

Swept Ashore

By

Mona Deutsch Miller

In this short black comedy, a contemporary gay fashion designer and a bigoted 17th century pirate find themselves on a beach at the same time. Each is dealing with his own needs and insecurities.

This play was selected by ALAP to be read at the West Hollywood Gay and Lesbian Play Reading Festival in June 2015. It has not yet been produced.

©2020 Mona D. Miller
1916 Roscomare Road
Los Angeles, CA 90077
(310) 476-0789
monadeutschmiller@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

BURL: A burly pirate (40'S - 50's) of the 17th century, soaked and shivering, wearing a woman's long white dress, swept ashore on a modern day beach. BURL speaks with pronounced Scottish burr of a classic old movie pirate.

ARMANDO: A modern day fashion designer (30), dressed in ultra-fashionable, tight clothes, who's just had a terrible time at a fashion convention. ARMANDO loves theater and culture. HE's insecure.

SCENE: The deserted beach of a fancy resort in the islands.

TIME: Now. Or is it?

SETTING:

The stage is empty. If desired, the SOUND of SURF CRASHING may play.

AT RISE:

BURL (40's - 50's), a burly, hairy guy in seaman's 17th century pantaloons and a tattered white wedding dress partially pulled over the top of his body lies on the stage, seemingly unconscious. Gradually, HE wakes.

BURL

Oh, thankee, thankee, by the grace o' God, this pirate lives!

(BURL notices his clothes, remembering something)

Oh, thar be witchcraft in a man dressed so. Perhaps 'tis the devil what saved me.

(BURL struggles to remove the dress but is weak and exhausted. HE becomes more tangled in it)

(A slim male fashion designer, ARMANDO, 30, in very tight, high fashion clothes saunters in, surveying the scenery. HE does not notice BURL at first)

ARMANDO

Oh, the beautiful sea. That special blue green, the little flecks of white foam kissing the sky, a totally different blue, but complementary. Cool. Gracious. I must capture that feeling in my next collection.

(First seeing BURL as HE practically trips over him)

What have we here?

BURL

Oh, me God. Are you marooned too?

(Aside)

I guess he could only find little girls' under things to stay warm.

ARMANDO

The resort isn't that bad. I don't think I'd call it "marooned." Don't you have internet in your villa?

BURL

(Confused, trying to remove the dress)

Internet? My villa? Where are we?

ARMANDO

That's an amazing look you have on. I wouldn't be in such a hurry to take it off.

(HE circles BURL admiringly)

BURL

Is't a storm coming? Will I need it for warmth?

ARMANDO

It looks calm to me. Weather-wise, anyway. But that look is *hot!*

BURL

You must have been up in the crow's nest during the voyage. Or hidden down below.

(Aside, with disgust)

The captain's fancy boy, I reckon.

(To ARMANDO)

Are there any other survivors?

ARMANDO

Oh come on, jocko, a little criticism and you act as if you've been ripped to pieces! That's fashion. You have to learn to suck it up.

BURL

I've sucked up an ocean of salt water in this gullet, and seaweed too. Who are you?

ARMANDO

That must have been some after-party. Lot of stuff going around - maybe somebody gave you something bad - or you just overdid it.

BURL

Are there others here too? Other survivors?

ARMANDO

We all survived. You've got to let it go. The buyers didn't go for my new line and you don't see me lying on the sand, weeping about it. I'm not gonna let them ruin my 30th birthday.

BURL

(Wondering how this little boy could be 30)
We'd best get out of the sun. Where are t'others? Did the Captain make it?

(BURL pulls off the wedding dress but is immediately cold. HE shivers)

ARMANDO

Captain? Oh, I get it - you're here with "Old Navy." I guess they're expanding their line.

(BURL, in a stupor, understands none of this)

ARMANDO (CONT'D)

You seem a bit out of it. Kinda sick. Maybe we should call an ambulance.

BURL

What are you talking about? What's an am-booh-lance?

