

THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE ALBATROSS

Adapted from the story “MS Found in a Bottle” by Edgar Allan Poe

Written By

David Schmidt

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Characters

MAN

WOMAN

SARA

A passenger aboard The Albatross

CAPTAIN BOLDMAN

Captain of The Albatross

ERIC

A sailor aboard The Albatross

SETTING: The hold of a ghost ship.

TIME: Somewhere in the distant past

Authors note: The word Albatross is sometimes used metaphorically to mean a psychological burden that feels like a curse “an albatross around my neck”. It was also believed an albatross was generally considered a sign of good luck. Thus the albatross can be both an omen of good or bad luck.

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(The lights come up, a lone bottle can be seen on the stage and we hear the sound of sea gulls and the ocean washing over a beach. From R come a MAN and WOMAN dressed in 19th century clothing, both are barefoot)

WOMAN

This was a good idea, Edgar.

MAN

I know how much you like the beach, Virginia. Besides the doctor says it's good for you to get out into the fresh air.

WOMAN

I'm feeling much better now, but I think you needed this too, you have been working far too much lately.

MAN

I suppose I have, but we need the money.

WOMAN

(Spotting the bottle) Look at that. I swear ,Edgar, people are getting lazier these days leaving their trash around.

MAN

(Seeing the bottle as well) That's strange.

WOMAN

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

What's strange, it's an empty bottle.

MAN

Not quite, Ginny. *(He picks up the bottle and exams it)* It looks like there's something inside it.

WOMAN

(Looking closer at the bottle as well) What do you think that is.

MAN

Only one way to find out. *(He opens the bottle and takes out some rolled up papers).*

WOMAN

What is it?

MAN

(Looking through the papers) It's a manuscript in a bottle.

WOMAN

What's it about?

MAN

According to the title page it's the tale of the last voyage of a ship called The Albatross. *(Bringing the pages over to VIRGINIA)* Listen to this "I know not if anyone shall ever read these words of mine recounting the incredible tale that has brought me to the hold of this mysterious ship....."

(The curtain slowly opens and we find ourselves in the hold of a ship. C is a wooden crate. Next to the crate is an over turned wooden barrel with a lantern upon it. The floor is cluttered with ropes, pieces of sail cloth, wooden crates and barrels filled with charts and other navigational paraphernalia. The stage is awash in blue- white lighting. Sitting on the crate and using the overturned barrel for a desk is SARA who is writing on some old paper she found in the hold she picks up the narrative where POE leaves off And POE and VIRGINIA exit)

SARA

I began this journey as a passenger aboard the Albatross, a ship captained by a crusty old sea dog named Jonathan Boldman. The Albatross was a beautiful ship of about four

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

hundred tons, copper fastened and built at Bombay of Malabar teak. I say was because she has since sank to a watery grave and her crew along with her. I am the only one left to retell the tragedy that befell the Albatross. As I write these words the shadows of my deceased companions begin to once again materialize before me (*CAPTAIN BOLDMAN enters with a telescope and looks out over the ocean*) and once again I find myself aboard the Albatross. I went as a passenger having no other inducement other than a kind of restlessness which haunted me as a friend. (*The lighting changes to a bright sunny day*) We got on our way with a mere breath of wind and for many days stood along the coast of Java without any incident to beguile away the monotony of our course other than the small grabs of the archipelago to which we were bound.

BOLDMAN

Helmsman! Twenty – eight degrees to starboard.

SARA

(*Rising from the crate she crosses to join CAPTIN BOLDMAN*) Good afternoon, Captain Boldman.

BOLDMAN

(*Not looking at SARA*) And to ye, Lass. How are yer quarters?

SARA

Smaller than I'm used to.

BOLDMAN

(*Turning to face SARA*) The Albatross is not a luxury liner, Lass.

SARA

I'm aware of that, Captain. I'm not complaining about the accommodations just merely stating a fact that they are smaller than I'm use to that's all.

