

Captain Jemima Spinnaker (Marie)
Gertie the Good Flamingo (?)
Bertie the Bad Flamingo (?)
Battling Bill Bowline, first mate (Lene)
Princess Meera (Pratyusha)
Samson Fortinbras, pirate (Alexander)
Hercules Fortinbras, pirate, Samson's twin brother (Dani)
Joe Higgs, bosun (Natalie)
Tom "Crazy" Razey, cook (Neha)
Lyudmila Flipitova, midshipwoman (Neena)¹
Dai Deadeye, pirate (?)
Captain Sid Swashbuckle, Vlad the Butcher, and the crew of the *Improbable* (the children)
A random Minion (one of the children)

Scene 1. Captain Spinnaker (JS), Battling Bill Bowline (BB), Samson and Hercules Fortinbras (SF and HF), Joe Higgs (JH), Lyudmila Flipitova (LF), and Dai Deadeye (DD) are sitting round a table. The captain has Gertie and Bertie sitting on her shoulders as usual. The crew are all helping themselves to some kind of stew from a large pot in the middle of the table.

Song: the crew. Tune: Wellerman.

Oh, we are pirates brave and bold,
We sail the seas in search of gold,
With a cask or three of rum in the hold
Of the good ship *Adeline*.

(Chorus) We brave the cruel sea;
There are no rules for such as we.
Our flag is flying free
On the good ship *Adeline*.

With cutlass, dagger, axe, and sword,
Before you know it we're on board
To add your treasure to our hoard
On the good ship *Adeline*.

(Chorus)

The skull and bones we proudly fly;
Don't mess with us or question why,
For if you do, you'll likely die
On the good ship *Adeline*.

¹ Neena wanted a part like the Caterpillar, so she gets a fairly major role in the first two scenes and then disappears.

(Chorus)

BB Shiver me timbers, Jemima, this don't smell right!

JS You call me "Captain" in front o' the crew, Bill Bowline.

BB Sorry, Cap'n. It still don't smell right, though.

SF Does smell a bit odd, but I could eat a horse.

HF Perhaps it *is* a horse?

DD Where would we get a horse at sea?

HF A sea horse?

LF Is better than in Siberia.

BB Aye, what *did* you eat in Siberia, Lyudmila? You got me all curious now.

LF Every winter, was just the same. When snow started, my father went out and shot a bear. He put bear in shed, bear froze, when mamma² said "we need meat", he went to shed and hacked off some with an axe. Was boring.³

DD This does taste... strange...

LF Is better than bear.

JS Ugh! What's he put in this stuff – barnacles? (*Shouts*) Razey!

Enter Tom Razey (TR). He is the cook, so he is dressed accordingly and holding a ladle.

TR Aye, Cap'n?

JS What the dumboozle⁴ is in this stew, Razey?

TR Seagulls, Cap'n.

JS *Seagulls?! Where'd ye get 'em, anyway? Ain't seen you out shooting 'em down!*

TR Lyudmila shoots 'em, Cap'n. I figured how we might as well eat 'em, being as we're kind of low on provender right now.

² The Russian pronunciation of "mamma" has the stress on the first syllable, not the second.

³ Truth really is stranger than fiction. This story was told by someone I know who grew up in Siberia.

⁴ Not my own. Hat tip here to the Jaegers in *Girl Genius*.

Everyone stares at Lyudmila.

BB Lyudmila. Why do you shoot seagulls?

LF Is just a habit of mine, *chacun à son goût*.⁵

DD What sort of pirates are we if we're reduced to eating seagulls, look you?

JS Ah. Well... problem is... we have a bit of competition just at the moment.

BB We have the finest ship on the high seas! We should be a match for any competition.

JS Aye, well, there's the rub, see. *Should* be. No denying the *Adeline* is a far and away better vessel than that there *Improbable*, but... well, ye know how it is...