ARMANDO

It's a large white vehicle that holds a couple of narrow gurneys, full of medical equipment, things that shock your heart into beating, kind of high off the ground, you know, big wheels...

(BURL looks at him uncomprehendingly)

ARMANDO (CONT'D)

(Looking into the distance, brightly)

Oh look! Here comes one.

BURL

I don't see anything. What's happening to me?

ARMANDO

I was painting you a word picture. You shouldn't need scenery. Although a sound cue would have helped.

(The SOUND of an AMBULANCE SIREN suddenly comes up)

ARMANDO (CONT'D)

That's better.

BURL

Whar we be? I never did hear no sound like that, fancy boy.

ARMANDO

We'll get you some help. Even if you are a homophobic lunatic. Maybe it's dehydration.

BURL

Water, water, please. I'm sorry, sir. What be your name?

ARMANDO

It's not "Fancy Boy," I can tell you that. Although that would be a great name for that poet shirt you just threw off.

(ARMANDO picks up the wedding dress)

It's just too long, that's all. If you cut here, and put some tucks there... I love this lace.

(ARMANDO handles the dress with reverence)

BURL

Put down that lady's garb! Water, water, I prithee! For mercy's sake.

ARMANDO

(Looking into the distance)

They'll have water in the ambulance. It's making the turn to come down the hill.

BURL

I don't see anyone coming. No "Am - Booh - Lance." Why do ye torment a dyin' man? Why are ye playing with a lady's garment?

ARMANDO

I'm not playing, I'm thinking! I'm going to step away now from this raving lunatic. Something's off with him.

(ARMANDO studies the dress as BURL weakly crawls toward him)

ARMANDO

(Looking impatiently at the audience)

Alright, be that way. I think we should cut to the hospital, okay? Where you'll be in a nice clean bed, hooked up to all kinds of lines, everything white, neat, sterile, you can practically smell the antiseptic...

BURL

What do you mean, "cut to?" Am I wounded? Was there a sword fight afore we ran a'ground?

(BURL hurriedly examines himself for wounds and is relieved to find only bumps and scrapes)

BURL (CONT'D)

Oh Lordie, where are we?

ARMANDO

I was trying for another word picture. But you're right - I've got to make up my mind whether my life is a movie or a play.

(ARMANDO considers the dress, feeling it during his next speech)

I get so mixed up sometimes. Here you have this beautiful white lace, and even after being stretched around you, big guy, it's still delicate and fine - but strong. I wish I could be like that.

BURL

Like a woman's dress?

ARMANDO

What happened to her?

BURL

I don't know! I swear it! How this lady's garment came to be on me person - it befuddles me mind.

(As an afterthought)

I didn't kill her.

(ARMANDO tries the dress on, to BURL's disgust)

ARMANDO

I'm so glad we got that cleared up. I wouldn't want to be exploring the world - even a tiny itsy bitsy theatrical piece of it - in a murder victim's dress.

BURL

Are you an actor then?

(aside)

That'd explain a few things. Too much imagination and not enough sense.

ARMANDO

(Shyly)

Well, no, but I'm writing a screenplay. By the pool. But then, everyone in L.A. is writing a screenplay by the pool.

BURL

A pool? A pool of water? Oh my God, take me there, laddie. I don't understand. Please, please help me. I'm not long for this world without some water . . .

ARMANDO

They're coming. Just hang on. Of course, they're moving like Godot. [pronounced GOD-oh]

BURL

Who's Godot?

ARMANDO

You know. The one people are always waiting for.

BURL

Is that what you people call the Angel of Death?

ARMANDO

Now that's an interpretation! But I don't think it's right.

(BURL hitches himself up on his knees and crawls toward ARMANDO)

BURL

I don't want to die! Not here, not like this. What world is this?

ARMANDO

Why are you getting so excited? I guess you really are sick.

BURL

Will you nah help me? I'll confess me sins. I'll turn from me pirate ways.

ARMANDO

Oh, so that's it. Pirate wear. Very clever. And a model who acts, too. I'd have done better in the show if that stupid Jasmine could have looked intelligent for a second.

