

Ile

By Eugene O'Neill

SCENE: CAPTAIN KEENEY'S cabin on board the steam whaling ship Atlantic Queen--a small, square compartment, about eight feet high, with a skylight in the centre looking out on the poop deck. On the left (*the stern of the ship*) a long bench with rough cushions is built in against the wall. In front of the bench, a table. Over the bench, several curtained portholes.

In the rear, left, a door leading to the captain's sleeping-quarters. To the right of the door a small organ, looking as if it were brand-new, is placed against the wall.

On the right, to the rear, a marble-topped, sideboard. On the sideboard, a woman's sewing-basket. Farther forward, a doorway leading to the companion way, and past the officers' quarters to the main deck.

In the centre of the room, a stove. From the middle of the ceiling a hanging lamp is suspended. The walls of the cabin are painted white.

There is no rolling of the ship, and the light which comes through the skylight is sickly and faint, indicating one of those gray days of calm when ocean and sky are alike dead. The silence is unbroken except for the measured tread of someone walking up and down on the poop deck overhead.

It is nearing two bells--one o'clock--in the afternoon of a day in the year 1895.

At the rise of the curtain there is a moment of intense silence. Then the STEWARD enters and commences to clear the table of the few dishes which still remain on it after the CAPTAIN'S dinner. He is an old, grizzled man dressed in dungaree pants, a sweater, and a woolen cap with ear-flaps. His manner is sullen and angry. He stops stacking up the plates and casts a quick glance upward at the skylight; then tiptoes over to the closed door in rear and listens with his ear pressed

to the crack. What he hears makes his face darken and he mutters a furious curse. There is a noise from the doorway on the right, and he darts back to the table.

BEN enters. He is an over-grown, gawky boy with a long, pinched face. He is dressed in sweater, fur cap, etc. His teeth are chattering with the cold and he hurries to the stove, where he stands for a moment shivering, blowing on his hands, slapping them against his sides, on the verge of crying.

THE STEWARD (*in relieved tones--seeing who it is*). Oh, 'tis you, is it? What're ye shiverin' 'bout? Stay by the stove where ye belong and ye'll find no need of chatterin'.

BEN. It's c-c-old. (*Trying to control his chattering teeth--derisively*) Who d' ye think it were--the Old Man?

THE STEWARD. (He makes a threatening move--BEN shrinks away.) None o' your lip, young un, or I'll learn ye. (*More kindly*) Where was it ye've been all o' the time--the fo'c's'le?

BEN. Yes.

THE STEWARD. Let the Old Man see ye up for'ard monkey-shinin' with the handstand ye'll get a hidin' ye'll not forget in a hurry.

BEN. Aw, he don't see nothin'. (*A trace of awe in his tones--he glances upward.*) He just walks up and down like he didn't notice nobody--and stares at the ice to the no'th'ard.

THE STEWARD (*the same tone of awe creeping into his voice*). He's always starin' at the ice. (*In a sudden rage, shaking his fist at the skylight*) Ice, ice, ice! Damn him and damn the ice! Holdin' us in for nigh on a year--nothin' to see but ice--stuck in it like a fly in molasses!

BEN (*apprehensively*). Sssh! He'll hear ye.

THE STEWARD (*raging*). Aye, damn him, and damn the Arctic seas, and damn this stinkin' whalin' ship of his, and damn me for a fool to ever ship on it! (*Subsiding, as if realizing the uselessness of this*

outburst--shaking his head--slowly, with deep conviction) He's a hard man--as hard a man as ever sailed the seas.

BEN (*solemnly*). Aye.

THE STEWARD. The two years we all signed up for are done this day. Blessed Christ! Two years o' this dog's life, and no luck in the fishin', and the hands half starved with the food runnin' low, rotten as it is; and not a sign of him turnin' back for home! (*Bitterly*) Home! I begin to doubt if ever I'll set foot on land again. (*Excitedly*) What is it he thinks he's goin' to do? Keep us all up here after our time is worked out till the last man of us is starved to death or frozen? We've grub enough hardly to last out the voyage back if we started now. What are the men goin' to do 'bout it? Did ye hear any talk in the fo'c's'le?

BEN (*going over to him--in a half-whisper*). They said if he don't put back south for home to-day they're goin' to mutiny.