SF It's true. They say Captain Sid Swashbuckle⁶ and his crew are the most vicious pirates afloat. Not even Hercules and I would want to tangle with them.

HF (*nodding vigorously*) You're right, Samson! They're all crazy!

JH So why don't we just sail elsewhere?

BB Shame on ye, Bosun Higgs!⁷ We never run away from anyone!

JS I... wouldn't call it runnin' away, exactly. More like... strategic withdrawal.

JH Exactly, Cap'n! There's plenty of sea to go round, after all. They can have this bit, and we'll just... have another bit.

LF (*helping herself to more stew*) Is good. Tomorrow, I shoot more seagulls.

DD I really hate to think what bear tastes like.

BB Dumboozled if I'm eatin' one more seagull. We need some quick loot!

JS Then we'll have to risk landin' near Stoneport and seein' what we can get there, on account o' there's no ships about 'cos they're all avoidin' the *Improbable*.

TR You bain't eatin' your stew, Cap'n.

JS Razey... right now I'm just in the mood for a bowl o' yer famous split pea soup.

⁵ A direct quote from Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus*. Lyudmila channels this character quite a lot!

⁶ "Swashbuckle" is (or was) the name of a pirate-themed children's programme on CBeebies.

⁷ The physicists in the audience are going to laugh. "Higgs boson", obviously!

TR We'm all out o' split peas, Cap'n.

JS Dumboozle!

Scene 2. A little later. Most of the crew, other than TR, are milling around the deck doing nautical things; LF is up in the rigging.

LF Ship ahoy!

JS About time! What flag is she flyin'?

LF Is not clear yet.

JS Then tell me when it is. Which way is she headin'?

LF I think is *this* way.

JS Interestin'. Must be a stranger to these here waters. Well, mateys, let's get the welcomin' committee ready!

BB Aye, aye, Cap'n!

SF We will plunder their gold!

HF And their jewels!

DD And their split peas!

JH You know, I've been thinking... maybe we could *not* plunder them for once?

BB Not plunder 'em?! Have ye the brain worms?

JH No, no, Mr Bowline, sir, what I meant was... we could pretend to be customs officials or something, and take a tax? Then we wouldn't need to threaten them.

JS Where be the fun in that, Higgs?

JH Well... you know, Cap'n, we still get the loot, but then they don't send the navy out after us, and there's no unpleasantness, and... well...

JS You ain't no use as a pirate. Just as well you're a fine bosun.

BB Aye. You ain't got the attitude.

SF We have!

HF Right! Lots of attitude here.

JH (*quietly but doggedly*) ...and we can probably pick up more loot when they go back the other way.

LF Flag is visible now. Is black.

SF Oh...

HF Ah...

JH The *Improbable*! And she's coming right at us. Now what?

JS Belay that jelly-wobblin', ye lily-livered lubbers! We be pirates too, with hearts just as stout as theirs. If they think they'll take us on, we'll have a surprise or two for them. To your posts!

LF Now is a white flag too. Is gone up underneath black one.

JH Oh, they want to talk!

JS H'mm. Seems as how they do. What could they want with us, I wonder?

LF I expect we soon find out.

The other ship heaves into view. There are half a dozen pirates on deck, headed by Captain Sid Swashbuckle (SS) and first mate Vlad the Butcher (VB).⁸

SS Ahoy there, mateys!

JS Ahoy there! You be Cap'n Swashbuckle?

SS Aye, that I am. And you must be Cap'n Jemima Spinnaker, right?

JS Right. What can we do for ye?

SS We're comin' aboard first. Stand by!

BB Belay that! Pirate etiquette says you ask.

VB We're the *Improbable*. We don't do etiquette. We can't even spell it.

⁸ There is a historical character called Vlad the Impaler; the name's referencing that.

A gangplank is thrown across by the other ship. All the pirates charge across it and start running around the deck, investigating everything, and generally causing chaos.

JS Can ye not keep control o' yer crew, Cap'n Swashbuckle?

