

AFLOAT IN A BOAT

by Ken Bradbury

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SYNOPSIS: A cruise ship sinks and there are 5 survivors on a small lifeboat.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 either)

GWALTNEY (m/f)..... (61 lines)
McQUILLAN (m/f) (17 lines)
BECKWITH (m/f) (32 lines)
ROTHSTEIN (m/f) (28 lines)
HURLEY (m/f) (12 lines)

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AT START: *The setting is a small boat afloat somewhere in the Atlantic. The chairs are arranged to resemble a crowded tiny craft. Although the characters are referred to as "he," they may be played by either sex. As the scene opens, the characters are strewn all over each other and there is a large collective groan.*

GWALTNEY: *(Raising up out of the mess.)* Where are we?

McQUILLAN: *(Raising his head.)* What happened?

GWALTNEY: I asked first. Where are we?

McQUILLAN: *(Peering over the edge of the boat.)* At sea. We're in a boat.

GWALTNEY: I know that. Where?

McQUILLAN: *(Reaches down and touches the water then looks at his hand.)* In the ocean. *(Then MCQUILLAN collapses back into the heap of bodies.)*

GWALTNEY: Thanks.

ROTHSTEIN: *(Suddenly raising up.)* Is it time for dinner?

GWALTNEY: The ship sank. No dinner.

ROTHSTEIN: *(Rubbing his head.)* Oh. That explains the horrible service. You say our cruise ship is gone?

GWALTNEY: *(Looking into the water.)* Not completely. It's down there somewhere.

ROTHSTEIN: Along with dinner?

GWALTNEY: We're lucky to be alive.

ROTHSTEIN: Yeh. Some luck. *(ROTHSTEIN collapses back into the boat.)*

GWALTNEY: I wonder how long it takes to die.

BECKWITH: *(Raising up.)* Depends on the weather, actually.

GWALTNEY: Who are you?

BECKWITH: Beckwith. Promenade Deck, cabin 401 B.

GWALTNEY: With the balcony.

BECKWITH: Yes, I had the balcony. I wanted a view.

GWALTNEY: *(Indicating the ocean.)* Well, you got your wish. Nothing but ocean for as far as the eye can see. I'm Gwaltney. Lido deck, 809 A. No balcony.

BECKWITH: Sorry. Are we sunk?

GWALTNEY: Not personally, but the ship, yes. I threw every body I could find into this lifeboat.

BECKWITH: Oh. Thanks.

GWALTNEY: Don't mention it.

BECKWITH: Did you throw in any food or water?

GWALTNEY: No.

BECKWITH: Oh.

GWALTNEY: I was busy. Sorry.

BECKWITH: Oh, that's quite understandable. Thanks again for the lift.

GWALTNEY: Don't mention it.

BECKWITH: Look, hold that thought, would you? I think I'm about to pass out.

GWALTNEY: No problem. (*BECKWITH collapses back into the boat.*)

Seems like I learned this back in science class. What was it? Five days without food ... two days without water. The ship sunk three days ago ... so ... Let's see. I should be dead. That's curious.

HURLEY: (*Suddenly standing.*) Okay, you lazy bones! Time for our morning aerobics workout! Let's go! Everybody up to the ... (*but as he turns to go, he realizes that the cruise ship is gone.*) Hey! What's this?

GWALTNEY: What are you doing?

HURLEY: I'm the recreation director! What ... Where's my ship?

GWALTNEY: Down there.

HURLEY: (*Looking over the edge.*) Someone dropped it?

GWALTNEY: It sunk. The Atlantic Queen is now at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

HURLEY: Well, just how am I supposed to get to it?

GWALTNEY: I could push you. Look, the ship is gone, chap. Sunk. And we don't need a recreational director.

HURLEY: (*Laughs, then.*) That's ridiculous! This is a boat! Every boat needs a recreational director! (*Shouting to the others lying about.*)

Up! Up! Come on, everybody! Up and at 'em! It's time for our on-deck workout! Come on, you lazy bones! Up and at 'em! (*The others, with much groaning and pain, rise to a sitting position.*)

Okay! How about a few jumping jacks to get those sea legs going? Ready? (*Jumping up and down.*) One! Two! One! Two! One! Two!

McQUILLAN: Is he crazy?

GWALTNEY: Very.

HURLEY: Come on! Smell that sea air! Let your muscles breathe! One! Two! One! Two! Oh, my favorite sounds on the sea!

BECKWITH: I got a favorite sound.

HURLEY: What's that?

BECKWITH: "Man overboard!" *(And he shoves HURLEY out of the boat ... falling upstage of the chairs and thus concealed.)*

ALL: *(Of those still in the boat ... with feeble hand gestures to continue the jumping jacks.)* One! Two! One! Two! *(And both ROTHSTEIN and MCQUILLAN collapse back into the boat.)*

GWALTNEY: Good move.