THE STEWARD (*with grim satisfaction*). Mutiny? Aye, 'tis the only thing they can do; and serve him right after the manner he's treated them--'s if they weren't no better nor dogs.

BEN. The ice is all broke up to s'uth'rd. They's clear water's far's you can see. He ain't got no excuse for not turnin' back for home, the men says.

THE STEWARD (*bitterly*). He won't look nowheres but no'th'rd where they's only the ice to see. He don't want to see no clear water. All he thinks on is gittin' the ile--'s if it was our fault he ain't had good luck with the whales. (*Shaking his head*) I think the man's mighty nigh losin' his senses.

BEN (*awed*). D' you really think he's crazy?

THE STEWARD. Aye, it's the punishment o' God on him. Did ye hear ever of a man who wasn't crazy do the things he does? (*Pointing to the door in rear*) Who but a man that's mad would take his woman--and as sweet a woman as ever was--on a stinkin' whalin' ship to the Arctic seas to be locked in by the rotten ice for nigh on a year, and

maybe lose her senses forever--for it's sure she'll never be the same again.

BEN (*sadly*). She useter be awful nice to me before--(*his eyes grow wide and frightened*) she got--like she is.

THE STEWARD. Aye, she was good to all of us. 'T would have been hell on board without her; for he's a hard man--a hard, hard man--a driver if there ever was one. (With a grim laugh) I hope he's satisfied now--drivin' her on till she's near lost her mind. And who could blame her? 'T is a God's wonder we're not a ship full of crazed people--with the damned ice all the time, and the quiet so thick you're afraid to hear your own voice.

BEN (*with a frightened glance toward the door on right*). She don't never speak to me no more--jest looks at me's if she didn't know me.

THE STEWARD. She don't know no one--but him. She talks to him--when she does talk--right enough.

BEN. She does nothin' all day long now but sit and sew--and then she cries to herself without makin' no noise. I've seen her.

THE STEWARD. Aye, I could hear her through the door a while back.

BEN (*tiptoes over to the door and listens*). She's cryin' now.

THE STEWARD (*furiously--shaking his fist*). God send his soul to hell for the devil he is!

(There is the noise of someone coming slowly down the companionway stairs. THE STEWARD hurries to his stacked-up dishes. He is so nervous from fright that he knocks off the top one, which falls and breaks on the floor. He stands aghast, trembling with dread. BEN is violently rubbing off the organ with a piece of cloth which he has snatched from his pocket, CAPTAIN KEENEY appears in the doorway on right and comes into the cabin, removing his fur cap as he does so. He is a man of about forty, around five-ten in height, but looking much shorter on account of the enormous

proportions of his shoulders and chest. His face is massive and deeply lined, with gray-blue eyes of a bleak hardness, and a tightly clenched, thin-lipped mouth. His thick hair is long and gray. He is dressed in a heavy blue jacket and blue pants stuffed into his sea-boots.

He is followed into the cabin by the SECOND MATE, a rangy six-footer with a lean, weatherbeaten face. The MATE is dressed about the same as the captain. He is a man of thirty or so.)

KEENEY. *(Comes toward the STEWARD--with a stern look on his face. The STEWARD is visibly frightened and the stack of dishes rattles in his trembling hands. KEENEY draws back his fist and the STEWARD shrinks away. The fist is gradually lowered and KEENEY speaks slowly.)* 'T would be like hitting a worm. It Is nigh on two bells, Mr. Steward, and this truck not cleared yet.

THE STEWARD *(stammering)*. Y-y-yes, sir.

KEENEY. Instead of doin' your rightful work ye've been below here gossipin' old woman's talk with that boy. *(To BEN fiercely)* Get out o' this, you! Clean up the chartroom. *(BEN darts past the MATE to the open doorway.)* Pick up that dish, Mr. Steward!

THE STEWARD *(doing so with difficulty)*. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. The next dish you break, Mr. Steward, you take a bath in the Bering Sea at the end of a rope.

THE STEWARD *(tremblingly)*. Yes, sir.

(He hurries out. The SECOND MATE walks slowly over to the CAPTAIN.)

MATE. I warn't 'specially anxious the man at the wheel should catch what I wanted to say to you, sir. That's why I asked you to come below.

KEENEY *(impatiently)*. Speak your say, Mr. Slocum.