SS *(with an evil grin)* Can. Don't wanna.

BB What brings ye here?

VB I'm Vlad the Butcher, first mate. We're looking for my mother.

SS Aye. We know she's a pirate, so we're searching every other pirate ship we find.

VB She makes the best plov⁹ in all of Russia!

JH Wait... your mother is Russian? *(Shouts)* Lyudmila!

LF climbs down from the rigging.

BB Is this your mother?

VB Mamma!

LF Is my little Volodya!¹⁰ I thought you were gone for ever! How you have grown!

VB Less of the "little Volodya". I'm Vlad the Butcher now.

LF *(beaming)* You make your mamma proud.

SS Perfect! Come along with us, er... Mrs Butcher. We've got the violence and mayhem off pat, but we do need someone to help us with knots and stuff.

LF Flipitova.

SS Flip what over?

LF *Da nyet zhe!*¹¹ Flipitova. Lyudmila Flipitova. Is my name.

VB And some help with the cooking.

LF Is good. You like seagulls?

⁹ A kind of lamb stew.

¹⁰ His name is Vladimir. "Volodya" is the traditional Russian diminutive.

¹¹ "Absolutely not!" Pronounced with strong emphasis on the "nyet". She probably gets this all the time.

VB We got much better than seagulls.

LF Is *very* good. Of course I come.

SS Great! Our quest is over. All right, come on, you 'orrible lot, we got plundering and pillaging to do. And in return, Cap'n Spinnaker, we'll give you some news.

BB (*suspiciously*) That all?

SS Ah, but it's very good news, as long as you lot are pirates enough to make something of it. Us lot, we don't bother with stuff on land... but *you* might, when you hear this.

JS Go on. I'm listenin'.

SS The Princess Meera¹² is on a royal tour at the moment. And she'll be in Stoneport tomorrow.

BB We ain't interested in royalty. Half of us went to sea just to get away from havin' royalty. How's that good news?

JS No, no, Mr Bowline. Think a bit harder. A princess. Know what that means?

BB Well, far as I know, generally it means you got to have three brothers, and they all want to marry her, and the two older ones do somethin' stupid and get killed or turned into frogs or what-not, and the youngest one gets it right and marries her. But we only got two brothers here, this being Samson and Hercules, and there ain't like an Achilles or what have you to marry the princess.

HF Achilles?! What a silly name!

JS The point what I am tryin' to make here is if you got a princess, you can kidnap her an' hold her to ransom. Which is very easy loot.

BB Ohhhh!

JS And nobody's got to marry her. In fact it'd properly mess things up if anyone did. We just kidnap her, get her on board, and as long as there's a chance o' gettin' the ransom money, we treat her all right. But if there ain't, we make her walk the plank.

BB Oooh! We ain't done that for a bit now.

¹² We may as well make her Indian, right? "Meera" is a classless name, much as "Sarah" is in English.

JS And we ain't goin' to now, if it all goes to plan. So don't get excited, Bill Bowline.

BB Awww.

SS Your Mr Bowline's got potential, Cap'n. Why, I'd have him on my crew!

Bertie That's quite the compliment!

Gertie Is not so!

JS All right, all right, you two can argue later. For now... it's been a right pleasure to meet the famous Cap'n Swashbuckle, but we got stuff to do, so if you could just see yer way to marshalling yer crew back on board the *Improbable* that'd be peachy.

SS Oh, all right. *(Raises voice)* I said come on, you 'orrible lot!

With visible reluctance, the horrible lot cease causing chaos and alarm and shuffle back across the gangplank, followed by SS, VB, and LF.

LF Farewell. I will write long letters to you. Was good to be one of your crew.

BB Aye, we'll miss ye, Lyudmila.

DD But not the seagulls.

Scene 3. A quiet bay near Stoneport; the lights of the town are visible in the distance. The crew, with the exception of TR, are all on deck; JH is letting the anchor down.

BB I volunteer to do the kidnapping!

