

THE SEA HORSE

by Edward J. Moore

ACT I

The "Sea Horse" is a bar in a California seaport owned by Gertrude Blum. She is a large, rowdy, seemingly unsentimental woman who uses her tough facade to keep a distance between the world and her vulnerable core. Harry Bales is a seaman who enjoys a physical relationship with Gertrude whenever he is on shore leave. On this visit, Harry surprises Gertrude with new plans to buy a charter fishing boat and settle down to married life with her.

In the scene below, Harry, somewhat drunk, confesses that he loves her and asks her to "run away" with him. Because of her own fear of being hurt, Gertrude deliberately misinterprets his proposal and bullies Harry into an argument that ends in a physical confrontation.

GERTRUDE: Ya know . . . I wish I could have been a dancer . . . *(She puts phonograph on bar. Plugs it in. Harry leans across the table, resting his head on his arms. Concentrated on what she's doing, she doesn't notice this.)* they seem so graceful . . . they kind of float, ya know . . . *(puts on the record)* like their feet don't touch . . . it just fascinates me . . . *(The music plays; it is: Cajita de Musica, "Little Music Box." She adjusts the volume.)* come on, dance with me . . . *(Now, sees him slumped over on the table. A moment, then before she can turn the phonograph off, the music moves in on her. She listens, lost a little in the gentleness of the chords. Then she sways and lifts her arms, doing little dance steps as a child might. Unseen by Gertrude, Harry has opened his eyes and is watching her. She turns slowly as a figure on a music box, until she sees him looking at her. Embarrassed, she laughs, curtsies.)* Dance with me.

HARRY, lifts his head. Moved at seeing this sensitive side of

Gertrude, says warmly: That was beautiful . . . that was just beautiful . . .

GERTRUDE, smiles, crosses to him, takes his hand: Come on, let's dance!

HARRY, gently: In a minute, okay? . . . Sit down first . . . *She sits next to him. He gets up, crosses to phonograph, turns it off. A beat, then:* I'm a dummy, right? . . . I'm a dummy! I mean what do I know?

GERTRUDE, compassionately: A lot of things! . . . You're a good carpenter, a good engineer . . . *(smiles)* and you're about to be a good roof-fixer, right?

HARRY, crosses back to her: No, I mean other stuff! . . . *you!* . . . I'm dumb about you! . . . over a year I've been staying with ya now, and I don't know ya . . . you never tell me nothing!

GERTRUDE, a moment, then: Well . . . I was born . . . right here. In the Sea Horse . . .

HARRY: Oh, yeah?!

GERTRUDE: Tending bar! *Laughs.* There I was, just toddling around in my diapers, pourin' 'em out and kickin' 'em out!

HARRY, laughs: Oh yeah! . . . well I ain't that dumb . . . I know you was married once . . .

GERTRUDE, a moment, then: Who told you that?

HARRY, hoping she will take this lead and talk about herself: One of the guys said ya was hitched a long time ago.

GERTRUDE, quiet warning: Ya hear . . . a lot of things.

HARRY, disappointed, but not wanting to press it: . . . Naw . . . that was all. *Finishes his whisky. A beat, then:* Remember the first day I came in this place? *Sits next to her.* I had this babe with me . . . you said "Leave the bitch outside, Handsome, and come on in!" My babe says "Honey, let's get out of here, that woman scares me!" You said "It's a house rule sailor, nothing through that door without balls, come back without the whore sometime, and the first drink'll be on me!" *Laughs:* . . . What a way to talk . . .

GERTRUDE, smiles, gets up, moves behind him: You came back all right . . . that same night!

HARRY: I never had that much fun in my life!

GERTRUDE, rubs his neck: Everyone sure took to you . . .

HARRY: How could they miss! . . . You said it was a rule for me to buy everyone a first drink . . . you nearly broke me!

GERTRUDE: Well, they took to ya, didn't they?!? (*smiles, puts her arms around him*) . . . You know . . . that was the first time I brought anyone upstairs, the same night I met 'em.

HARRY: Yeah?

GERTRUDE: Uh-huh.

