERA. Come up with what?

ALMA. That I was dead. But at dawn. At six, the crew hoses down deck 7. They'd have found the coat and the shoe as we came into Bastia. I was supposed to set it all out at four, when the deck is empty. And at twenty-five to one, the director came and smoked next to me and called me by my name. I thought the note was from him. I didn't wait. No turning round: the boat in port, they count the passengers at the gangway, one missing, they search the water, behind us. Whoever wrote that note thinks I'm at the bottom of the sea with the key. They stop looking. And I walk off by the crew gangway, in a bar jacket, with Sam.

INÈS. And the scream?

ALMA. That wasn't planned. I'd taken my suitcase up at midnight and hidden it in the life-jacket locker, behind lifeboat 6. My clothes, my papers, everything anyone could have read in my cabin, and two bottles of water so it would sink. Lifting it over the bar, it crushed my hand. I screamed. Then the coat, the shoe, the phone on the bench. And the service stairs, on one foot.

INÈS. And I found the coat at five to one.

ALMA. Five hours too early.

ODETTE. I couldn't know someone was jumping without jumping.

ALMA. I couldn't know someone was collecting phones.

CLAIRE. And you, Sam. You picked up that phone knowing she was behind your door.

SAM. The girl was standing in front of me, the coat in her arms. If I'd said "it's nothing", she'd have told someone else, and within a quarter of an hour they'd have been opening my storeroom. So I called. And when the ship heeled over, I knew what I'd just done.

CLAIRE. Four people in a helicopter, fifty metres above the water, at night. You know what that means.

SAM. I know. Nico told me what it's like when the boat falls. At two o'clock, I wanted to tell you. She showed me the note a second time. I picked up my cloth again.

VERA. And your hair?

ALMA. A wig. Bought at the Noailles market. At head office, they've only ever seen me with dark hair. I didn't want anyone recognising me on the quay. It was no use: he recognised my voice.

BRUNO. I did not write that note.

ALMA. You offered me a flat with a sea view. Usually, people who offer you a flat don't write threats two hours earlier. Usually.

VERA. Someone searched your cabin. At three minutes to two. With Tiago's master key.

ALMA. He was looking for the key. Or she was.

VERA. It wasn't there.

(Alma pulls a lanyard out from under her jumper. On the end, a little red key, the same as Vera's and Claire's.)

ALMA. The company gives everyone one, at head office too. This one has never left my neck. Not even in the storeroom. Not even when I screamed.

SCENE 2: NOBODY LEAVES

(Half past four. Bruno has put his jacket back on properly.)

BRUNO. Right. Miss Ferri is an employee of this company. She has just mobilised a helicopter for nothing. I'm taking her under my responsibility. My cabin, door shut, until Bastia. And the key stays with her, I won't touch it.

ALMA. No.

DIANE. Not with him, obviously. Purser, I'll take her to mine. I know how to guard someone. Nobody in, nobody out, and I'll hand her back to you at seven, on the quay, for the gendarmes.

ALMA. Not with you either.

DIANE. You'd rather stay in the middle of everyone, with the person who wrote to you?

ALMA. I'd rather stay in the middle of everyone. That way, whoever wrote to me is in the middle of everyone too.

VERA. She's right. Nobody leaves. Not her, not you, not me. We stay here until seven. Thirteen people watching each other: that's the best lock on this ship.

CHARLIE. Can I talk to her?

VERA. In front of everyone.

CHARLIE. It's me. "C." The café on the old port, nine o'clock.

ALMA. Anyone could say that. Everyone's read the message on my phone.

CHARLIE. Your first email. The fourth of February, at twelve minutes past eleven at night. No hello. "I count figures, not bodies. For now."

(A pause.)

ALMA. It really is you. So you were the one on the other side of the funnel. You heard me scream. And you went back to your cabin.

CHARLIE. Yes.

ALMA. Why?

CHARLIE. Because if I went to look, and someone saw me at the rail, next to your coat, it was all over. For the article, for you, for me. I told myself: if it's serious, someone else will raise the alarm. That's what everyone tells themselves. I've written that sentence a hundred times, in articles about other people. Tonight, I was the one saying it.