JS Not so fast, Bill Bowline. We don't even know where the Princess is yet.

BB But you said she was in Stoneport!

JS Aye, an' there's plenty of Stoneport. What we need is a plan.

DD Oh, you mean like a map, Cap'n?

JS Ain't denyin' one o' them'd be handy, but no, that ain't what I meant. We need to find out where she is before we can kidnap her, which means... we infiltrate.

BB You're the best pirate cap'n on the high seas. You know some great words!

SF Aye, you're right there, Mr Bowline, sir. *(Pause)* What's in-fil-trate?

JS Means you sneak in under cover.

BB That's my job, then!

JS No, it *ain't*, Bill. You're great at fightin' but you're dumbboozlin' terrible at infiltratin'. It's that swagger o' yours.

HF Mr Higgs doesn't swagger.

JS Noooo... but... you know what, Hercules? I think you an' yer brother ought to do it. On account o' there might be some breakin' in to do somewhere, an' you two are the strongest we've got.

SF Right! We're *super* strong!

HF We have muscles on our muscles!

JS So... you're gonna need a disguise so as not to be noticed. You can't go swannin' round Stoneport lookin' like a couple of pirates.

SF But we *are* a couple of pirates, Cap'n.

JS O' course ye're pirates, ye lubbers! But you can't *look* like pirates. I reckon... aye... I reckon we'll dress ye as maids.

HF Maids?!

JS Aye. Maids can go anywhere an' nobody even notices 'em. It'll be perfect. What's more, Lyudmila left a load o' clothes behind, so we can use those. An' I bet Crazy Razey's got a spare apron or two in the galley.

SF But... but... I got a beard, Cap'n!

JS That ain't a problem. Lyudmila wore a lot o' black. Ye can be in mournin'. Bet she's got a veil somewhere.¹³

BB You think of everything!

JS Someone on this dumbboozlin' ship needs to have a brain. Right, Bill Bowline. Take these two lads to Lyudmila's berth an' get 'em fitted up.

¹³ I shamelessly plagiarised my own idea from a piece of fanfic I wrote years ago:
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/3278375>

BB Aye, aye, Cap'n!

HF But...

SF But...

JS You two get to kidnap the Princess. You get all the glory. Now off ye go!

Exeunt BB, SF, and HF.

JS Dai Deadeye?

DD Cap'n?

JS Go an' help Mr Higgs get the ship's boat ready.

DD Aye, aye, Cap'n. *(He goes off to join JH at the other end of the stage, leaving JS standing alone with the flamingoes.)*

Gertie Jemima, this is a very bad idea.

Bertie What are you on about? Seems like a great plan to me!

Gertie What are you thinking, kidnapping an innocent young girl like that?

JS We ain't going to hurt her! Well, not unless they don't pay the ransom. But they will. She's a princess. Stands to reason they'll want her back.

Gertie Never mind you ain't going to hurt her. What about all the trauma, eh? How's she going to cope with a whole boatload of rough, tough, scary, swearsy pirates? She's never even seen such a thing before! She's spent all her life in a palace where everyone bows and curtsies and says "Yes, Your Royal Highness"!

Bertie Sounds like it'll be just the kind of education she needs.

Gertie I'll grant you there's such a thing as too sheltered. But... all at once? You want to show someone the real world, you do it gently. A bit at a time.

Bertie Nah, that'd take for ever!

Gertie And if they don't pay the ransom, what then? You've already said you'll make her walk the plank, and you know Bill Bowline will hold you to that. What harm's she done you? H'mm?

JS I'm tellin' you, they'll pay up!

Gertie You don't *know* that.

Bertie Well, Bill's right, though. We've not had anyone walk the plank since... ooh... that lubber Bill challenged to a duel, and when we asked him for his choice of weapons he said "chess". Remember?

Gertie Yes, and *that* wasn't fair. A chess game is a perfectly valid way to have a duel.

