

H.M.S. Pinafore  
or, The Lass That Loved a Sailor  
An Entirely Original Nautical Comic Opera, in Two Acts

Synopsis by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson

First produced at the Opera Comique Theatre, under the management of the Comedy-Opera Company (of which Richard D'Oyly Carte was a director), on Saturday, May 25, 1878, for 571 performances through February 20, 1880. Sullivan conducted the first performance.

SIR JOSEPH PORTER, K.C.B., First Lord of the Admiralty	<i>Light Baritone</i>	George Grossmith
CAPTAIN CORCORAN, Commanding the "Pinafore"	<i>Baritone</i>	Rutland Barrington
RALPH RACKSTRAW, Able Seaman	<i>Tenor</i>	George Power
DICK DEADEYE, Able Seaman	<i>Bass-Baritone</i>	Richard Temple
BILL BOBSTAY, the Boatswain's Mate	<i>Bass-Baritone</i>	Fred Clifton
BOB BECKETT, the Carpenter's Mate	<i>Bass</i>	Mr. Dymott
TOM TUCKER, a Midshipmite	<i>Non-singing (Juvenile)</i>	Mr. Fitzaltamont
THE SERGEANT OF MARINES	<i>Non-singing</i>	Frank Talbot
JOSEPHINE, Captain Corcoran's Daughter	<i>Soprano</i>	Emma Howson
HEBE, Sir Joseph's First Cousin	<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Jessie Bond
MRS. CRIPPS, a Portsmouth Bumboat Woman, called "Little Buttercup"	<i>Contralto</i>	Harriet Everard

SAILORS, MARINES, and SIR JOSEPH'S FEMALE RELATIVES

First American performance at the Boston Museum, under the management of R. M. Field, on November 25, 1878. First authorized American performance by D'Oyly Carte's Opera Company at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York, under the management of John Stetson, on December 1, 1879. Sullivan conducted the first performance. Produced with a juvenile company at the Opera Comique Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on December 16, 1879, for 78 performances through March 20, 1880. First revived at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on November 12, 1887, for 120 performances through March 10, 1888. Revived (with *Trial by Jury*) at the Savoy Theatre on June 6, 1899, for 174 performances through November 25, 1899.

ACT I — THE QUARTER-DECK OF H.M.S. PINAFORE, OFF PORTSMOUTH, AT NOON

The curtain opens on the deck of the “Pinafore” as the Sailors conscientiously and contentedly tend to their duties (Chorus, *We sail the ocean blue*). Mrs. Cripps, a “Bumboat woman” known as Little Buttercup, comes aboard (Recitative, *Hail, men-o’war’s men*). She is greeted heartily by the Crew as she displays the interesting articles she has for sale (Aria, *I’m called Little Buttercup*).

Buttercup spies a handsome sailor (Recitative, *But tell me, who’s the youth*), and on learning his name she grows uneasy: “Ralph! That name! Remorse!” Dick Deadeye is revealed as a misanthropic malcontent, disliked by the Crew; but he shows a philosophic turn: “From such a face and form as mine, the noblest sentiments sound like the black utterances of a depraved imagination.”

Ralph (pronounced *rafe*) enters, singing a forlorn song (Madrigal, *The nightingale Loved the pale moon’s bright ray*) and reveals the source of his depression (Ballad, *A maiden fair to see*) to be his hopeless love: “Our Captain’s daughter she, and I that lowly suitor!” The Sailors sympathize and encourage him to follow his heart and profess his love to Josephine — all, that is, but Deadeye, who chides, to the general disgust of the Crew, that “Captains’ daughters don’t marry foremast hands.”

Captain Corcoran approaches the deck and greets the Crew (Recitative, *My gallant crew, good morning!*), who happily “return the compliment” to the popular officer. The Captain recites to his Crew (Song, *I am the Captain of the Pinafore*) both his family connections and his extensive qualifications (“Though related to a peer, I can hand reef and steer, Or ship a selvagee”) — though the Crew politely doubt (“What, never?”) his claims that “I’m never, never sick at sea” and “I never use a big, big D—.”