MATE (*unconsciously lowering his voice*). I'm afeard there'll be trouble with the hands by the look o' things. They'll likely turn ugly, every blessed one o' them, if you don't put back. The two years they signed up for is up to-day.

KEENEY. And d'you think you're tellin' me somethin' new, Mr. Slocum? I've felt it in the air this long time past. D'you think I've not seen their ugly looks and the grudgin' way they worked?

(*The door in rear is opened and MRS. KEENEY stands in the doorway. She is a slight, sweet-faced little woman primly dressed in black. Her eyes are red from weeping and her face drawn and pale. She takes in the cabin with a frightened glance and stands as if fixed to the spot by some nameless dread, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. The two men turn and look at her.*)

KEENEY (*with rough tenderness*). Well, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*as if awakening from a dream*). David, I--(*She is silent. The MATE starts for the doorway.*)

KEENEY (*turning to him--sharply*). Wait!

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. D'you want anything, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*after a pause, during which she seems to be endeavoring to collect her thoughts*). I thought maybe--I'd go up on deck, David, to get a breath of fresh air.

(*She stand's humbly awaiting his permission. He and the MATE exchange a significant glance.*)

KEENEY. It's too cold, Annie. You'd best stay below to-day. There's nothing to look at on deck--but ice.

MRS. KEENEY (*monotonously*). I know--ice, ice, ice! But there's nothing to see down here but these walls.

(She makes a gesture of loathing.)

KEENEY. You can play the organ, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*). I hate the organ. It puts me in mind of home.

KEENEY (*a touch of resentment in his voice*). I got it jest for you.

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*). I know. (*She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.*) Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! (*She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.*) Ah, now I must go upon deck and look at it, David.

KEENEY (*frowning*). Best not to-day, Annie. Best wait for a day when the sun shines.

MRS. KEENEY (*desperately*). But the sun never shines in this terrible place.

KEENEY (*a tone of command in his voice*). Best not to-day, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*crumbling before this command--abjectly*). Very well, David.

(*She stands there staring straight before her as if in a daze. The two men look at her uneasily.*)

KEENEY (*sharply*). Annie!

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*). Yes, David.

KEENEY. Me and Mr. Slocum has business to talk about--ship's business.

MRS. KEENEY. Very well, David.

(*She goes slowly out, rear, and leaves the door three quarters shut behind her.*)

KEENEY. Best not have her on deck if they's goin' to be any trouble.

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. And trouble they's goin' to be. I feel it in my bones.

(Takes a revolver from the pocket of his coat and examines it.)

Got yourn?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY. Not that we'll have to use 'em--not if I know their breed of dog--jest to frighten 'em up a bit. (*Grimly*) I ain't never been forced to use one yit; and trouble I've had by land and by sea's long as I kin remember, and will have till my dyin' day, I reckon.

MATE (*hesitatingly*). Then you ain't goin'--to turn back?

KEENEY. Turn back! Mr. Slocum, did you ever hear o' me pointin' s'uth for home with only a measly four hundred barrel of ile in the hold?

MATE (*hastily*). No, sir--but the grub's gittin' low.

KEENEY. They's enough to last a long time yit, if they're careful with it; and they's plenty o' water.

MATE. They say it's not fit to eat--what's left; and the two years they signed on fur is up to-day. They might make trouble for you in the courts when we git home.

KEENEY. To hell with 'em! Let them make what law trouble they kin. I don't give a damn 'bout the money. I've got to git the ile! (*Glancing sharply at the MATE*) You ain't turnin' no damned sea lawyer, be you, Mr. Slocum?

MATE (*flushing*). Not by a hell of a sight, sir.

KEENEY. What do the fools want to go home fur now? Their share o' the four hundred barrel wouldn't keep 'em in chewin' terbacco.

MATE (*slowly*). They wants to git back to their folks an' things, I s'pose.

KEENEY (*looking at him searchingly*). 'N' you want to turn back, too. (THE MATE *looks down confusedly before his sharp gaze.*) Don't lie, Mr. Slocum. It's writ down plain in your eyes. (*With grim sarcasm*) I hope, Mr. Slocum, you ain't agoin' to jine the men agin me.

MATE (*indignantly*). That ain't fair, sir, to say sich things.

KEENEY (*with satisfaction*). I warn't much afeard o' that, Tom. You been with me nigh on ten year and I've learned ye whalin'. No man kin say I ain't a good master, if I be a hard one.

