

**Series: Arch Oboler's Plays**  
**Show: Bathysphere**  
**Date: Nov 18 1939**

SOUND:

(WIND SIGHS ... CONTINUES IN BG)

LEADER:

The sea is very quiet.

ERIC:

(SERVILE) Yes, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

Will it be very quiet under the water?

ERIC:

No motion, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

I'm told it'll all be very amusing.

ERIC:

I hope so, sir. The captain ought to have everything ready by now, sir. If you'll excuse me now, Your Excellency, (FADES) I'll go see....

LEADER:

No, no, just a moment, doctor.

ERIC:

(FADES IN AGAIN, TIMID) Yes, Your Excellency?

LEADER:

You're much too impatient, my dear young friend. One of the great joys of an experience is to savor it before it happens. Yes, stay and talk to me.

ERIC:

As you say, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

How far under will we have to go to break the record?

ERIC:

Over half a mile.

LEADER:

Uh huh. How far's the bottom?

ERIC:

Just over the record mark.

LEADER:

Deeper than any man's ever gone. It'll all be very amusing.

SOUND:

(WIND AND SOUND OF MEN'S VOICES UP)

LEADER:

Suddenly the wind's changed!

ERIC:

Always at this hour of the day, Your Excellency. It's time to go.

LEADER:

(CHUCKLES) I assure you that the sea will wait for us.

ERIC:

But I only thought that--

LEADER:

Don't think so much, my young friend. Thinking is an unnecessary pastime. The emotions are much more dependable. My thoughts tell me that this little excursion under the sea will be quite precarious. On the other hand, my emotions tell me that it will be most interesting and amusing.

CAPTAIN:

(FADES IN) Your Excellency! We are ready!

LEADER:

Well, captain, you, too, are impatient, eh?

CAPTAIN:

(NERVOUS) I--I don't know what you mean--that is to say ...

LEADER:

Now, now, don't splutter! Come ahead, my young and impatient friend--we'll go aboard your diving bell and begin our little adventure. Come!

SOUND:

(WIND SIGHS ... A TRANSITION ... MURMUR OF MEN'S VOICES AS THEY WORK)

CAPTAIN:

(UP) 'Tenshun!

SOUND:

(MEN'S VOICES ABRUPTLY OUT)

CAPTAIN:

You see, Your Excellency, we are quite ready.

LEADER:

Well, doctor, is everything to your satisfaction?

ERIC:

Did you put in an extra oxygen tank, captain?

CAPTAIN:

Yes, sir. Everything just as you said, doctor.

ERIC:

Telephone communication been tested?

CAPTAIN:

Twenty times!

ERIC:

Searchlight?

CAPTAIN:

I assure you everything has been tested, doctor.

ERIC:

The winch goes smoothly now?

CAPTAIN:

Why - why, yes, I believe--

ERIC:

(SHARPLY) I don't want you to believe, I want you to know!

CAPTAIN:

But I assure you--

ERIC:

Go and test it at once!

CAPTAIN:

Yes, doctor. (FADES) At once, doctor. (OFF) All right, men! Test number one.

MEN'S VOICES:

Aye, aye, sir. Aye, aye. Test number one.

SOUND:

(MACHINERY OF WINCH TESTED ... AND MEN'S VOICES ... IN BG)

CAPTAIN:

(OFF) Slowly! Slowly there.

LEADER:

(QUIETLY) Well, your thoroughness is most commendable, doctor.

ERIC:

We are going half a mile below the sea, sir. Nothing can be left to chance. The pressures down there are almost beyond imagination.

LEADER:

Yes, I know, I know.

ERIC:

Particularly on this dive, everything must be perfection.

LEADER:

You mean the record?

ERIC:

I mean, Your Excellency, that - your life is precious to the State.

LEADER:

Yes. The press of the world has known me only as a record-breaker in the world of what they so quaintly term "power politics." By nightfall, they'll herald me as a record-breaker in the world of science, eh, doctor?

ERIC:

If all goes well, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

Eh? You have doubts?

ERIC:

No one can predict the ways of the sea.