Captain Corcoran is left alone with Buttercup, who notices an underlying sadness in his manner (Recitative, *Sir, you are sad!*), which, he confesses, is brought about by the reluctance on the part of his daughter Josephine to receive the attentions of the elderly Sir Joseph Porter, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Josephine appears as the Captain and Buttercup leave the stage, and she sings of an unknown sadness (Ballad, *Sorry her lot who loves too well*). Her father enters, and perceiving her melancholy, tries to cheer her up for Sir Joseph’s arrival that same afternoon. Josephine confesses that she cannot love Sir Joseph because she loves a sailor on board the ship. Captain Corcoran tries gently to sway her: “I would not coerce my daughter — I attach but little value to rank or wealth, but the line must be drawn somewhere.” Josephine is ashamed, and promises that though she cannot deny her love, she will never act on it.

A barge approaches, from which can be heard the sound of women’s voices (Barcarolle, *Over the bright blue sea*). It bears Sir Joseph and “the admiring crowd of sisters, cousins, and aunts that attend him wherever he goes.” The Sailors prepare for their arrival (Chorus, *Sir Joseph’s barge is seen*), and they greet the appreciative female relatives (“Sailors always

welcome ladies most politely”). Captain Corcoran welcomes the First Lord (Recitative, *Now give three cheers, I’ll lead the way*), and Sir Joseph Porter enters, obliging the company by introducing himself (Song, *I am the monarch of the sea*), as his haughty first cousin Hebe echoes, “And we are his sisters and his cousins and his aunts!” Sir Joseph relates the circumstances of his career and his rise from humble beginnings to prominence (Patter-Song, *When I was a lad I served a term*). He admits that he owes his advancement to lackeyism and stick-to-it-iveness, and he acknowledges that he has no experience at sea and no qualifications whatever for his exalted post.

Sir Joseph deprecates Captain Corcoran and humiliates him before his Crew, while he extols the virtues of those of rank so far below him as to pose no challenge to his authority. He notices Ralph, “a remarkably fine fellow,” and presents him with the manuscript of a song he himself has composed in order to “encourage independence of thought and action in the lower branches of the service.”

He and the Captain leave to discuss “a tender and sentimental subject,” and the Crew are left alone to consider Sir Joseph’s precept that “a British seaman is any man’s equal, excepting mine.” Encouraged by his companions — except for Deadeye, who grumbles “When people have to obey other people’s orders, equality’s out of the question” — Ralph determines to tell Josephine of “the honest love I have for her.” Ralph, the Boatswain’s Mate, and the Carpenter’s Mate attempt to teach Deadeye a lesson by singing to him Sir Joseph’s song (Glee, *A British tar is a soaring soul*), which the entire Crew pick up from them. They all dance offstage, leaving Ralph leaning pensively against the bulwark.

Josephine enters, and, noticing Ralph, in an aside reveals that it is he whom she has loved. He is resolved to act, and expresses himself in language remarkable for a “simple sailor, lowly born”: “I am poor in the essence of happiness lady ... wafted one moment into blazing day, by mocking hope — plunged the next into the Cimmerian darkness of tangible despair.” Josephine is touched: “His simple eloquence goes to my heart”; but when Ralph declares himself she remembers her promise. Although, in asides, she is deeply moved, she dismisses his professions of love: “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.” In a dramatic duet (*Refrain, audacious tar*) each shows an outward pride and inward anguish.

Josephine leaves the deck, and Ralph determines to end his life (Recitative, *Can I survive this overbearing?*), calling his messmates to relate Josephine’s treatment of him. With one dissenting voice — that of Deadeye, providing an elaborate counterpoint — the Crew and Sir Joseph’s relatives extend their sympathy. As Ralph puts the pistol to his head (*My friends, my leave of life I’m taking*), Josephine returns and stops him (“Ah, stay your hand! I love you!”). Josephine, Ralph, and (unaccountably) Hebe join in an ecstatic trio (Ensemble, *Oh joy, oh rapture unforeseen*) — again to be countered by Deadeye (“He thinks he’s won his Josephine”). The Boatswain’s Mate joins the three as they plot an elopement (*This very*

*night, With bated breath*). Deadeye appears at the hatchway with a warning (“Forbear, nor carry out the scheme you’ve planned”), but the company revile him (“Back, vermin, back!”) and the act ends with a joyful chorus (*Let’s give three cheers for the sailor’s bride*) and a reprise of Sir Joseph’s glee, first sung by the women (who must have rehearsed it beforehand) and culminating in a grand ensemble.