BOLDMAN

My apologies, Lass, It's just that I am uncomfortable having ye aboard me ship.

SARA

Do you have a problem with me, Captain?

BOLDMAN

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

Ye as a person? No.

SARA

Then why does my presence aboard your ship bother you?

BOLDMAN

Yer a woman.

SARA

(Indignant) Excuse me?

BOLDMAN

Don't take it personal, Lass. I mean ye no disrespect. All of us old sea dogs are a superstitious lot. One such superstition is tis bad luck to have a woman aboard yer ship.

SARA

Well that's a stupid superstition.

BOLDMAN

To ye, perhaps, but not to an old sea dog like meself. I've known captains who have taken a woman across the ocean and never come back.

SARA

If you're that superstitious why did you agree to let me aboard your ship?

BOLDMAN

My actions in allowing ye aboard me ship are purely mercenary. Ye have paid me well fer yer passage, and though I am a superstitious man I am also a greedy one.

SARA

I'll say this much for you you're, if nothing else, honest.

BOLDMAN

I'll take that as a compliment.

SARA

It was meant to be. *(Looking out to sea)* The water is a beautiful blue today, so calm and clear.

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

BOLDMAN

Aye, Lass, tis, but it is the calmness that has me concerned?

SARA

How do you mean

BOLDMAN

(Pointing at something) See there, on the horizon, that cloud formation.

SARA

(Looking in the direction BOLDMAN is pointing) What about it?

BOLMAN

Its coloration is rather ominous, it's the first cloud formation we have seen since we departed Batavia and according to all my weather reports we were supposed to have clear sailing today. I suggest ye return to yer cabin, Lass, I fear we are in for some rough sailing, and I don't need to be worrying about you getting in the way of my men as they try to secure this ship.

SARA

I will stay put if it is all the same to you, captain. I am not your cabin boy whom you can order about. I am quite capable of taking care of myself.

ERIC

(Entering from L) We have secured the cargo as you ordered, Captain.*(Surprised and pleased to see SARA)* Sara, what are you doing out here?

BOLDMAN

Annoying me. There's a storm coming and she refuses to return to her cabin where she will be safe. Perhaps ye can talk some sense into that stubborn, pretty little head of hers, Lad. I give up *(he exits mumbling to himself)*.

ERIC

I think you might have hurt the old sea dogs pride.

SARA

Good, he needed to be taken down a peg.

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

ERIC

You shouldn't be so hard on him, Sara. He's only concerned with your welfare.

SARA

I am not a child, Eric. I am a grown woman.

ERIC

No one is disputing *that*, Sara.

SARA

Excuse me?

ERIC

That captain Boldman would be remiss in his duties if he refused to be concerned with the welfare of his crew and passengers.

SARA

I suppose I was a little hard on him.

ERIC

(Laughing) A little.

SARA

It's just he made me so angry with his condescending tone.

ERIC

What were you arguing about?

SARA

The approaching storm. He felt I would be a distraction to the crew as they try to secure the ship against it. He was ordering me to return to my cabin like I was some kind of cabin boy. But I could tell something about the storm had him spooked.

ERIC

He has seen storms at sea before. What's different about this one do you think?

SARA

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

I don't know, I got the sense he thinks there's something almost supernatural about it.

ERIC

Supernatural?! I think you're letting your imagination run away with you, Sara.

SARA

I don't have an imagination, Eric. I never have.

ERIC

Everyone has an imagination, Sara.

SARA

Not me. I am a student of philosophy, Eric. We are taught to ignore the imagination.

ERIC

I don't understand.

SARA

Philosophy has two aims, Eric. First, it tries to give a person a unified view of the universe in which we live. Secondly, it seeks to make a person a more critical thinker by shaping their ability to think clearly and precisely. A philosopher is an ordinary person who thinks more deeply and obstinately than other people. By accepting a particular philosophy a person can begin to seek certain goals and to direct their life's behavior. A philosopher, Eric, seeks the truth in all things disregarding all fanciful or empty assumptions.