LEADER:

What are you talking about? We'll be quite apart from the sea inside of this steel ball, this - this bathysphere. Oxygen to breathe, telephones with which to communicate, lights with which to see-- Why should there be any question?

ERIC:

The question of the human factor, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

(CHUCKLES SOFTLY) You are as cautious as they said. I like that. I, too, am a cautious man. Oh, yes, indeed. My success has been based upon determining that the unpredictable cannot occur before I -- shall I say -- embark upon my bold adventure. I'm talking quite frankly with you, eh, doctor? Well, it pleases me to do so. For a few hours we'll be locked up in that steel ball. There's no reason you shouldn't know a little about your leader, is there?

ERIC:

You honor me, sir.

LEADER:

For example, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the steel cable which will drop us down

beneath the ocean has strength enough to hold fifty such steel spheres as the one we will be in. I know, too, that you have made -- let me think, you've made - thirty such descents toward the floor of the ocean without the slightest misadventure. The men on this cruiser are especially trained for the work. And, with my life in their hands, I'm sure they'll be particularly careful on this descent -- eh, doctor?

ERIC:

There is no doubt of it, sir.

CAPTAIN:

(FADE IN) All ready now, sir.

ERIC:

Shall we go now, Your Excellency?

LEADER:

Of course, of course.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

CAPTAIN:

Careful, Your Excellency--the deck is quite wet here.

LEADER:

Oh, thank you, captain. You're very thoughtful.

CAPTAIN:

Thank you, sir.

SOUND:

(MURMUR OF MEN'S VOICES ... OUT WITH:)

CAPTAIN:

'Tenshun!

LEADER:

No, no. No formalities--let the men go about their business so we can get started.

CAPTAIN:

Yes, Your Excellency. (UP) At your work, men!

MEN'S VOICES Aye, aye, sir.

SOUND:

(MURMUR OF MEN'S VOICES IN BG)

ERIC:

Would you like to get into the bathysphere first, Your Excellency?

LEADER:

No, no, after you. Quite a small doorway, isn't it? How fortunate we're both small, lean men, doctor. (REPEATS) Lean men. ... Caesar once said something about that sort, didn't he?

ERIC:

I don't know much about that sort of thing, sir.

LEADER:

Ah, I didn't imagine so. Get in, doctor -- I'll follow you.

ERIC:

Yes, sir.

LEADER:

Head first into the steel ball -- quite without dignity, eh, captain?

CAPTAIN:

Shall I help you, sir?

LEADER:

No, no, I'll make it all right. You ready for me, doctor?

ERIC:

(OFF) Come ahead, sir.

SOUND:

(WIND OUT AS LEADER CLIMBS INTO BATHYSPHERE ... THE VOICES OF ERIC AND THE LEADER HAVE A SLIGHT METALLIC RING TO GIVE IMPRESSION OF BEING INSIDE HOLLOW STEEL SPHERE)

ERIC:

Careful of the bolt ends, sir.

CAPTAIN:

(OFF) Careful ...

LEADER:

Ah! That does it!

ERIC:

You're all right, sir?

LEADER:

Yes, yes, of course I am. ... Well? What are we waiting for?

ERIC:

(CALLS) Captain!

CAPTAIN:

(OFF) Aye, sir?

ERIC:

Close her up.

CAPTAIN:

Aye, sir!

SOUND:

(METAL DOOR SLAMS SHUT)

ERIC:

(QUICKLY) Your ears, cover your ears.

LEADER:

Huh?

ERIC:

The bolts and wing bolts that hold the door shut--they have to be tightened by hammering with a sledge.

SOUND:

(TREMENDOUS ECHOING HAMMERING BEGINS)

ERIC:

Cover your ears, sir.

SOUND:

(A TOTAL OF TEN LOUD BLOWS ... THEN OUT)

ERIC:

It's all right now, sir. They - they've done.

LEADER:

Well, what an infernal din! Wasn't there any other way?

ERIC:

Hammering is the only definite guarantee of a watertight seal, sir.

LEADER:

My ears.

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well in there, sir?

LEADER:

What's that?