## ACT II — THE SAME NIGHT

Captain Corcoran is discovered on the deck of the “Pinafore,” singing while accompanying himself on a guitar (Song, *Fair moon, to thee I sing*), as Buttercup watches sentimentally. In this melancholy song (“why is everything either at sixes or at sevens”) the Captain laments that his “kindly crew rebel” and his “daughter to a tar is partial.” Buttercup assures him that she, at least, is staunch to him, and in an aside he shows that he too has an affectionate regard for her. She knows that it is their difference in rank that prevents his expressing his affection. She hints darkly that there is a change destined for him (Duet, *Things are seldom what they seem*), and leaves the Captain alone, puzzled.

Sir Joseph enters, and informs the Captain of his disappointment that Josephine does not return his affection. The Captain suggests that “It may be that she feels she is not worthy of you.” Sir Joseph accepts this as a plausible suggestion, and resolves to assure her, in an “official utterance,” that “love levels all ranks.” They withdraw as Josephine enters. She sings (Scena, *The hours creep on apace*) of her second thoughts of leaving a life of comfort and privilege for one of squalid poverty, and the conflict of love and duty: “God of love, god of reason, say, Which shall my poor heart obey?” Sir Joseph and her father approach her and assure her that “married happiness is *not* inconsistent with discrepancy in rank.” She receives this information with apparent relief, but in an aside she confides, “He little thinks how eloquently he has pleaded his rival’s cause!” They sing an animated trio (*Never mind the why and wherefore*) in which the Captain and Sir Joseph mistakenly assume the best.

Left alone, Captain Corcoran is informed by Dick Deadeye of the impending elopement (Duet, *Kind Captain, I’ve important information*). The Captain, armed with a cat-o’-nine-tails, hides in the darkness shrouded in a boat cloak, as Deadeye gleefully awaits the downfall of his tormentors (“Ha, ha! They are foiled — foiled — foiled!”).

The Sailors creep onto the deck (Ensemble, *Carefully on tiptoe stealing*), shortly to be joined by Josephine and Ralph. At a dramatic point the Captain interrupts (“Hold!”) and insists on an explanation. The Crew are defiant, and Ralph (“Proud officer, that haughty lip uncurl”) declares his intentions. The Boatswain’s Mate sings an anthem (*He is an Englishman!*) that is echoed by the entire Crew. The Captain is outraged: “But to seek your Captain’s child in marriage — Why, damme, it’s too bad!” By this time the disturbance has brought Sir Joseph’s female relatives within earshot, and they overhear the Captain’s intemperate outburst (“Did you hear him?”), as does Sir Joseph himself (“My pain and my

distress, I find it is not easy to express”). He will hear no defense, and orders Captain Corcoran confined to his cabin, adding: “This is the consequence of ill-advised asperity!” The assembled company endorse the sentence with a reprise of “For he is an Englishman.”

Sir Joseph asks Ralph for a reason for the Captain’s behavior, and Ralph’s explanation that “Josephine is the fairest bud that ever blossomed on the tree of a poor fellow’s wildest hopes” makes Sir Joseph apoplectic. Despite Josephine’s pleas for mercy, Sir Joseph sends him in chains to a dungeon. A poignant ensemble (Octet, *Farewell, my own*) accompanies his departure. As Sir Joseph is about to describe to the assembly his outrage, Buttercup interrupts (“Hold! Ere upon your loss you lay much stress”) with the revelation she had hinted at earlier: “A long concealed crime I would confess.”

Buttercup tells the attentive company that when she was younger she had “practiced baby-farming” (Legend, *A many years ago*). Entrusted with the care of two babes, one lowly born and the other a “regular patrician,” she mixed them up: “The well-born babe was Ralph — Your captain was the other!” Sir Joseph calls for Ralph and the Captain to be brought before him — and they appear in clothes that bespeak their changed conditions. Sir Joseph explains that, under the circumstances, a marriage with Josephine would be out of the question, and hands her to Ralph: “Here — take her, sir, and mind you treat her kindly.” Ex-Captain Corcoran takes Buttercup contentedly.

Sir Joseph bemoans his desolate situation, but Hebe steps in: “I’ll soothe and comfort your declining days.” Sir Joseph protests mildly, but Hebe is determined, and the plot is resolved with the prospect of “Three loving pairs on the same day united!” The opera concludes with a succession of songs heard earlier (*Oh joy, oh rapture unforeseen!*; *For he is the Captain of the “Pinafore”*; *For he loves little Buttercup*; *I’m the monarch of the sea*; and *For he is an Englishman*).

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