MATE. I warn't thinkin' of myself, sir--'bout turnin' home, I mean. (*Desperately*) But Mrs. Keeney, sir--seems like she ain't jest satisfied up here, ailin' like--what with the cold an' bad luck an' the ice an' all.

KEENEY (his face clouding--rebukingly but not severely). That's my business, Mr. Slocum. I'll thank you to steer a clear course o' that. (*A pause.*) The ice'll break up soon to no'th'rd. I could see it startin' to-day. And when it goes and we git some sun, Annie'll perk up. (*Another pause--then he bursts forth*) It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that truth?

MATE. Yes, sir; but this voyage you been ice-bound, an'--

KEENEY (*scornfully*). And d' you s'pose any of 'em would believe that--any o' them skippers I've beaten voyage after voyage? Can't you hear 'em laughin' and sneerin'--Tibbotts 'n' Harris 'n' Simms and the rest--and all o' Homeport makin' fun o' me? "Dave Keeney what boasts he's the best whalin' skipper out o' Homeport comin' back with a measly four hundred barrel of ile?" (The thought of this drives him into a frenzy, and he smashes his fist down on the marble top of the

sideboard.) Hell! I got to git the ile, I tell you. How could I figger on this ice? It's never been so bad before in the thirty year I been a-comin' here. And now it's breakin'up. In a couple o'days it'll be all gone. And they's whale here, plenty of 'em. I know they is and I ain't never gone wrong yit. I got to git the ile! I got to git it in spite of all hell, and by God, I ain't a-goin' home till I do git it!

(There is the sound of subdued sobbing from the door in rear. The two men stand silent for a moment, listening. Then KEENEY goes over to the door and looks in. He hesitates for a moment as if he were going to enter--then closes the door softly. JOE, the harpooner, an enormous six-footer with a battered, ugly face, enters from right and stands waiting for the captain to notice him.)

KEENEY *(turning and seeing him)*. Don't be standin' there like a gawk, Harpooner. Speak up!

JOE *(confusedly)*. We want--the men, sir--they want send a depitation aft to have a word with you.

KEENEY *(furiously)*. Tell 'em to go to--*(checks himself and continues grimly)* Tell'em to come. I'll see'em.

JOE. Aye, aye, sir.

(He goes out.)

KEENEY *(with a grim smile)*. Here it comes, the trouble you spoke of, Mr. Slocum, and we'll make short shift of it. It's better to crush such things at the start than let them make headway.

MATE *(worriedly)*. Shall I wake up the First and Fourth, sir? We might need their help.

KEENEY. No, let them sleep. I'm well able to handle this alone, Mr. Slocum.

(There is the shuffling of footsteps from outside and five of the crew crowd into the cabin, led by JOE. All are dressed alike--sweaters, sea-

boots, etc. They glance uneasily at the CAPTAIN, twirling their fur caps in their hands.)

KEENEY (*after a pause*). Well? Who's to speak fur ye?

JOE (*stepping forward with an air of bravado*). I be.

KEENEY (*eyeing him up and down coldly*). So you be. Then speak your say and be quick about it.

JOE (*trying not to wilt before the CAPTAIN'S glance and avoiding his eyes*). The time we signed up for is done to-day.

KEENEY (*icily*). You're tellin' me nothin' I don't know.

JOE. You ain't p'intin' fur home yit, far's we kin see.

KEENEY. No, and I ain't agoin' to till this ship is full of ile.

JOE. You can't go no further no'the with the ice afore ye.

KEENEY. The ice is breaking up.

JOB (*after a slight pause during which the others mumble angrily to one another*). The grub we're gittin' now is rotten.

KEENEY. It's good enough fur ye. Better men than ye are have eaten worse.

(There is a chorus of angry exclamations from the crowd.)

JOE (*encouraged by this support*). We ain'ta-goin' to work no more 'less you puts back fur home.

KEENEY (*fiercely*). You ain't, ain't you?

JOE. No; and the law courts 'll say we was right.

KEENEY. To hell with your law courts! We're at sea now and I'm the law on this ship. (*Edging up toward the harpooner.*) And every mother's son of you what don't obey orders goes in irons.

(*There are more angry exclamations from the crew. MRS. KEENEY appears in the doorway in rear and looks on with startled eyes. None of the men notices her.*)

JOE (*with bravado*). Then we're a-goin' to mutiny and take the old hooker home ourselves. Ain't we, boys?