ERIC:

A voice through the telephone, sir. They'll communicate with us from the deck every three minutes. If one of us doesn't answer within half a minute, the orders are to pull us up.

LEADER:

An excellent safety precaution. Yes, indeed.

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well in there, doctor?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well!

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

We're moving.

ERIC:

Yes. Lifting us out to the end of the boom and then - down we go! Look, sir--you can see the deck down there through the windows.

LEADER:

Glass--so clear.

ERIC:

Clearest in the world. Quartz glass to stand the pressure.

LEADER:

Letting us down in the water, aren't they?

ERIC:

Yes, sir, in a moment--

SOUND:

(LOUD, LONG SPLASH ... THEN SILENCE)

LEADER:

(QUIET, BUT EXCITED) We're under.

ERIC:

Yes. I - I'll turn the oxygen higher.

SOUND:

(QUIET HISS OF OXYGEN IN BG)

LEADER:

(AFTER A PAUSE, ENRAPTURED) The light---so green ...

ERIC:

Yes. Soon it'll be blue. Then a darker blue until, at around two thousand feet, we'll be in a darkness that - goes beyond dark. Complete eternal night.

LEADER:

Eternal night under the water. ... How amusing. ...

SOUND:

(SWIRL OF WATER IN BG OF MUSIC)

(MUSIC ... FOR A TRANSITION ... PALMGREN'S "THE SEA")

SOUND:

(HISS OF OXYGEN)

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well down there, sir?

ERIC:

All well.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

How far down are we?

ERIC:

About eleven hundred feet, sir.

LEADER:

It's hard to believe it.

ERIC:

There is almost a quarter of a mile of water crushing down upon us.

LEADER:

(LIGHTLY) The word "crushing" is most inappropriate at this time, my young friend.

ERIC:

(MATCHES HIM) My apologies, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

I've been watching the water. You said it would be as night. Yet it isn't black. It's - it's blue. The strangest blue.

ERIC:

A few more hundred feet and there will be no more color in the water, sir.

LEADER:

The light out there. What--?

ERIC:

Well, I can't quite make it out, sir--perhaps some sort of a luminous plankton.

LEADER:

(CHUCKLES SOFTLY) It's amusing, the fishes carrying along their own electric plants!

ERIC:

The dark's alive with them, sir. (QUIETLY ENTHUSIASTIC) Oh, look, sir.

LEADER:

What?

ERIC:

That small flat fish. You see? Even his teeth gleam with the luminous mucus. I've caught that sort in the trawls. They can eat organisms as large as they are. Wait, I'll - I'll turn on the searchlight and you'll see--

LEADER:

No, no, no, never mind. I didn't come under the sea out of any interest in those bits of fish.

ERIC:

As you say, sir.

LEADER:

They light up like a train in the dark. Or would the portholes of a boat be a more appropriate figure of speech? Well, seen one, seen them all.

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well down there, sir?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well.

LEADER:

How far down now? Ask him.

ERIC:

How far?

VOICE:

(FILTER) Thirteen hundred and fifty feet.

ERIC:

Right.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

We make good time, eh?

ERIC:

Yes, sir. They lower us very quickly, sir.

LEADER:

A six-foot ball containing a very earnest young man and the leader of a state. Headed for--what shall we say, doctor?

ERIC:

(CAREFULLY) A new record, sir.

LEADER:

Is that as far as your imagination carries you?

ERIC:

At the moment I cannot say, Your Excellency.

LEADER:

Well, perhaps when we reach the end of the cable we'll discuss life and death very profoundly, eh, my friend? Philosophy under the sea. (CHUCKLES) Yes.

(MUSIC ... FOR A TRANSITION)

SOUND:

(SWIRL OF WATER IN BG ... OUT WITH MUSIC)

SOUND:

(HISS OF OXYGEN)

VOICE:

(AFTER A MOMENT OF SILENCE, FILTER) All well down there, sir?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well.

VOICE:

(FILTER) Twenty-two hundred feet.

ERIC:

Right.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

How much further?

ERIC:

We've four thousand feet of cable, sir.