ALMA. And it was a fifteen-year-old girl who raised it, the alarm.

CHARLIE. I know.

(A pause. Charlie turns towards Inès, who says nothing.)

CHARLIE. Give me the key now. I'll put it somewhere safe, I'll copy it, and whatever happens at seven, the article comes out.

ALMA. At nine, at the café on the old port. As planned. I'm not changing anything else that was planned.

(Sam comes and stands near Vera.)

SAM. Do you want to know why I didn't tell you anything tonight? Why I hid a woman in your storeroom, under your nose, for three hours?

VERA. You're going to tell me.

SAM. Because you signed. The 14th of March. Claire wrote the truth: the cable, the boat, the fall, Nico's leg. And at the bottom of another report, the one that went to head office, it says "drill compliant". With your signature.

(Silence. Everyone looks at Vera.)

CLAIRE. I saw it on the screen, in April. I said nothing.

VERA. The day after the drill, head office called me. They told me Claire's report was going to cost the Calanca its season. The inspections, the ship laid up, three hundred jobs on board and ashore. They'd change the cable quietly, in June. I rewrote the report. I signed it. Nico got his workplace accident. I got my end-of-year bonus.

BRUNO. Vera, this isn't the moment.

VERA. Yes, it is. It's exactly the moment. You wanted us to talk about the cable later, at head office. We'll talk about it here, at half past four in the morning, with the people who are on the boat.

CLAIRE. The cable hasn't been changed.

VERA. I know. So there are two of us tonight, Sam, who lied to the same ship.

SAM. Me, for three hours. You, for two months.

VERA. I can count.

ALMA. Your name is on my key, Purser. Page forty-one.

VERA. Then it goes to the gendarmes with my name on it.

(Odette writes. She stops, reads it back, then carries on.)

ODETTE. Four forty. "With my name on it."

ACT FIVE: UNTIL SEVEN

SCENE 1: FIVE O'CLOCK

(Two minutes to five. The bar has settled. Joseph dozes, his head against the porthole. Marco has pulled his cap down over his eyes. On the banquette, Diane sits next to Alma. Mila has left the banquette: she has carried a chair into the middle of the bar, taken her cello out of its case, and holds it against her, without playing.)

DIANE. That took courage.

ALMA. I was frightened. From a distance, they look alike.

DIANE. Is anyone waiting for you in Bastia? Apart from the café on the old port?

ALMA. My mother. She thinks I'm coming for her birthday.

DIANE. Does she live far from the port?

ALMA. Why?

DIANE. No reason. We're talking. You have to talk about something, at five in the morning.

(Bruno has sat down opposite Charlie.)

BRUNO. How much?

CHARLIE. Sorry?

BRUNO. For the article to wait. One week. Time to change the cable, redo the certificates, properly. Nobody dies, nobody loses their job. How much?

CHARLIE. That's your second promotion of the night turned down.

(Odette has sat down beside Joseph, who isn't asleep.)

ODETTE. Your wife. Did you keep her long, before you threw her?

JOSEPH. Three months. On the sideboard. I said good morning to her every day.

ODETTE. My husband, I kept for eleven years. In his box, in the wardrobe, behind the sheets. He wanted the mountains. I never took the coach.

JOSEPH. Eleven years.

ODETTE. You get used to keeping. After a while, you forget how to give back.

JOSEPH. Take the coach. I drove coaches for forty years: we always help ladies carrying a box.

INÈS. Could you play something?

MILA. At five in the morning, on a boat, in front of people who are scared?

INÈS. Nobody's scared in here.

ODETTE. I am.

MARCO. Me too.

JOSEPH. Play, girl. Lucienne loved the cello. She said it sounds like someone talking in the next room.

(Mila sets the bow on the strings. One note, long, low, tuned to the engine. From the far end of the banquette, two muffled beeps, one high note, one low. The clock says five. Mila stops dead. She looks at the banquette.)

ODETTE. You end up fond of that little noise. Since one in the morning. I've noted it every time.

(Mila puts down her bow. She takes her score and goes over to Vera, by the counter.)

MILA. Purser. Can I show you a passage? In the score. I need an opinion.

VERA. I don't read music.