(*As he turns his head to look at the others, KEENEY'S fist shoots out to the side of his jaw. JOE goes down in a heap and lies there. MRS. KEENEY gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands. The men pull out their sheath knives and start a rush, but stop when they find themselves confronted by the revolvers of KEENEY and the MATE.*)

KEENEY (his eyes and voice snapping). Hold still! (*The men stand huddled together in a sullen silence. KEENEY'S voice is full of mockery.*) You've found out it ain't safe to mutiny on this ship, ain't you? And now git for'ard where ye belong, and (*he gives JOE'S body a contemptuous kick*) drag him with you. And remember, the first man of ye I see shirkin' I'll shoot dead as sure as there's a sea under us, and you can tell the rest the same. Git for'ard now! Quick! (*The men leave in cowed silence, carrying JOE with them. KEENEY turns to the MATE with a short laugh and puts his revolver back in his pocket.*) Best get up on deck, Mr. Slocum, and see to it they don't try none of their skulkin' tricks. We'll have to keep an eye peeled from now on. I know 'em.

MATE. Yes, sir.

(*He goes out, right. KEENEY hears his wife's hysterical weeping and turns around in surprise--then walks slowly to her side.*)

KEENEY (putting an arm around her shoulder--with gruff tenderness). There, there, Annie. Don't be afeard. It's all past and gone.

MRS. KEENEY (*shrinking away from, him*). Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!

KEENEY (*gently*). Can't bear what, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*hysterically*). All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men, and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence.

(*After this outburst she calms down and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*)

KEENEY (after a pause during which he looks down at her with a puzzled frown). Remember, I warn't hankerin' to have you come on this voyage, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. I wanted to be with you, David, don't you see? I didn't want to wait back there in the house all alone as I've been doing these last six years since we were married--waiting, and watching, and fearing--with nothing to keep my mind occupied--not able to go back teaching school on account of being Dave Keeney's wife. I used to dream of sailing on the great, wide, glorious ocean. I wanted to be by your side in the danger and vigorous life of it all. I wanted to see you the hero they make you out to be in Homeport. And instead--(*her voice grows tremulous*) all I find is ice--and cold--and brutality!

(*Her voice breaks.*)

KEENEY. I warned you what it'd be, Annie. "Whalin' ain't no ladies' tea party," I says to you, "and you better stay to home where you've got all your woman's comforts." (*Shaking his head*) But you was so set on it.

MRS. KEENEY (*wearily*). Oh, I know it isn't your fault, David. You see, I didn't believe you. I guess I was dreaming about the old Vikings in the story-books and I thought you were one of them.

KEENEY (*protestingly*). I done my best to make it as cozy and comfortable as could be. (MRS. KEENEY *looks around her in wild scorn.*) I even sent to the city for that organ for ye, thinkin' it might be

soothin' to ye to be playin' it times when they was calms and things was dull like.

MRS. KEENEY (*wearily*). Yes, you were very kind, David. I know that. (*She goes to left and lifts the curtains from the porthole and looks out--then suddenly bursts forth.*) I won't stand it--I can't stand it--pent up by these walls like a prisoner. (*She runs over to him and throws her arms around him, weeping. He puts his arm protectingly over her shoulders.*) Take me away from here, David! If I don't get away from here, out of this terrible ship, I'll go mad! Take me home, David! I can't think any more. I feel as if the cold and the silence were crushing down on my brain. I'm afraid. Take me home!

KEENEY (*holds her at arm's length and looks at her face anxiously*). Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't yourself. You got fever. Your eyes look so strange like. I ain't never seen you look this way before.

MRS. KEENEY (*laughing hysterically*). It's the ice and the cold and the silence--they'd make anyone look strange.

KEENEY (*soothingly*). In a month or two, with good luck, three at the most, I'll have her filled with ile and then we'll give her everything she'll stand and p'int for home.

MRS. KEENEY. But we can't wait for that--I can't wait. I want to get home. And the men won't wait. They want to get home. It's cruel, it's brutal for you to keep them. You must sail back. You've got no excuse. There's clear water to the south now. If you've a heart at all, you've got to turn back.

KEENEY (*harshly*). I can't, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. Why can't you?

KEENEY. A woman couldn't rightly understand my reason.