LEADER:

You were right ... There's a darkness out there now that's darker than any night that man has ever seen. (SLOWLY, PATLY) It's ... amusing. ...

(MUSIC ... FOR A TRANSITION)

SOUND:

(SWIRL OF WATER ... OUT WITH MUSIC)

SOUND:

(HISS OF OXYGEN)

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well down there, sir?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well.

VOICE:

(FILTER) Twenty-eight hundred feet, sir.

ERIC:

Right.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

(AFTER A BEAT) Your Excellency ... ?

LEADER:

Yes?

ERIC:

In ten or eleven minutes we will have broken the record. ... You keep your eyes so close to that window--might I ask why?

LEADER:

(SLOWLY) I thought I saw -- something -- out there.

ERIC:

What, sir?

LEADER:

Something huge. It gave off a pale green light and then was gone so quickly I-- I'm not quite sure.

ERIC:

I'll turn on the searchlight.

LEADER:

No, no. ... (MORE QUIETLY) No, this infernal darkness amuses me. (AFTER A BEAT) Tell me, doctor, in your other trips, have you seen anything out there -- a vague, huge -- you know what I mean.

ERIC:

Yes, sir. Several times.

LEADER:

Well?

ERIC:

Shadowy and - indistinct. I couldn't say what, sir.

LEADER:

Can't you guess?

ERIC:

I have no answers.

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well down there, sir?

LEADER:

(IRRITATED) Oh, tell him yes, yes, yes, and stop annoying us!

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well, and don't bother--

VOICE:

(INTERRUPTS, FILTER) The captain's compliments, sir, you've reached three thousand twenty-eight feet, sir.

ERIC:

That was Beebe's record.

LEADER:

Eh?

ERIC:

The old one.

VOICE:

(FILTER) Three thousand and thirty.

LEADER:

(RELIEVED) Broken it!

VOICE:

(FILTER) Thirty-one hundred.

LEADER:

Doctor, that's quite enough--

VOICE:

(FILTER) Thirty-one hundred and fifty.

LEADER:

Doctor, did you hear me? Broken the record and a few feet to spare. Order them to haul us up.

VOICE:

(FILTER) Thirty-two hundred.

LEADER:

(ANNOYED) Doctor, are you out of your head? I gave you orders. Have them pull us up. I've had enough of this. I tell you that I --

SOUND:

(BATHYSPHERE HITS BOTTOM ... SWIRL OF BUBBLES ... CRASH OF ITEMS FALLING AROUND INSIDE SPHERE ... THEN SILENCE)

LEADER:

(TENSE) What--what happened?

ERIC:

(NO LONGER ANY DEFERENCE IN HIS VOICE) Happened? We just landed at the bottom of the sea, that's all.

LEADER:

Why did you ignore my orders? I said to go up. What are you doing now?!

SOUND:

(LEVER THROWN BACK)

LEADER:

What was the lever that you threw? Answer me!

ERIC:

(FLATLY) Yes. I'll answer.

LEADER:

Haven't you forgotten something, doctor?

ERIC:

What?

LEADER:

To say "Sir! Your Excellency!"?

ERIC:

(QUIETLY AMUSED) "Excellency"? Here, at the bottom of the sea?

LEADER:

What--what's happened to you? All of a sudden you-- (UNDERSTANDING) Ah, the excitement of creating a new record, a little too much for you, eh, my young friend? Well, it's understandable. Now signal the ship and have them draw us up. Your little adventure is over.

(NO ANSWER) Didn't you hear me? I said signal the ship!

ERIC:

How?

LEADER:

Are you out of your mind completely? Telephone them! (NO ANSWER) At once! You hear me?

ERIC:

(POINTEDLY) A telephone consists of a carbon transmitter, receiver, actuating battery and connecting wire. We - have no telephone.

LEADER:

Get to one side!

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

Hello? Hello, up there? (CLICK) Hello? Hello? Answer me! (CLICK, CLICK) Hello! Hello! Blast you, answer me! Hello! (CLICK) But they don't--

ERIC:

(CALMLY) The wire's torn loose. Would you know how to - fix it, Your Excellency?