MILA. That doesn't matter. You read it with your ears.

(Mila and Vera lean over the score, by the porthole. Mila speaks low. We can't hear. Vera listens without looking up. Then she turns to Odette.)

VERA. Odette. Your notebook.

ODETTE. Nobody reads my notebook.

VERA. Nobody's ever asked you.

(Odette hands over her notebook. Vera turns the pages, goes back, stops. She gives it back.)

ODETTE. Is that all?

VERA. That's a lot.

(Vera speaks low to Claire. Claire goes out. Vera goes and sits on the banquette, on Alma's other side. She speaks low to her. Alma slips a hand

under the blanket.)

DIANE. Secrets, Purser?

VERA. Instructions. Until seven, I'm still the purser of this ship.

SCENE 2: THE TILL

(Twenty to six. Claire is back. Vera gets a coffee at the counter and says a few words to Sam that nobody hears. Then she stands up in the middle of the bar.)

VERA. I know who wrote the note.

(Those who were asleep sit up.)

VERA. Someone who knew she was an accountant before anyone said so. Who was at the counter at midnight, next to Tiago's master key. Who sleeps on the Prestige deck, with a pad of that paper on the desk. Who was smoking next to her at twenty to one. And who needed, more than anyone here, to stop her getting off at Bastia.

BRUNO. You're mad. At three minutes to two, I was on the bridge, Claire told you so!

VERA. For the cabin, you had someone. Directors don't do their own searching. They have it done.

BRUNO. Who?

VERA. The gendarmes will find out. That's what they're paid for.

DIANE. I told you, at ten to two. He's been lying since he walked in.

BRUNO. I want to call my lawyer.

MARCO. He's asleep, your lawyer. Like everybody else.

ODETTE. Five forty-two. "I want to call my lawyer." They all say that. Forty years I've been writing it down.

VERA. At seven. Alma, the key.

(Alma unhooks a red key from her lanyard and hands it to Vera.)

VERA. Sam. The till.

(Sam opens the cash drawer of the till. Vera puts the key inside, shuts it, turns the till's little key and puts it in her jacket pocket.)

VERA. It stays there until the gendarmes arrive. Nobody touches it. And now everybody sleeps for an hour. Here. I need an hour too. Sam, the main lights.

SAM. The night light?

VERA. The night light.

(Sam switches off. All that's left is a blue light above the counter and the small glowing circle of the clock. The silhouettes can barely be made out. Vera sits on a chair by the door and folds her arms.)

SCENE 3: THE NIGHT LIGHT

(Quarter past six. The blue light. The engine. Behind the portholes, the black is starting to turn grey. People speak low.)

MARCO. Are you asleep?

ALMA. No.

MARCO. Me neither. I wanted to tell you. At two o'clock, I wasn't smoking. I went down to the car deck, by the drivers' stairs. I've got the code. To see if you weren't on my bunk, after all. Even though I'd said no.

ALMA. And if I had been?

MARCO. I don't know. That's why I went down: to find out what I'd have done.

ALMA. And what you said to me, up there?

MARCO. "Go and cry somewhere else."

ALMA. I didn't cry. I screamed, an hour later. It's not the same.

(Further off, at the porthole, Inès and Joseph.)

INÈS. The sky's going grey, over there. With a line.

JOSEPH. That's Cap Corse. The line is the mountains.

INÈS. So did we go over her? Over Grandma?

JOSEPH. Four hours ago. She's behind us now. All the sea behind us, that's her.

INÈS. I'll show Mum the video. That way she'll have seen it too.

JOSEPH. Show her the lid first. Then the video. In that order, it'll be all right.

(By the counter, Tiago and Claire, sitting on the floor, backs to the wall.)

TIAGO. Do you think they'll sack me?

CLAIRE. I think a lot of people will be sacked before you.

(At a table, Odette and Mila.)

ODETTE. Tell your sister you played well.

MILA. I played one note.

ODETTE. At five in the morning, one note is a concert.

MILA. I'll tell her I travelled with a court clerk, a drowned woman who wasn't, and a director in a bathrobe. She won't believe me.

ODETTE. I'll copy out my notebook for you.

(Behind the counter, Sam is drying a glass that's already dry. Charlie, opposite, elbows on the counter.)