JS No, it ain't! Bill can't play chess!

Gertie So what? Don't suppose he knows how to use a catapult either, but you wouldn't have made him walk the plank if he'd said catapults.

Bertie He was just trying to be clever, so he deserved what he got.

Gertie He wasn't *trying* to be clever. He *was* clever. You saying that's a crime now?

Bertie It is if you ain't on our side.

Gertie Anyway. We are getting sidetracked. Point is, kidnapping the Princess is a bad idea.

JS But we need provender!

Gertie Don't tell me you haven't got enough money just to go into Stoneport and buy some.

Bertie Bo-ring.

JS Yeah. We're pirates. Pirates don't land just to do the grocery shopping!

Gertie But it's got to be done, all the same.

JS Oh, it'll get done, but... not *just* that. Otherwise it ain't piratical.

Bertie I want some squid.

Gertie That'd be good... hey, wait, what am I doing agreeing with you?!

Bertie Not everything's a moral issue.

JS We will get squid. An' split peas. An' barrels of other stuff. But before we do any o' that, we'll get the Princess.

Gertie You will so regret that.

Bertie Nah. It'll be fun!

Scene 4. A well-appointed room somewhere in Stoneport. Princess Meera is in front of a mirror, removing her earrings. There is a knock at the door.

Meera Come in!

Enter SF and HF, dressed as maids. SF also wears a heavy mourning veil.

Meera Oh, there you are at last. What took you so long?

SF Um...

HF Er...

Meera You should curtsy when you speak to me. Don't you know anything?

The two "maids" both clumsily attempt to curtsy.

Meera H'mm. Not used to it, I see. Well, I suppose you don't often get royalty here. Who do you usually work for?

SF Um...

HF Er...

Meera Has the cat got your tongues?

SF *(aside to HF)* This isn't working, is it?

HF *(aside to SF)* Not really. I think we'd better just tell her right now.

SF Very well. *(Dramatically removes the veil)* We are no maids!

Meera So who are you and what are you doing in here?

HF We are bold, bad pirates!

SF And you're coming back to our ship with us. Don't even think about screaming, or we'll have to gag you, and you won't like that.

Meera Pirates? Really? I thought they were only in stories!

HF No, no, we really exist. Here we are, as large as life.

Meera Well, this is going to be an unexpectedly interesting evening. One moment while I put my earrings back on. What are your names?

SF My name is Samson Fortinbras¹⁴, and this is my twin brother, Hercules.

Meera Your... twin... brother?!

HF Oh yes. Everyone wonders. You see, it is like this. Our parents were very poor. They could only afford to bring up one of us. So they tossed a coin to see which it would be, and it was Samson; and I was sent to live with our aunt.

SF Who then married a Spanish pirate.

HF Yes, and he taught me the trade. And I had so much fun that Samson came and joined me when he was able.

Meera Fascinating! I'm sure you all have plenty of good stories like that. There now, my earrings are back in place. I'm ready.

SF You... don't... *mind* coming with us?

Meera Not at all! I'm looking forward to meeting the rest of your crew.

HF (*aside to SF*) Something is wrong here.

SF (*aside to HF*) Never mind that. If we don't do what we were sent to do, we'll be in trouble. Do you want to be on deck-swabbing duty for the next month?

Meera Lead the way!

SF Um...

HF Er...

Meera Well, come on! Do I have to find this ship all by myself?

Song: Meera, with SF and HF as chorus. Tune: Orinoco Flow.

Let me sail, let me sail
With the pirates on the tide;
Let me reach, let me beach
In the fabled Spanish Main.

¹⁴ "Fortinbras" literally means "strong in the arm". Nothing subtle here!

Let me sail, let me sail
All across the ocean wide;
Let me reach, let me beach
Round the world and back again.

(Chorus) Sail away, sail away, sail away,
Sail away, sail away, sail away,
Sail away, sail away, sail away,
Sail away, sail away, sail away.