MRS. KEENEY (*wildly*). Because it's a stupid, stubborn reason. Oh, I heard you talking with the second mate. You're afraid the other captains will sneer at you because you didn't come back with a full

ship. You want to live up to our silly reputation even if you do have to beat and starve men and drive me mad to do it.

KEENEY (*his jaw set stubbornly*). It ain't that, Annie. Them skippers would never dare sneer to my face. It ain't so much what anyone'd say--but--(He hesitates, struggling to express his meaning.) You see--I've always done it--since my first voyage as skipper. I always come back--with a full ship--and--it don't seem right not to--somehow. I been always first whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, and--Don't you see my meanin', Annie? (*He glances at her. She is not looking at him but staring dully in front of her, not hearing a word he is saying.*) Annie! (*She comes to herself with a start.*) Best turn in, Annie, there's a good woman. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY (*resisting his attempts to guide her to the door in rear*). David! Won't you please turn back?

KEENEY (*gently*). I can't, Annie--not yet awhile. You don't see my meanin'. I got to git the ile.

MRS. KEENEY. It'd be different if you needed the money, but you don't. You've got more than plenty.

KEENEY (*impatiently*). It ain't the money I'm thinkin' of. D'you think I'm as mean as that?

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*). No--I don't know--I can't understand--(*Intensely*) Oh, I want to be home in the old house once more and see my own kitchen again, and hear a woman's voice talking to me and be able to talk to her. Two years! It seems so long ago--as if I'd been dead and could never go back.

KEENEY (*worried by her strange tone and the far-away look in her eyes*). Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY (*not appearing to hear him*). I used to be lonely when you were away. I used to think Homeport was a stupid, monotonous place. Then I used to go down on the beach, especially when it was windy and the breakers were rolling in, and I'd dream of the fine free life you must be leading. (*She gives a laugh which is half*

a sob.) I used to love the sea then. (*She pauses; then continues with slow intensity.*) But now--I don't ever want to see the sea again.

KEENEY (*thinking to humor her*). 'Tis no fit place for a woman, that's sure. I was a fool to bring ye.

MRS. KEENEY (after a pause--passing her hand over her eyes with a gesture of pathetic weariness). How long would it take us to reach home--if we started now?

KEENEY (*frowning*). 'Bout two months, I reckon, Annie, with fair luck.

MRS. KEENEY (*counts on her fingers--then murmurs with a rapt smile*). That would be August, the latter part of August, wouldn't it? It was on the twenty-fifth of August we were married, David, wasn't it?

KEENEY (*trying to conceal the fact that her memories have moved him--gruffly*). Don't you remember?

MRS. KEENEY (*vaguely--again passes her hand over her eyes*). My memory is leaving me--up here in the ice. It was so long ago. (A pause--then she smiles dreamily.) It's June now. The lilacs will be all in bloom in the front yard--and the climbing roses on the trellis to the side of the house--they're budding.

(*She suddenly covers her face with her hands and commences to sob.*)

KEENEY (*disturbed*). Go in and rest, Annie. You're all wore out cryin' over what can't be helped.

MRS. KEENEY (*suddenly throwing her arms around his neck and clinging to him*). You love me, don't you, David?

KEENEY (*in amazed embarrassment at this outburst*) Love you? Why d'you ask me such a question, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*shaking him--fiercely*). But you do, don't you, David? Tell me!

KEENEY. I'm your husband, Annie, and you're my wife. Could there be aught but love between us after all these years?

MRS. KEENEY (*shaking him again--still more fiercely*). Then you do love me. Say it!

KEENEY (*simply*). I do, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. (*Gives a sigh of relief--her hands drop to her sides. KEENEY regards her anxiously. She passes her hand across her eyes and murmurs half to herself.*) I sometimes think if we could only have had a child. (*KEENEY turns away from her, deeply moved. She grabs his arm and turns him around to face her--intensely.*) And I've always been a good wife to you, haven't I, David?

KEENEY (*his voice betraying his emotion*). No man ever had a better, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY. And I've never asked for much from you, have I, David? Have I?

KEENEY. You know you could have all I got the power to give ye, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*wildly*). Then do this, this once, for my sake, for God's sake--take me home! It's killing me, this life--the brutality and cold and horror of it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can hear the silence threatening me--day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. (*Sobbing.*) I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid. For the love of God, take me home!