BURL

It's no act. I'll - I'll tell thee of the treasure, lad, if you'll just find me some water, and shelter.

ARMANDO

This really is an extraordinary encounter. You must have gotten into the most amazing party. I didn't.

BURL

Tis true, I've kept low company, but I swear to thee - I did not kill the lady. Give me the dress!

ARMANDO

So you'll have that design, too? No way. You're already so picturesque.

BURL

I'm Burl! Burl Owens!

ARMANDO

I think this definitely has the makings of a play. I've passed that three-page scene barrier. But you're not supposed to waste time. No slow waking up and providing unnecessary dribble.

(BURL wakes up at the word "dribble")

BURL

Dribble? Where is the dribble? A small stream?

ARMANDO

The difficulty of melding different time periods into one scene can be overcome, I think. That's part of what I'm trying to do with my designs. I see 18th century corsets and lacings, paired with some nice rugged chaps to wear over a denim pant - it's like an old saloon door slamming right into Melrose Avenue. Our clothes do influence us, you know. They express our inner world.

BURL

I didn't kill her! I don't know how I ended up in that dress. You must believe me.

ARMANDO

He's either hallucinating, and thinks he's a buccaneer from hundreds of years ago - probably influenced by that outfit - and I'm your contemporary metrosexual - or there's some kind of time warp. We make a brilliant pair, don't you think?

BURL

Who ye be talking to now, young sir? Is ye daft? I don't see no-one but the pounding waves - the tide's coming in - we'd best move up the hill some. Help me, boy.

ARMANDO

In a minute.

(Continuing to talk to the audience)

That was a “direct address.” My life is full of them. Moments, images, they’re always calling out to me. They frown on it, I think. Too “presentational,” whatever that means. Whatever plane of existence I’m in, I’m just supposed to stay there, and not look outside the box into something else. Well who can do that and stay sane?

BURL

You’re a madman with a character, I tell ee! I’m dying of thirst here, and you promise me help, but none comes, you say they’re comin’ but I naw see a thing.. You have no character, lad! None at all. Even a bloodthirsty pirate would give a dyin’ man a drink. Rum in fact. Have you got any rum? What is this place? Is there no rum?

ARMANDO

Maybe my character’s a nasty one. There’s more to me than meets the eye.

BURL

Thank God for that.

ARMANDO

Conflict - they say you have to have conflict.

BURL

Who is “they?” What ye be going on about? I have no quarrel with you, sir. I just want water, shelter, some food. Not much.

ARMANDO

Not much? The whole world wants that treasure.

BURL

I’ll tell thee about the treasure, once ye sees to me needs, and I know I’ll not be a dead ‘un.

ARMANDO

You’re so melodramatic - come off it. Doing a good job of it, too. Just who are you?

BURL

Will ye’ give me som’at ta drink or no? Must I give up the ghost right here and now? To survive a shipwreck only t’ be killed by a slip of a fancy boy on the beach...

ARMANDO

All right, all right, I'll get you some water. I can't believe the ambulance just stopped up there. No doubt they didn't want to pay for an additional actor to walk on - and God forbid anyone would have to pay for a decent prop.

(Confidentially, to BURL)

Look, before I get you the water, and, off the record of course, what are they paying you for this? More than carfare, I assume. I mean with the accent and all. You're really good.

BURL

Tis payment you want? I tell you, laddie, I'll give you all the details about the treasure, but first ye' must give me water, food and shelter. I give ye me hand on it.

(THEY shake hands, BURL on the ground)

ARMANDO

Oh, nice strong grip. Okay then.

(ARMANDO starts to trudge away, in search of the ambulance)

Hey! Wait! I'm coming! Wait! He can't walk - he needs water!

(ARMANDO exits)

BURL

I'd sooner die than share me treasure with a fancy boy who talks nonsense. But he'll save me life and then I'll slit his throat. With pleasure. Just like that young woman whose dress I stole...

(BURL laughs an evil laugh that turns into retching)

End of Play