Scene 5. A little later. SF and HF, still dressed as maids (but SF is now without the veil), are helping Princess Meera on board the pirate ship. The whole crew, including TR, is waiting on the deck.

JS Very well done, lads. You remembered to leave the ransom note?

SF Aye, aye, Cap'n.

Meera Ah. You are the captain? Your flamingoes are very fetching.

JS Aye. I'm Cap'n Jemima Spinnaker, an' this here is the good ship *Adeline*.

JH Don't know so much about good. Morally dubious if you ask me...

BB That's enough from you, Bosun Higgs!

JS As I was just about to say, welcome aboard. You needn't be afraid o' nothin' while you're here. We'll treat ye right, an' bring ye straight back to where ye were as soon as they pay the ransom.

Meera Afraid? I wasn't planning to be. So who are the other members of your crew?

BB I'm the first mate. Battling Bill Bowline from Barnsley, that's me.

JS You're from Rotherham.

BB Aye, I know, but "Battling Bill Bowline from Rotherham" don't sound quite right.

JH Joe Higgs, Your Royal Highness. Bosun. *(He salutes smartly)*

DD Dai Deadeye from Merthyr Tydfil.

TR Tom Razey from Devizes. I be the cook.

BB We call him Crazy Razey.

TR I bain't no crazier than anyone else aboard this ship, Mr Bowline, sir.

Meera So why do they say you are?

TR It's like this, Your Royal Highness. I'm homesick. Like you'd expect, me being a Wiltshire man. And either the rest o' the crew ain't, or they ain't admitting it.

BB A true pirate is never homesick!

TR Well, I bain't a true pirate, Mr Bowline, sir. I'm a cook. Never even knew I was signing up to be a pirate; but I don't know how to read nor write. So they just said there was a situation going for a ship's cook, and by the time I'd taken it, it was too late.

Song: TR and Chorus. Tune: the Major-General song.

Now let me make it very clear and tell you most emphatical,
I don't mind all the sailing but I'm not at all piratical;
I'm really not a bit inclined to muster the ferocity,
I'd rather run away from any fight at full velocity.
They say it's merely cowardice that makes me feel so ill at ease,
Because they don't consider all the other possibilities;
There's all these other people and I wish a peaceful life to them,
I've got no time for pirates when they'd have me take a knife to them.

(Chorus) There's all these other people and he'd wish a peaceful life to them,
He's got no time for pirates when they'd have him take a knife to them.

But down there in the galley my accomplishment's incredible;
Whatever lives at sea, I'll find a way to make it edible,
And even if it's new to me, I'll simply do a quick assay,
Then serve it up for dinner as the basis of a fricassée.
Don't ever call me lazy – I could not work any harder, ma'am;
I pull off minor miracles with rosemary and cardamom,
And even though I never went to Balliol or Trinity,
The recipes I've memorised are somewhere near infinity.

(Chorus) And even though he never went to Balliol or Trinity,
The recipes he's memorised are somewhere near infinity.

I've sailed throughout the seven seas from India to Italy,
And though I'm never seasick, yet I still regret it bitterly;
The flowers of the tropics make me feel a sense of irony,
I miss the Wiltshire hedgerows with the rock-rose and the bryony,
And when we're in the Arctic and I'm chipping off the icicles,
I long to go to Trowbridge with my brother on our bicycles.
You'd think a love of home was something common to humanity,
But all they do is laugh and cast aspersions on my sanity!

(Chorus) You'd think a love of home was something common to humanity,
But all they do is laugh and cast aspersions on his sanity!

Meera I see. Very well. I command the rest of you to stop calling him crazy.

BB What do you think you're going to do about it?

Meera I command you to kneel!

BB *(drops to his knees; looks flabbergasted)* What the dumboozle?!

JS Hey, now. I give the orders round here!

Meera I am the captain now.¹⁵

JS What? No, you ain't!