ERIC

And what is the truth about that on coming storm?

SARA

Captain Boldman is right, It's supernatural in nature.

ERIC

How so?

SARA

Look at the water, as calm and transparent as glass, and do you feel that?

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

ERIC

What?

SARA

The sudden rise in temperature.

ERIC

It does seem to be getting warmer all of a sudden.

BOLDMAN

(Enters studying some charts and mumbling to himself) That fool navigator has plotted the wrong course.

ERIC

(Crossing to BOLDMAN) Captain, a word please.

BOLDMAN

What is it? I have a great many things I have to do.

ERIC

This will only take a moment, Captain.

BOLDMAN

Very well, but be quick.

ERIC

Sara and I were just discussing the sudden and mysterious change in the atmosphere.

BOLDMAN

Ye were were ye?

ERIC

Sara believes you think there's something supernatural about the approaching storm. Is she right?

BOLDMAN

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

Listen, Lad, being a sailor yerself ye should know out here on the open sea we experience all forms of phenomenon's, ya get use to them.

SARA

You didn't answer his question, Captain. What is it about that approaching storm that bothers you?

BOLDMAN

Nothing, its just a storm.

SARA

I have seen storms at sea before, Captain, none of them as ominous as the one coming upon us.

BOLDMAN

Now yer an expert on sea travel are ye?

SARA

(Indignant) Look around you, Captain, the heat in the air has become stifling, the water is too calm and an eerie, haunting silence has settle over us.

BOLDMAN

I assure ye, Lass, there is nothing supernatural about that storm approaching us.

SARA

You don't believe that, I can hear it in your voice. Something about the approaching storm bothers you doesn't it?

BOLDMAN

Alright, Lass, ya have me. Never in all me years on the open sea have I encountered something so sinister as that approaching storm.

ERIC

What do you suggest we do, Captain?

BOLDMAN

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

The best thing ye can do, Lad, is for her to return to her cabin and ye to join the crew to secure the ship. Now if ye'll excuse me I think I will go make that fool navigator walk the plank (*he exits*).

SARA

He's joking right?

ERIC

Of course, we don't have a plank.

SARA

That's reassuring. I suppose we better do as he says.

ERIC

I'll see you later, Sara (*He exits. SARA returns to her writing as the lights fade to blue-white lighting.*)

SARA

As the image of Eric fades from my mind I recall what happened next. I went bellow, but not without a full premonition of evil. My uneasiness, however, prevented me from sleeping. About midnight I went up on deck. As I placed my foot upon the upper rung of the companion ladder I was startled by a loud humming noise. Before I could ascertain what it was the ship quivered at its very center. In the next instant a rush of water hurled us upon our beams end and rushed over us fore and aft sweeping the entire deck from stem to stern. (*BOLDMAN enters and stands next to SARA*) By what miracle I escaped destruction is impossible to say. When I came to Captain Boldman was standing over me.

BOLDMAN

(*Helping SARA up*) Are ye all right, Lass?

SARA

I think so. Are there any more survivors?

ERIC

(*Entering frantically calling for SARA*) SARA! SARA! Where are you?

BOLDMAN

Over here, Lad.

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

ERIC

(Crossing to SARA and BOLDMAN) How did you survive?

BOLDMAN

I lashed meself to the wheel just as the storm hit.

ERIC

I meant Sara.

BOLDMAN

I'm touched by yer concern, Lad.

SARA

The storm's fury jammed me between the stern and rudder. What about you, Eric, how did you survive?

ERIC

I was on the promenade when the storm hit. I managed to lash myself to the mast before the storms full fury hit.

SARA

I'm glad you're all right.

ERIC

I'm glad you are too.

BOLDMAN

If ye two are through making doe eyes at each other there's work to be done.

SARA

Where is the rest of the crew?

BOLDMAN

Dead, all of them. The cabins bellow are deluged with water.

The Last Voyage of the Albatross

ERIC

Those who were on deck when the full fury of the storm hit were washed out to sea. It's a miracle we survived at all.