LEADER:

What? (THINKS HE UNDERSTANDS) I see. Happened when we bumped on the bottom, didn't it? Well, can't YOU fix it?

ERIC:

I can -- but I won't ... Your Excellency.

LEADER:

(QUIETLY MYSTIFIED) What is this?

ERIC:

It's taken you a great number of moments longer than I expected to ask that question. You notice that I've called you "Your Excellency" a couple of times but - that was the end of that. From now on I will call you "your infernal excellency."

LEADER:

(NOT AMUSED) How amusing!

ERIC:

Still "amusing"?

LEADER:

Yes.

ERIC:

I don't believe it. You think it's some kind of madness on my part--that you'll do something about it?

LEADER:

Not I -- you.

ERIC:

I?

LEADER:

You have an emergency way of signaling. Yes, I know you have! You flash the searchlight on and off three times and the flow of current registers up on deck -- and they know that it's an emergency. Well, go ahead and do it, and perhaps I'll forget your little -- shall we call it -- "joke"?

ERIC:

I am quite content to stay down here.

LEADER:

Turn on the searchlight! (NO ANSWER) All right, I'll do it myself.

SOUND:

(SEARCHLIGHT SWITCH CLICKS USELESSLY)

ERIC:

Why waste your time? You've so little of it left.

LEADER:

What do you mean by that?

ERIC:

The searchlight, too, is disconnected.

LEADER:

Why?

ERIC:

There's no need of it. It will be best to die in the dark.

LEADER:

Die?

ERIC:

Yes.

LEADER:

(QUIETLY, AS IF TO HIMSELF) This is impossible. I investigated you--your record--your family--your associates. Clearest record in the State. You haven't the reason or the will to kill me. Kill me--? That's really funny! A young empty-headed fool kill me? (CHUCKLES) That's very amusing.

ERIC:

You'll be afraid soon.

LEADER:

(STILL AMUSED) Is it possible that you've forgotten the final emergency signal, you fool? Yes, I said signal. The signal of silence. They'll try the telephone as scheduled, and when we don't answer, they'll pull us up. Have you forgotten that?

ERIC:

It's been more than three minutes since the last signal. If what you say is true, why aren't we moving?

LEADER:

(UNCERTAINLY) We -- we are. For all I know, we - we are.

ERIC:

Are we?

LEADER:

The darkness--who can tell if there's an upward motion?

ERIC:

You know we're motionless. As quiet as in a tomb. Appropriate that. And we'll stay here--I know

that!

LEADER:

Eh?

ERIC:

That lever up on the roof that I pulled.

LEADER:

Well?

ERIC:

It threw the end of the steel cable free. Yes, severed the cord between ourselves - and the ship - and the world.

LEADER:

No!

ERIC:

We're here, your infernal excellency. Down here -- to stay!

LEADER:

(BUILDS TO A PANIC) No! You lie! I don't believe you! They'll pull us up! The telephone-- here--here, you up there, listen! Get me up! Get me up! You, up there! Hear me! It's your leader! Get me out of here! (FADES) Get me out of here! You hear me! Get me out of here! Out of here! Out of here! (OUT)

SOUND:

(TRANSITIONAL PAUSE ... HISS OF OXYGEN)

LEADER:

(WHISPERS WEARILY) Unbelievable.

ERIC:

Oxygen left for another hour, and it takes you ten precious minutes of your precious life to believe. You do believe you're going to die, now, don't you?

LEADER:

(LOST IN THOUGHT) I--I was sure nothing could happen. Every detail of the machinery. The record of every member of the crew.

ERIC:

And I was one of those who was perfectly harmless, hm?

LEADER:

Yes. Your past. Since a boy, trained in the schools of the State. Your father an official. Why do you do this to me? Why?

ERIC:

Your ego is so great that, even now, knowing you're going to die here with me, you're less concerned with death than you are with knowing wherein you failed.

LEADER:

Answer me. Why do you do this? You were trained in my schools, brought up to think the way you should think. Who up there made you do this thing and why?