Meera I command you to kneel, too. *(JS kneels as fast as BB did, looks equally amazed.)*

JS What is going on here?!

Meera It's simple. You have to obey. This is so much fun! I had no idea pirate ships really existed until this evening, but as soon as I found out, I just knew I had to try commanding one.

BB But *why* have we got to obey? We don't want to!

Meera That's my little secret, Mr Bowline. All right, you may both get up now. *(They do, looking highly embarrassed.)*

Gertie See? I *told* you this was a bad idea, and would you listen?

JS You shut yer face, Gertie, or I'll have... er... Mr Razey make stew of ye.

¹⁵ You wanted the line. You got the line!

TR I don't cook anything that talks.

Scene 6. Late at night. JH is alone on the deck. TR pops his head up from the galley, looks cautiously round, sees that JH is alone, and emerges.

TR Joe?

JH Tom! What can I do for you?

TR You bain't stupid, Joe, so I bet you've been doing some thinking.

JH You're right I have. I've been thinking... maybe Princess Meera is our ticket off this ship.

TR Arr, well, even I've managed to think that far. It's just... how, exactly?

JH You're not as stupid as you think you are, Tom. It's just that you haven't had a good education. If you could read and write, you'd soon see you're quite a clever man, after all.

TR It's true, I'd like to learn. But I don't see how we're going to get off the *Adeline*, even so.

JH We need to talk to the Princess. I don't know about you, but I don't know anything about her. I don't know what sort of princess she is – whether she's one who's going to be queen one day, or just a kind of spare one who'll get married off to some prince because of politics.

TR They have to get married just because o' politics? What happened to love?

JH I think that's normally considered kind of inconvenient in royal families.

TR Oh, but... she'll be all right, though. If she can just walk on board here and tell the Cap'n an' Mr Bowline to kneel, and they do it, then nobody's going to be able to tell her to marry anyone she don't want to marry.

JH See? I said you were cleverer than you thought. I wonder how she does that?

TR Reckon as how it be some sort o' magic.

JH You could be right. She's taken over the Captain's cabin, so the Captain's taken mine and thrown me in with Mr Bowline. Neither of us is pleased.

TR That why you're out on deck at this hour?

JH Yes. He snores.

TR Come and sleep in the galley, then. It's a bit cramped, but it's quiet.

JH I might, if he hasn't stopped by the time I look in again. Thanks, Tom.

TR You and I, Joe, we bain't pirates. Not what you'd call proper ones. We got to stick together.

JH That we have. Why don't we go and see if the Princess is awake right now?

TR Right you are!

Scene 7. Captain Spinnaker's cabin. Princess Meera is sitting at the dressing table. Once again, there is a tap on the door.

Meera Come in!

Enter JH and TR.

JH Sorry to disturb you, Your Royal Highness. Is it all right if we have a little word with you in private?

Meera I don't see why not. I'm not a bit tired.

JH Thank you. You see, Tom and I... we don't want to be pirates at all, and we'd like to get off this ship. We... wondered if you could help us?

TR I know it's a lot to ask, Your Royal Highness, and there bain't a lot we can do in return, but I can teach you any recipe you want to learn.

Meera Ooh! I'm already having so much fun and now I get to do a rescue too! Of course I'll help!

JH That's wonderful! Thank you so much, Your Royal Highness!

Meera It's my great pleasure. Besides, nobody should have to be a pirate if they don't want to.

TR So... what's the plan?

Meera I can't come up with one all in a moment! I need to do some serious thinking. Let me see. So you, Mr Razey, want to go home to Wiltshire. I think I can do that. Where do *you* want to go, Mr Higgs?

JH I'd like a situation on another ship, if that can be arranged. Even the pirates say I'm a good bosun. I can tie any knot you can name.

Meera I think I can do that, too. But I need to consider how. Please leave me for the moment. I shall send for you again when I am ready.

Both bow.