HARRY: It was kind of funny . . . I mean you wasn't my type!

GERTRUDE, *chuckles:* I'll bet!

HARRY: I remember I said to myself . . . "Harry . . . you don't do it right, you could get killed."

GERTRUDE, *laughs:* . . . You did it right!

HARRY: Yeah, lucky for me I did it right! *He takes her hand:* Gertrude? . . . do you ever hear things talk? . . . Not people, things . . . machines 'n' water 'n' wind 'n' stuff. *She realizes that he's been drinking again, sniffs his coffee cup.* Ya know what a shaft alley is?

GERTRUDE: I told you, no more boozell! *Crosses, goes behind bar, puts cup in sink.*

HARRY: Ya know what a shaft alley is?! *Disgusted, as she takes his wet cigar out of sink, throws it in garbage pail. He gets up, crosses to her:* I go down this ladder, see . . . (*although a little high, he is still articulate, not slurring his words*) Way down below the water line . . . (*Gertrude goes to refrigerator, pours a glass of soda*) and there's the shaft . . . it turns the screw . . . the propeller. *Sits center bar.* And I go down there to check the bearings . . . and it's quiet down there . . . and I like to sit for a bit, alone, and think. I like to listen to the shaft . . . it talks.

GERTRUDE, *she has taken off the record and unplugged the phonograph, winds up the cord:* It does what?

HARRY, *smiles:* It talks! . . . I mean it rumbles . . . It's rusty in places and it squeaks . . . and it kinda says stuff . . . like . . . (*gesturing with his hand, indicating the turning shaft and making a squeaking sound*) "I'm old . . . I'm old" and I'd answer 'n' say "Oh, yeah . . . oh, yeah." (*Gertrude, leaning on stage left end of bar, drinks some soda, begins to get caught up in what he's saying*) . . . then she'd speed up 'n' say other things, like . . . (*again gestures*) "I'm so long at sea, I'm so long at sea" and I'd answer, 'n' say "Your bearings'll be fine, your bearings'll be fine" . . . and then, that strange night, you know, the one I told ya about, the glass ocean . . . well, later that same night, I went down to

the shaft alley, to think about it. And that old shaft is rumbling away again, and this time she's saying "Gertrude Blum . . . Gertrude Blum" . . . and I started saying it "Gertrude Blum . . . Gertrude Blum" . . . but then she starts speeding up, and my saying "Gertrude Blum" . . . doesn't fit the rumble . . . and it started saying . . . (*indicates the speed of the shaft, spinning his arm rapidly, and talking with compulsive intensity*) "I love Gertrude Blum, I love Gertrude Blum" and I started sayin' it— (*moving toward her*)

HARRY:

"I love Gertrude Blum,
I love Gertrude Blum,
I love Gertrude Blum,
I love Gertrude Blum"

GERTRUDE:

Shut up!!
You drunken damn fool, shut
up!!

I SAID SHUT UP!!!!

Throws the soda in his face.

GERTRUDE: You *are* a crazy man!! The guys hear you spouting that love stuff at me they'll laugh you off the pier!

HARRY, *angry, wiping his face, with the blanket:* They won't hear it! . . . none of 'em will hear it! . . . We'll be way up the coast, where nobody knows us! They can't laugh at me!! *A moment, then he smiles:* You see . . . I figured it all . . . How in the hell can they possibly laugh at me, if we ain't here!

GERTRUDE, *trying to make sense out of what he's saying:* Val-lejo?!

HARRY, *makes his way to downstage center table:* You got it!

GERTRUDE: Is that what this is all about? . . . You wanna run away with me?

HARRY, *happy she understands it:* That's it! *Sits.*

GERTRUDE: Why?

HARRY: Because I love you!! *She stares at him incredulously.* I know! . . . I couldn't believe it myself! . . . But it all fits don't ya see . . .

GERTRUDE: . . . The machine's been telling ya!

HARRY, *realization:* . . . yeah . . . kinda . . .

GERTRUDE: . . . The still ocean . . . and the pumps . . . the shaft . . .

HARRY, *fondly:* Ahhh, the shaft . . .

GERTRUDE, *crosses to him:* And your buddies won't know . . .

