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SIR JOSEPH PORTER

SIR JOSEPH. You've a remarkably fine crew, Captain Corcoran.  
CAPT. It is a fine crew, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH (*examining a very small midshipman*). A British sailor is a splendid fellow, Captain Corcoran.  
CAPT. A splendid fellow indeed, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. I hope you treat your crew kindly, Captain Corcoran.  
CAPT. Indeed I hope so, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. Never forget that they are the bulwarks of England's greatness, Captain Corcoran.  
CAPT. So I have always considered them, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. No bullying, I trust – no strong language of any kind, eh?  
CAPT. Oh, never, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. What, *never*?  
CAPT. Well, hardly ever, Sir Joseph. They are an excellent crew, and do their work thoroughly without it.  
SIR JOSEPH. Don't patronize them, sir – pray, don't patronize them.  
CAPT. Certainly not, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. That you are their captain is an accident of birth. I cannot permit these noble fellows to be patronized because an accident of birth has placed you above them and them below you.  
CAPT. I am the last person to insult a British sailor, Sir Joseph.  
SIR JOSEPH. You are the last person who did, Captain Corcoran.

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SIR JOSEPH. Captain Corcoran, I am much disappointed with your daughter. In fact, I don't think she will do.  
CAPT. She won't do, Sir Joseph!  
SIR JOSEPH. I'm afraid not. The fact is, that although I have urged my suit with as much eloquence as is consistent with an official utterance, I have done so hitherto without success. How do you account for this?  
CAPT. Really, Sir Joseph, I hardly know. Josephine is of course sensible of your condescension.  
SIR JOSEPH. She naturally would be.  
CAPT. But perhaps your exalted rank dazzles her.  
SIR JOSEPH. You think it does?  
CAPT. I can hardly say; but she is a modest girl, and her social position is far below your own. It may be that she feels she is not worthy of you.  
SIR JOSEPH. That is really a very sensible suggestion, and displays more knowledge of human nature than I had given you credit for.  
CAPT. See, she comes. If your lordship would kindly reason with her and assure her officially that it is a standing rule at the Admiralty that love levels all ranks, her respect for an official utterance might induce her to look upon your offer in its proper light.  
SIR JOSEPH. It is not unlikely. I will adopt your suggestion. But soft, she is here. Let us withdraw, and watch our opportunity.

CAPTAIN CORCORAN

CAPT. My child, I grieve to see that you are a prey to melancholy. You should look your best today, for Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., will be here this afternoon to claim your promised hand.

JOS. Ah, father, your words cut me to the quick. I can esteem – reverence – venerate Sir Joseph, for he is a great and good man; but oh, I cannot love him! My heart is already given.

CAPT. (*aside*). It is then as I feared. (*Aloud.*) Given? And to whom? Not to some gilded lordling?

JOS. No, father – the object of my love is no lordling. Oh, pity me, for he is but a humble sailor on board your own ship!

CAPT. Impossible!

JOS. Yes, it is true – too true.

CAPT. A common sailor? Oh fie!

JOS. I blush for the weakness that allows me to cherish such a passion. I hate myself when I think of the depth to which I have stooped in permitting myself to think tenderly of one so ignobly born, but I love him! I love him! I love him! (*Weeps.*)

CAPT. Come, my child, let us talk this over. In a matter of the heart I would not coerce my daughter – I attach but little value to rank or wealth, but the line must be drawn somewhere. A man in that station may be brave and worthy, but at every step he would commit solecisms that society would never pardon.

JOS. Oh, I have thought of this night and day. But fear not, father, I have a heart, and therefore I love; but I am your daughter, and therefore I am proud. Though I carry my love with me to the tomb, he shall never, never know it.

CAPT. You *are* my daughter after all. But see, Sir Joseph's barge approaches, manned by twelve trusty oarsmen and accompanied by the admiring crowd of sisters, cousins, and aunts that attend him wherever he goes. Retire, my daughter, to your cabin – take this, his photograph, with you – it may help to bring you to a more reasonable frame of mind.

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BUT. How sweetly he carols forth his melody to the unconscious moon! Of whom is he thinking? Of some high-born beauty? It may be! Who is poor Little Buttercup that she should expect his glance to fall on one so lowly! And yet if he knew – if he only knew!

CAPT. (*coming down*). Ah! Little Buttercup, still on board? That is not quite right, little one. It would have been more respectable to have gone on shore at dusk.

BUT. True, dear Captain – but the recollection of your sad pale face seemed to chain me to the ship. I would fain see you smile before I go.

CAPT. Ah! Little Buttercup, I fear it will be long before I recover my accustomed cheerfulness, for misfortunes crowd upon me, and all my old friends seem to have turned against me!

BUT. Oh no – do not say “all”, dear Captain. That were unjust to one, at least.

CAPT. True, for you are staunch to me. (*Aside.*) If ever I gave my heart again, methinks it would be to such a one as this! (*Aloud.*) I am touched to the heart by your innocent regard for me, and were we differently situated, I think I could have returned it.

But as it is, I fear I can never be more to you than a friend.

BUT. I understand! You hold aloof from me because you are rich and lofty – and I poor and lowly. But take care! The poor bumboat woman has gipsy blood in her veins, and she can read destinies.

CAPT. Destinies?

BUT. There is a change in store for you!

CAPT. A change?

BUT. Aye – be prepared!