ERIC:

It'll be a slow death. As slow as the death of my country.

LEADER:

Answer me. Who and why?

ERIC:

Your mouth'll bite for air and there won't be enough to let you live and yet there'll be enough so that you won't quite die.

LEADER:

(INSISTENT) You'll tell me. You will.

ERIC:

Your lungs'll reach up through your mouth. A breath of air--just another-- There won't be another. And as you die you'll know it!

LEADER:

I want to know one thing. Why do you do this?

ERIC:

(SNAPS AT HIM) "Why, why, why?!" Yes, I'll give you yours whys! You trained me in your schools, and, from morning to night, what went into my head was only what you decreed was right and proper for a good citizen of your infernal state to know! Yes, you crammed my head full. But there's one place you and your books and your speeches couldn't reach. My heart!

LEADER:

Your heart?

ERIC:

Yes, heart--you heard me, heart! My head said believe--my heart said no! My head said obey--my heart said no! That's where you made your mistake, you devil--you didn't start in young enough with me! For the heart that was born inside of me has brought you here to die.

LEADER I--I don't understand.

ERIC:

Wait, I - I'll turn a little more oxygen on.

SOUND:

(HISS OF OXYGEN)

ERIC:

That'll give me a little more strength to keep on telling you your whys! And cut the breaths left for you after I'm finished! What was I saying? Yes, that you didn't condition me quite well enough--should have started with the embryo, for somewhere along the line a little humanity got inside of me that cried out against what you were doing! It grew and grew until it said you had to die. And you will die--yes, here in the black under the sea. And they won't roll drums for you, march for you. Ended here. What have you to say to that?

LEADER:

(QUIETLY DISGUSTED) You fool.

ERIC:

Fool? Is that all you answer?

LEADER:

Yes, fool.

ERIC:

You think I'm a fool to die here with you? You call me a fool when I know that ending here I give a new beginning to those up there?

LEADER:

Yes, such a fool!

ERIC:

Oh, stop saying that! They won't say it back in the cities when they know that they're free!

LEADER:

You fool, you think that freeing them of me will make them free?

ERIC:

Yes! Yes, of course it will!

LEADER:

I call you fool again. How do you think I became the head of the State? Through my great wisdom? I'm really not so wise. Through my great courage? No man has courage of that sort to stand up single-handed against the bullets and the bayonets of the entrenched powers. Then how, how did I do it?

ERIC:

(PASSIONATE) With lies and ruthlessness and cruelty! I know!

LEADER:

You don't know a thing. You saw the end result surrounded by pomp and circumstance and you couldn't see the means. All right, I know I'm going to die. When a man has expected to die as long as I have, the actuality isn't quite as frightening as you might think. Since I am going to die, I'll have the one small satisfaction of showing you that you are an empty-headed fool.

ERIC:

(STUNG) Stop saying that!

LEADER:

Ah, you, too, have an ego. Apparently it's lived for weeks on how you'd make me plead and beg and squirm down on my knees. I had a few moments of hysteria, didn't I? You liked that. But you don't like this--my sitting in the dark so calmly telling you that you're a fool.

ERIC:

(DEFENSIVE) I haven't failed! You're here!

LEADER:

You failed because, if you're killing me and yourself to give them back their freedom--whatever that word means--you're dying quite in vain.

ERIC:

You're saying that because you think that--

LEADER:

(INTERRUPTS, CALM) No, don't talk. Listen to me. I'll tell you where you failed. I came into power, not alone through my own strength, but because the conditions of our country were such that other men, sitting on their wealth, came to the decision that I alone could keep them there.

ERIC:

But it was you--

LEADER:

(INTERRUPTS) I tell you, listen. When an ancient rule of privilege is threatened, it seeks to live no matter what the cost. The cost to them was me. And they found me worth it, for I threw to the mass none of the wealth they'd worked to build, but only fighting phrases of prejudice and hate that cost the men who made me nothing but the rent of the halls for the simple to hear my opiates. And so I call you fool -- fool to die and fool to kill me -- for the conditions that made me will still exist when I'm dead. You free them of me. But what of hunger? What of ruthless exploitation? These will still be free up there to put hate and desperation into men. And so the ones who gave me power will find a new leader to stop the rumblings of rebellion with all the tricks that I taught them. A new Leader -- you hear me, fool? -- a new Leader.

