

SAMUEL – Scene 1

FREDERIC Yes, I have done my best for you. And why? It was my duty under my indentures, and I am the slave of duty. As a child I was regularly apprenticed to your band. It was through an error -- no matter, the mistake was ours, not yours, and I was in honour bound by it.

SAMUEL An error? What error?

FREDERIC I may not tell you; it would reflect upon my well-loved Ruth.

(RUTH rises and comes forward)

RUTH Nay, dear master, my mind has long been gnawed by the cankering tooth of mystery. Better have it out at once.

~~Music No. 2. _____ SONG (Ruth)
"When Frederic was a little lad"~~

RUTH Oh, pardon! Frederic, pardon! *(kneels)*

FREDERIC Rise, sweet one, I have long pardoned you.

RUTH *(rises)* The two words were so much alike!

FREDERIC They were. They still are, though years have rolled over their heads. But this afternoon my obligation ceases. Individually, I love you all with affection unspeakable; but, collectively, I look upon you with a disgust that amounts to absolute detestation. Oh! pity me, my beloved friends, for such is my sense of duty that, once out of my indentures, I shall feel myself bound to devote myself heart and soul to your extermination!

ALL Poor lad – poor lad! *(All weep)*

KING Well, Frederic, if you conscientiously feel that it is your duty to destroy us, we cannot blame you for acting on that conviction. Always act in accordance with the dictates of your conscience, my boy, and chance the consequences.

SAMUEL Besides, we can offer you but little temptation to remain with us. We don't seem to make piracy pay. I'm sure I don't know why, but we don't.

FREDERIC I know why, but, alas! I mustn't tell you; it wouldn't be right.

KING Why not, my boy? It's only half-past eleven, and you are one of us until the clock strikes twelve.

SAMUEL True, and until then you are bound to protect our interests.

ALL Hear, hear!

FREDERIC Well, then, it is my duty, as a pirate, to tell you that you are too tender-hearted. For instance, you make a point of never attacking a weaker party than yourselves, and when you attack a stronger party you invariably get thrashed.

KING There is some truth in that.

FREDERIC Then, again, you make a point of never molesting an orphan!

SAMUEL Of course: we are orphans ourselves, and know what it is.

FREDERIC Yes, but it has got about, and what is the consequence? Every one we capture says he's an orphan. The last three ships we took proved to be manned entirely by orphans, and so we had to let them go. One would think that Great Britain's mercantile navy was recruited solely from her orphan asylums – which we know is not the case.

SAMUEL But, hang it all! you wouldn't have us absolutely merciless?

FREDERIC There's my difficulty; until twelve o'clock I would, after twelve I wouldn't. Was ever a man placed in so delicate a situation?

RUTH And Ruth, your own Ruth, whom you love so well, and who has won her middle-aged way into your boyish heart, what is to become of her?

KING Oh, he will take you with him. (*Hands RUTH to FREDERIC.*)

FREDERIC Well, Ruth, I feel some difficulty about you. It is true that I admire you very much, but I have been constantly at sea since I was eight years old, and yours is the only woman's face I have seen during that time. I think it is a sweet face.

RUTH It is – oh, it is!

FREDERIC I say I think it is; that is my impression. But as I have never had an opportunity of comparing you with other women, it is just possible I may be mistaken.

KING True.

FREDERIC What a terrible thing it would be if I were to marry this innocent person, and then find out that she is, on the whole, plain!

KING Oh, Ruth is very well, very well indeed.

SAMUEL Yes, there are the remains of a fine woman about Ruth.

FREDERIC Do you really think so?

SAMUEL I do.

FREDERIC Then I will not be so selfish as to take her from you. In justice to her, and in consideration for you, I will leave her behind. (*Hands RUTH to KING.*)

KING No, Frederic, this must not be. We are rough men, who lead a rough life, but we are not so utterly heartless as to deprive thee of thy love. I think I am right in saying that there is not one here who would rob thee of this inestimable treasure for all the world holds dear.

ALL (*loudly*) Not one!

KING No, I thought there wasn't. Keep thy love, Frederic, keep thy love. (*Hands her back to FREDERIC.*)

FREDERIC You're very good, I'm sure. (*Exit RUTH.*)

KING Well, it's the top of the tide, and we must be off. Farewell, Frederic. When your process of extermination begins, let our deaths be as swift and painless as you can conveniently make them.

FREDERIC I will! By the love I have for you, I swear it! Would that you could render this extermination unnecessary by accompanying me back to civilization!

KING No, Frederic, it cannot be. I don't think much of our profession, but, contrasted with respectability, it is comparatively honest. No, Frederic, I shall live and die a Pirate King.

~~Music No. 3. _____ SONG (Pirate King & Chorus)
"Oh, better far to live and die"~~

Exeunt all except FREDERIC