CHARLIE. Nico. Can I put his name in the article?

SAM. Ask him. He'll say yes. He's said yes to everything since he can't run any more.

CHARLIE. And yours?

SAM. Mine, no. I stay behind the counter. Somebody has to serve the gendarmes their coffee.

(Silence. The engine. The silhouettes no longer move. Vera, on her chair by the door, has her head bowed on her chest.)

(A silhouette gets up, bumps into a chair. It's Bruno.)

BRUNO. The toilets. Which way are the toilets?

SAM. The little door, to the right of the counter.

(Bruno moves forward in the half-dark. He passes the till. He stops. He looks at the till. He looks at Vera, who doesn't move. On the banquette, another silhouette has sat up and is watching him. A pause. Then Bruno carries on, opens the little door and disappears.)

(The silhouette on the banquette gets up, without a sound. It moves between the tables without touching a chair, goes round the counter, stops at the till. It picks up the little bar knife from the counter, slides the blade into the lock of the drawer, pushes. The drawer opens. A hand takes the red

key.)

VERA. Sam.

(The main lights snap on. Diane is behind the counter, the knife in one hand, the red key in the other. The little toilet door opens: Bruno comes out, stops dead.)

BRUNO. It wasn't me! I didn't touch anything!

VERA. We know, sir. For once, we know.

SCENE 4: WHAT GETS RECOVERED

(Half past six. Everyone is standing. Diane hasn't moved from behind the counter. She puts down the knife.)

DIANE. I saw the director stop in front of the till. I came to check the key was still there.

VERA. You watched me lock that drawer. To check a locked drawer, you look at it. You don't force it with the lemon knife.

DIANE. A drawer, a knife, a woman who can't sleep, and you're building a case? I did fifteen years on the murder squad, Purser. I know what stands up in front of a judge.

VERA. Then we'll tell you what stands up. Not me. Them. Tiago?

TIAGO. Midnight. The counter. Master key number 14 next to your herbal tea. Four people at the counter, and you're one of them.

CLAIRE. Three minutes to two, the master key opens 6012. The director is with me on the bridge. Outside: you, Mila, Marco and Charlie. Marco, the car deck camera films him on his bunk from four minutes to two until ten past; that one works. Charlie's phone is writing to the newsroom on the deck 5 wifi until nine minutes past two. That leaves two.

ODETTE. Two, on the same banquette. So I reread my beeps. One o'clock: two beeps, from the banquette, when the girl came in. The cellist was still asleep: on the banquette, there was only you. Two o'clock: nothing, in here, you'd gone out. Three o'clock, four o'clock: two muffled beeps, from your side.

MILA. And at five, I wasn't on the banquette any more. I was in the middle, with my cello, playing an A against the engine. The two beeps came from the far end, from under your sleeve. An E and a C. The same as at two o'clock, through the wall of 6012. At three, there was the chair; at four, the radio:

I wasn't sure of anything. At five, there was nothing but my A.

DIANE. A watch. There are thousands of watches like mine.

ODETTE. And one twenty-eight. I'll read it back: "At dinner, a little brunette, alone at her table." The girl had just said red. She was a redhead to everyone, tonight. Except to you.

VERA. She's only a brunette under her wig. And in the photo on her badge, at head office. A photo someone gave you, with a cabin number. Claire?

CLAIRE. Méridien Conseil. A private investigation firm, in Marseille. No office in Bastia, no training. Their biggest client: Azur Levant's law firm.

(Diane looks at the red key in her hand.)

VERA. Keep it. It's mine. The one I've worn round my neck since the start of the night, the one you've all seen. It has the Calanca's evacuation drills on it, and the report of the 14th of March, with my signature at the bottom.

(Alma pulls the lanyard out from under her jumper. A red key still hangs from it.)

ALMA. She passed it to me at five, under the blanket. I had two round my neck. I gave you hers.

(A long silence. Diane puts the key down on the counter, next to the knife.)

