

(All dance off except Ralph, who remains, leaning pensively against bulwark.)

(Enter Josephine from cabin.)

JOSEPHINE: 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 Rackstraw!

JOSEPHINE. (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?

JOSEPHINE: 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!

JOSEPHINE. (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!

JOSEPHINE: 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.

JOSEPHINE: 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.