HARRY: That's right, they won't know!

GERTRUDE: You wanna hide me! *Both roar with laughter.*

HARRY: Yeah!! *Realizing what he said:* I mean no . . . I mean . . .

GERTRUDE: You mean I'm a blubberball and you wanna hide me! *Both laugh. During the following she moves from his left side to his right, back and forth.*

HARRY: . . . It's just that . . .

GERTRUDE: I been sleeping around so you wanna hide me . . .

HARRY: No, that's . . .

GERTRUDE: And all your buddies know!

HARRY, *still laughing:* They won't find out! . . . I mean . . . you're mixing me up . . .

GERTRUDE: You wanna hide me!!

HARRY, *suddenly explodes, jumps up, his fist clenched:* Quit making fun of me!!

GERTRUDE, *glares at him:* You don't have any balls, Harry, you belong in a dress! Who'd wanna run away with you! *She turns, goes behind bar.*

HARRY, *infuriated, goes after her. Slams his fist on the bar:*

YOU DAMN LARD ASS!!!! SHUT UP!!!! . . . You're right! I was just kidding ya!! . . . I been using ya, my buddies all know it!! . . . Staying here free!! . . . Drinking your booze!! . . . Banging ya when I get the notion!! Who'd wanna run away with a fat pig like you!!!! *Gertrude has moved right end of bar. Slowly he moves toward her now as:* You're a lard ass full of hate! . . . You hate everything!! Ohhhh, you hate my son! Ya hate little kids!! *Right up to her:* . . . You are so full of hate!! *Gertrude attacks him viciously with her fists. Harry, forced back, near downstage center table, drops to his knees, tries to protect himself. Covers his head.*

HARRY: Stop it!!! Stop it!!!!
Damn you!! Stop hitting me!!
Quit hitting!!!

GERTRUDE: You damn son of a bitch!!! Who the hell do you think you are!!! You bastard!! You damn bastard!!!!

HARRY: *swings wildly, hitting Gertrude with a tremendous blow to the stomach:* QUIT HITTING!!!! *She falls to the floor in agony, her breath knocked out by Harry's punch. She clutches her stomach, desperately trying to breathe. Harry, hands over head, confused, not knowing or seeing what he has done, has crawled away from her. Realizing she has stopped hitting him:* What ya trying to do?! Knock my head off?!! You crazy woman . . . *(Seeing her now, writhing on the floor . . . Starting to get her breath back, she moans in pain. He shakily gets up, moves to-*

ward her.) Hey . . . what's the matter . . . *(bending over her, seeing she is in terrible agony)* what happened! . . . I hit ya?!

GERTRUDE: . . . My belly . . . oh, my belly . . . you hurt my belly . . .

HARRY, *distressed, he tries to comfort her:* Oh . . . I'm sorry I'm so sorry . . . It was an accident . . .

GERTRUDE, *gaining a little vocal strength:* You hurt me . . . you hurt me . . .

HARRY: I'm sorry . . . I never hit a woman before! . . .

GERTRUDE, *clutches her stomach:* Is there blood on me?!!

HARRY: What . . .

GERTRUDE: Blood!! Is there blood on me?!! Am I bleeding?!!

HARRY, *on his knees, next to her now, he sees there is no blood:* . . . Nol . . . there's no blood! . . . I just knocked the wind . . .

GERTRUDE, *panicked, she screams:* You hurt me! I'm bleeding . . . you hurt me!! *She starts swinging wildly.*

HARRY, *trying desperately to hold her down:* What's the matter?!! Hey !!! Take it easy!!!

GERTRUDE, *screams:* YOU HURT ME!! GET AWAY FROM ME!!! YOU HURT ME!!! SOMEBODY HELP ME!!! YOU HURT ME!!!

HARRY, *panicked:* I WON'T HIDE YA!! I'M NOT GONNA HIDE YA!!! I LOVE YA!!! YOU'RE NOT A LARD ASS!!!

HARRY: I'M NOT GONNA HIDE YA!!! I WON'T HIDE YA!!! I'M NOT GONNA HIDE YA!!!