ERIC:

(DENIES THE OBVIOUS) No! It isn't true! It can't be true! (WHIMPERS)

LEADER:

So dark--if I could see your face--to see the fool discovering he's a fool.

ERIC:

They will be free! They will! They will!

LEADER:

What magic do you think will come into the air when I am dead? Will men forget their greed and say, "Oh, we've quite enough. There's enough for everyone--let each share according to his needs ..."? No, fool. With me or without me, the game will be played just as it always has been played. And so you're a fool and die like one.

ERIC:

I - I - What could I have done? I had to do something!

LEADER:

I'll tell you what you could have done. You could have done the one thing that would have, in time, helped destroy not only me but those who made me. You could have gone to the people.

ERIC:

What?

LEADER:

Yes, walked among them, worked among them. And at every chance whispered to them the things I kept from them. The noose would have been around your neck every time you opened up your mouth, and yet, in that talking of liberty and freedom and common decency and all the rest of that sort of thing, would have been far more meaning than this futile murdering of me. I've had them hunted down and shot each of those who dared to whisper among the people. But, as they died, I didn't call them fools -- because I knew that they were wise. That only through the will to live and do of the great bludgeoning mass of their people was there hope of making that new world they wanted. (SIGHS DEEPLY, WEARILY) Ah, why've I bothered talking? The air's thick, I'm -- tired. (SUDDENLY) Hand me something heavy, fool!

ERIC:

Why?

LEADER:

(INCREASINGLY SAVAGE) Why? Why? More explanations? All right, the last one. You think I'm going to sit here and wait and count my every breath until the dark's crawling with horrors and I'm crawl-- No. I'll end it now quickly. Yes, faster than a bullet shot! Give me something heavy, I tell you! I'll smash the glass--the water--tons of it--smashing in! I'll be dead, dead, dead, faster than the thought and that'll end it! Give me something to smash the glass or I'll ...

VOICE:

(FILTER) All well down there, sir? (PAUSE) All well down there, sir?

LEADER:

(AFTER A LONG PAUSE, IN DISBELIEF) Voice ... ? Telephone ...?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

(FLATLY) All well. (WEAKLY) Take us up.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

(AMAZED) We're moving. Yes, water on the glass. We're moving. Doctor, the cable?

ERIC:

I lied.

LEADER:

But all this time. Why--?

ERIC:

My orders to the crew were to leave us alone on the bottom as soon as the slackening of the wire showed them we'd hit the bottom.

LEADER:

Telephone?

ERIC:

I reconnected it - while you talked.

LEADER:

Then--then you didn't really mean to kill me?

ERIC:

(DEFEATED) Kill you? Yes, I meant to kill you. Had it all planned out. Tell you what I told you, and then you'd go quite crazy with fear. And, after that, I'd kill you.

VOICE:

(FILTER) Twenty-nine hundred feet. All well down there, sir?

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

ERIC:

All well.

SOUND:

(CLICK OF SWITCH)

LEADER:

And yet you didn't.

ERIC:

(AS IF TO HIMSELF) The lights of the creatures out there. Blinking of stars on a cold night.

LEADER:

Why didn't you kill me? I want to know.

ERIC:

What would have been the good of it? A fool and a figurehead die together. No good of it.

LEADER:

(MILDLY SURPRISED) So you believed me.

ERIC:

Even a fool can understand futility.

LEADER:

Water's getting lighter. Soon we'll be back - up there. It'll be very strange at first.

ERIC:

I don't much care now--yet I'll ask: What happens to me?

LEADER:

You? I told you many things down there, didn't I? Yes, too many things. A man - in doubt, as I was, talks too much. And since you, of necessity, heard what I said--when we get up there I will probably have you shot. The victim sentences his murderer. It will be most amusing.

(MUSIC ... TO A FINISH)