(She throws her arms around him, weeping against his shoulder. His face betrays the tremendous struggle going on within him. He holds her out at arm's length, his expression softening. For a moment his shoulders sag, he becomes old, his iron spirit weakens as he looks at her tear-stained face.)

KEENEY (*dragging out the words with an effort*). I'll do it, Annie--for your sake--if you say it's needful for ye.

MRS. KEENEY (with wild joy--kissing him). God bless you for that, David!

(He turns away from her silently and walks toward the companionway. Just at that moment there is a clatter of footsteps on the stairs and the SECOND MATE enters the cabin.)

MATE (*excitedly*). The ice is breakin' up to no'th'rd, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe, and clear water beyond, the lookout says.

(KEENEY straightens himself like a man coming out of a trance. MRS. KEENEY looks at the MATE with terrified eyes.)

KEENEY (*dazedly--trying to collect his thoughts*). A clear passage? To no'th'rd?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY (*his voice suddenly grim with determination*). Then get her ready and we'll drive her through.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir.

MRS. KEENEY (*appealingly*). David!

KEENEY (*not heeding her*). Will the men turn to willin' or must we drag 'em out?

MATE. They 'll turn to willin' enough. You put the fear o' God into 'em, sir. They're meek as lambs.

KEENEY. Then drive 'em--both watches. (*With grim determination*) They's whale t' other side o' this floe and we're going to git 'em.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir.

(He goes out hurriedly. A moment later there is the sound of scuffing feet from the deck outside and the MATE'S voice shouting orders.)

KEENEY (*speaking aloud to himself--derisively*). And I was a-goin' home like a yaller dog!

MRS. KEENEY (*imploringly*). David!

KEENEY (*sternly*). Woman, you ain't a-doin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em. You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to git the ile, I tell ye.

MRS. KEENEY (*supplicatingly*). David! Aren't you going home?

KEENEY (*ignoring this question--commandingly*). You ain't well. Go and lay down a mite. (*He starts for the door.*) I got to git on deck.

(He goes out. She cries after him in anguish, "David!" A pause. She passes her hand across her eyes--then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play wildly an old hymn. KEENEY reënters from the doorway to the deck and stands looking at her angrily. He comes over and grabs her roughly by the shoulder.)

KEENEY. Woman, what foolish mockin' is this? (*She laughs wildly, and he starts back from her in alarm.*) Annie! What is it? (*She doesn't answer him. KEENEY'S voice trembles.*) Don't you know me, Annie?

(He puts both hands on her shoulders and turns her around so that he can look into her eyes. She stares up at him with a stupid expression, a vague smile on her lips. He stumbles away from her, and she commences softly to play the organ again.)

KEENEY (*swallowing hard--in a hoarse whisper, as if he had difficulty in speaking*). You said--you was agoin' mad--God!

(A long wail is heard from the deck above: "Ah bl-o-o-o-ow!" A moment later the MATE'S face appears through the skylight. He cannot see MRS. KEENEY.)

MATE (*in great excitement*). Whales, sir--a whole school of 'em--off the starb'd quarter 'bout five mile away--big ones!

KEENEY (*galvanized into action*). Are you lowerin' the boats?

MATE. Yes, sir.

KEENEY (*with grim decision*). I'm a-comin' with ye.

MATE. Aye, aye, sir. (*Jubilantly*) You'll git the ile now right enough, sir.

(His head is withdrawn and he can be heard shouting orders.)

KEENEY (*turning to his wife*). Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ile. (She doesn't answer or seem to know he is there. He gives a hard laugh, which is almost a groan.) I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind--(*anxiously*) be you? I'll git the ile now right enough--jest a little while longer, Annie--then we'll turn hom'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't ye? I've got to git the ile. (*In sudden terror*) Answer me! You ain't mad, be you?

(She keeps on playing the organ, but makes no reply. The MATE'S face appears again through the skylight.)

MATE. All ready, sir.

(KEENEY turns his back on his wife and strides to the doorway, where he stands for a moment and looks back at her in anguish, fighting to control his feelings.)

MATE. Comin', sir?

KEENEY (*his face suddenly grown hard with determination*). Aye.

(He turns abruptly and goes out. MRS. KEENEY does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centred in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side to the rhythm of the hymn. Her fingers move faster and faster and she is playing wildly and discordantly as the Curtain falls.)