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JOSEPHINE - RALPH

JOS. It is useless – Sir Joseph’s attentions nauseate me. I know that he is a truly great and good man, for he told me so himself, but to me he seems tedious, fretful, and dictatorial. Yet his must be a mind of no common order, or he would not dare to teach my dear father to dance a hornpipe on the cabin table. (*Sees RALPH.*) Ralph Rackstraw!  
(*Overcome by emotion.*)

RALPH. Aye, lady – no other than poor Ralph Rackstraw!

JOS. (*aside*). How my heart beats! (*Aloud.*) And why poor, Ralph?

RALPH. I am poor in the essence of happiness, lady – rich only in never-ending unrest. In me there meet a combination of antithetical elements which are at eternal war with one another. Driven hither by objective influences – thither by subjective emotions – wafted one moment into blazing day, by mocking hope – plunged the next into the Cimmerian darkness of tangible despair, I am but a living ganglion of irreconcilable antagonisms. I hope I make myself clear, lady?

JOS. Perfectly. (*Aside.*) His simple eloquence goes to my heart. Oh, if I dared – but no, the thought is madness! (*Aloud.*) Dismiss these foolish fancies, they torture you but needlessly. Come, make one effort.

RALPH (*aside*). I will – one. (*Aloud.*) Josephine!

JOS. (*indignantly*). Sir!

RALPH. Aye, even though Jove’s armoury were launched at the head of the audacious mortal whose lips, unhallowed by relationship, dared to breathe that precious word, yet would I breathe it once, and then perchance be silent evermore. Josephine, in one brief breath I will concentrate the hopes, the doubts, the anxious fears of six weary months. Josephine, I am a British sailor, and I love you!

JOS. Sir, this audacity! (*Aside.*) Oh, my heart, my beating heart! (*Aloud.*) This unwarrantable presumption on the part of a common sailor! (*Aside.*) Common! oh, the irony of the word! (*Crossing, aloud.*) Oh, sir, you forget the disparity in our ranks.

RALPH. I forget nothing, haughty lady. I love you desperately, my life is in your hand – I lay it at your feet! Give me hope, and what I lack in education and polite accomplishments, that I will endeavour to acquire. Drive me to despair, and in death alone I shall look for consolation. I am proud and cannot stoop to implore. I have spoken and I wait your word.

JOS. You shall not wait long. Your proffered love I haughtily reject. Go, sir, and learn to cast your eyes on some village maiden in your own poor rank – they should be lowered before your captain’s daughter!

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DICK DEADEYE

DICK. *I have thought it often. (All recoil from him.)*  
BUT. Yes, you look like it! What's the matter with the man? Isn't he well?  
BOAT. Don't take no heed of *him*; that's only poor Dick Deadeye.  
DICK. I say – it's a beast of a name, ain't it – Dick Deadeye?  
BUT. It's not a nice name.  
DICK. I'm ugly too, ain't I?  
BUT. You are certainly plain.  
DICK. And I'm three-cornered too, ain't I?  
BUT. You are rather triangular.  
DICK. Ha! ha! That's it. I'm ugly, and they hate me for it; for you all hate me, don't you?  
ALL. We do!  
DICK. There!  
BOAT. Well, Dick, we wouldn't go for to hurt any fellow-creature's feelings, but you can't expect a chap with such a name as Dick Deadeye to be a popular character – now can you?  
DICK. No.  
BOAT. It's asking too much, ain't it?  
DICK. It is. From such a face and form as mine the noblest sentiments sound like the black utterances of a depraved imagination. It is human nature – I am resigned.

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CAPT. Deadeye! You here? Don't! (*Recoiling from him.*)  
DICK. Ah, don't shrink from me, Captain. I'm unpleasant to look at, and my name's agin me, but I ain't as bad as I seem.  
CAPT. What would you with me?  
DICK (*mysteriously*). I'm come to give you warning.  
CAPT. Indeed! do you propose to leave the Navy then?  
DICK. No, no, you misunderstand me; listen!

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BILL BOBSTAY (*BOATSWAIN*)

BOAT. Ah, my poor lad, you've climbed too high: our worthy captain's child won't have nothin' to say to a poor chap like you. Will she, lads?

ALL. No, no.

DICK. No, no, captains' daughters don't marry foremast hands.

ALL (*recoiling from him*). Shame! Shame!

BOAT. Dick Deadeye, them sentiments o' yourn are a disgrace to our common natur'.

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BOAT. My lads, our gallant captain has come on deck; let us greet him as so brave an officer and so gallant a seaman deserves.

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BOAT. Ah! Sir Joseph's a true gentleman; courteous and considerate to the very humblest.

DICK. You're on a wrong tack, and so is he. He means well, but he don't know. When people have to obey other people's orders, equality's out of the question.

ALL (*recoiling*). Horrible! horrible!

BOAT. Dick Deadeye, if you go for to infuriate this here ship's company too far, I won't answer for being able to hold 'em in. I'm shocked! that's what I am – shocked!

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BOAT. What is to be done with this here hopeless chap? Let us sing him the song that Sir Joseph has kindly composed for us. Perhaps it will bring this here miserable creetur to a proper state of mind.

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COUSIN HEBE

SIR JOSEPH. Sad my lot and sorry,  
What shall I do? I cannot live alone!

HEBE. Fear nothing – while I live I'll not desert you.  
I'll soothe and comfort your declining days.

SIR JOSEPH. No, don't do that.

HEBE. Yes, but indeed I'd rather –

SIR JOSEPH (*resigned*). Oh, very well then.