BECKWITH: Thank you. *(A pause, then.)* So ... you suppose we'll die?

GWALTNEY: According to science, we should expire any minute.

BECKWITH: Seems a shame.

GWALTNEY: I agree. There was much I wanted to accomplish.

BECKWITH: Like?

GWALTNEY: Well. Living, for a start. I always wanted to live.

BECKWITH: Yes. There's much to be said for that.

GWALTNEY: Perhaps retire to New Mexico some day ... a little condo up in the hills.

BECKWITH: Sounds nice.

GWALTNEY: You?

BECKWITH: Oh, I really hadn't planned much. I mean, I really didn't count on ending it like this, but as for my future plans ... well. No need looking too far ahead, I say.

GWALTNEY: The facts prove you out.

BECKWITH: They do indeed. Look, I don't mean to be rude, but my bodily functions seem to be slowing a bit.

GWALTNEY: Slowing pulse? Dizziness? A throbbing in the temples and dumbness of your extremities?

BECKWITH: I couldn't have put it better.

GWALTNEY: Yes, that would be the approach of death alright.

BECKWITH: Been good chatting.

GWALTNEY: It has indeed. *(BECKWITH collapses into the boat.)*

ROTHSTEIN: *(Rising.)* What was that?

GWALTNEY: Beckwith just died.

ROTHSTEIN: Oh. He was the first?

GWALTNEY: Among the last, actually. Over 2000 gave it up when the ship went down.

ROTHSTEIN: Oh. I suppose so. Look, I know we hardly know each

other but could I ask you for an iced tea? (*A very long pause as GWALTNEY simply turns and stares at him.*) Oh. No sugar?

GWALTNEY: No sugar.

ROTHSTEIN: (*A long pause, then.*) Then I suppose a lemonade would be ...

GWALTNEY: Out of the question. Sorry.

ROTHSTEIN: Well, I suppose there's nothing else to do for it. (*Begins to collapse then stops himself.*) I'm sorry but I'm new at this.

GWALTNEY: What's that?

ROTHSTEIN: Dying. I mean, is there a proper way or something?

GWALTNEY: Don't know. In movies they tend to grab their throat, choke a bit, and scream.

ROTHSTEIN: Scream? Seems so... I don't know... Well, not exactly the way I want to be remembered.

HURLEY: (*Pulling himself up over the edge of the boat and sputtering.*) Ach! Sputt! Okay! How about a little shuffleboard?

ROTHSTEIN: Shall I?

GWALTNEY: Please do. (*ROTHSTEIN pushes HURLEY back into the ocean.*)

ROTHSTEIN: Now ... where was I?

GWALTNEY: Dying, I think.

ROTHSTEIN: Ah, yes. (*He grabs his throat, screams, and collapses.*)

BECKWITH: (*Rising up.*) Who was that?

GWALTNEY: Rothstein. I thought you were dead.

BECKWITH: Not quite. Any moment now.

HURLEY: (*His head appearing over the side of the boat.*) Volleyball? (*BECKWITH pushes him back into the drink.*)

GWALTNEY: Thanks much.

BECKWITH: Don't mention it.

McQUILLAN: (*Rising up.*) What's all the fuss?

GWALTNEY: We're dying. It's a noisy process, I'm afraid.

McQUILLAN: Any hope of rescue?

GWALTNEY: Don't know. Never been in a fix like this before. (*Scanning the sea.*) Doesn't seem to be much traffic. I don't suppose you have any food.

McQUILLAN: Not a crumb. You?

GWALTNEY: Afraid not. My throat seems to be closing. I don't suppose ...

McQUILLAN: No.

GWALTNEY: Oh. No sugar?

McQUILLAN: No sugar.

HURLEY: (*His head again appearing over the edge of the boat.*) Hey, cruisers! We've got a lecture on Peruvian pottery in the Sierra Room at 10 o'clock.

McQUILLAN: Oh, bother. (*He pushes HURLEY back into the waves.*)

BECKWITH: Not a fan of pottery?

McQUILLAN: Not at all. You know, I've been wondering ...

GWALTNEY: What's that?

McQUILLAN: Should we all die at once or one at a time?

ROTHSTEIN: (*Rising up.*) What's the difference?

GWALTNEY: Thought you were dead.

ROTHSTEIN: Nearly. Just a couple minutes left, I think.

McQUILLAN: Well, you see, the difference is this... If we all die at once it would save the last few the agony of watching us go.

BECKWITH: Could I go first? I had the balcony.

GWALTNEY: No. Death is democratic, I think. All men are equal in death. At least they should be.

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