DIANE. Nobody touched a hair on anybody's head tonight. Write that down, madam clerk. Fifteen years on the Lyon murder squad. Nights in cold cars, dead kids on stairwells, a salary that doesn't cover the rent. And one day, a firm calls me. Recovering items. Hard drives, notebooks, keys. And persuading people. I don't hit anyone, I don't push anyone. I write one sentence under a door. Usually, that's enough: frightened people give back what they've taken. Not her. She'd rather drown for show. I'd never seen that before.

BRUNO. Who pays you?

DIANE. Not you. You offer flats with sea views. Méridien paid for cabin 8003. And dinner.

BRUNO. I didn't know.

DIANE. You didn't want to know. That's why they pay people like me: so that people like you don't have to know.

ALMA. And if I'd really jumped?

DIANE. I'd have been paid all the same. The key at the bottom of the sea: contract fulfilled.

(Nobody speaks. Marco and Tiago come and stand on either side of Diane.)

VERA. Sit down, madam. On the banquette. You know it well.

SCENE 5: BASTIA

(Five to seven. Daylight comes in through the portholes. Diane sits on the banquette, between Marco and Tiago. The engine slows. A foghorn, long, above the bar.)

MILA. B flat. Like the other one.

CLAIRE. Bastia in five minutes. The maritime gendarmerie is waiting on the quay. The coastguard recalled the helicopter at ten past four. The crew say they're glad to be going home empty-handed.

ALMA. Tell them thank you. From me.

CLAIRE. You'll tell them yourself. They'll want to see you. They always want to see the people they didn't find.

BRUNO. Vera. Twenty years with the firm. Do you know what you're doing?

VERA. That's why I'm doing it.

BRUNO. They'll fire you.

VERA. Before you, or after?

(Bruno doesn't answer. He takes off his bathrobe and folds it over a chair. Sam puts a cup of coffee in front of Vera.)

SAM. No sugar.

VERA. Sam. Does Nico still live in Bastia?

SAM. Up above the port. With his crutches, he comes down once a day.

VERA. Tell him I'll come by. With the real report. Claire's.

SAM. He'll throw you out.

VERA. He'll be right to. I'll come back the next day.

CLAIRE. It's on my key, with the other four. I've never sent it to anyone.

VERA. Send it to the gendarmes. With mine. Let them read the two side by

side.

(Odette stands up. She empties her bag onto the counter. Everything in it.)

ODETTE. The lighters. Whose are the lighters?

MARCO. The black one's mine. I lost it in March, on this boat.

ODETTE. In March, yes. The crossing on the twelfth. You already had your cap.

(Marco takes back his lighter.)

ODETTE. The spoon belongs to the restaurant. The sugars, to the bar. And the pen, Director, belongs to your company. It goes back to you.

BRUNO. Keep it.

ODETTE. No. This morning, I give everything back. It's a strange feeling, an empty bag. You'd think you'd lost something.

(She picks up her crossword again.)

ODETTE. And I'm still missing my word. Seven letters. "What the sea doesn't give back."

JOSEPH. Remains.

(Odette counts on her fingers, then writes.)

ODETTE. Seven. It fits.

MILA. Purser. What about me? Léa Morand?

VERA. Léa Morand, cabin 6014, had an uneventful crossing. She'll play beautifully tonight, in Calvi.

MILA. She'll play better than me.

VERA. That's your problem.

(Vera takes master key number 14 out of her pocket and holds it out to Tiago.)

VERA. Number 14. Wear it round your neck from now on. Like one of our keys.

TIAGO. Do I get to finish the season?

VERA. Not with me, probably. But you finish it.

(Alma takes the green coat from the counter and puts it on.)

CHARLIE. Nine o'clock, on the old port?

ALMA. Nine o'clock. I'll be on time.

CHARLIE. You're not going to disappear again?

ALMA. Never again. It's too much work.

(Vera picks up the shoe, which has stayed at the end of the counter since one in the morning. She holds it out to Alma. Alma looks at it, then puts it on.)

(A watch beeps twice, one high note, one low. Everyone turns to the banquette. Diane doesn't look at her wrist. The clock says seven.)

(The ship touches the quay. A jolt. The engine stops. For the first time all night, there is no sound.)

ALMA. I'm getting off at Bastia.

(A pause.)

ALMA. With what I've taken.

(The horn, one last time. Blackout.)



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