JH/TR Thank you, Your Royal Highness! (*Exeunt.*)

Meera H'mm. What an interesting day this is turning out to be, after all! I thought it was going to be so boring when I woke up this morning. The Governor of Stoneport is the most pompous old buffoon I have ever met. Perhaps when I return there I shall command him to stand on his head. It would be... entertaining, I think.

Scene 8. The next morning. Most of the crew, other than TR, are on deck; JS and BB are having an urgent council of war centre stage, while the others get on with doing various sailor stuff in the background.

JS Bill. What are we goin' to do?

BB Hope they pay up sharpish, I reckon. Then we'll be rid of her.

JS Aye, an' what if they don't?

BB Then we make her walk the... (*pause*) Oh.

JS "Oh," indeed. If we tried that she'd probably make *us* walk the plank.

BB How's she even doin' it?

JS I got no idea. But have ye noticed it's only when she says "I command"?

BB Why, Jemima, ye're right! Maybe it's a spell, like?

Bertie If it is a spell, stands to reason there's a way to break it.

JS That ain't no help if we don't know what it is.

Bertie So you get someone to eavesdrop. You're slipping, Jemima.

JS No, I ain't, and I don't appreciate bein' told what to do by a dumbboozlin' flamingo!

Bertie Ooh, temper, temper.

Gertie Shut your beak, Bertie. Can't you see Jemima's already wound up?

Bertie I know. It's fun...

BB Bertie might just have a point, though. Ooh! I know! Why don't one of us pretend to fall in love with the Princess? Then she'd tell us everythin'!

JS Pretend to...? Are you volunteerin', Bill Bowline?

BB Oh, no, not me. I ain't no romantic. But there's Higgs. He's young an' good-lookin'.

JS Seriously, Bill, do you trust him?

BB H'mm... see what ye mean... I'd trust any knot he tied, but that ain't quite the same thing.

JS It ain't at all. He ain't no pirate. You got any better suggestions?

BB Well... er... there's Dai. Suppose some women think eye patches are romantic...

JS An' others don't. That leaves Samson an' Hercules, don't it?

BB Suppose it do. I mean... not Tom Razey. He ain't no pirate neither.

JS So which is it to be? Samson or Hercules?

BB Why don't we ask 'em, Jemima?

Gertie You think even they are going to sink low enough to be prepared to trifle with the affections of an innocent young woman?

JS Shut it, Gertie. Besides, she ain't innocent.

Gertie H'mpf. I reckon that depends on how you define "innocent".

JS She's walked in an' taken over *my dumbboozlin' ship*. Far as I'm concerned, that makes her as guilty as sin.

Song: JS and chorus. Tune: My Heart Will Go On.

This here is my ship,
But she thinks she's the Captain,
And it's clear that this just can't go on.
Don't know how she does it;
It's some kind of magic,
But, whatever, it still can't go on.

(Chorus) It's ours, whatever her powers,
We know that this just can't go on;
For she knows naught of the sea,
And we'll end up a wreck
If this situation goes on.

Well, I'm goin' crazy,
As you would in my place,
And that'll get worse till she's gone;
Maybe she's a princess,
But the ship's a hot mess,
And I tell you that this can't go on!

(Chorus)

Scene 9. Captain Spinnaker's cabin again. Princess Meera is now intently studying a map. There is a knock on the door.

Meera Come in!

Enter JH.

Meera Just you, Mr Higgs? Where is your friend?

JH Oh, he's very sorry he can't come, Your Royal Highness, but we landed a fine catch of fish early this morning and he's busy preparing them in the galley. I promised him I'd tell him everything that was said.

Meera Well, that's good. I like fish. Anyway, I have a plan for you now.

JH Er... we were wondering... that is, you seem to be able to make anyone do exactly what you command. So we were wondering why you can't just command Captain Spinnaker to let us both go?

Meera A very intelligent question! But, in fact, the spell is only temporary. Usually it lasts about a week. I wouldn't want the pirates coming after you again once you were free.

JH Oh... I see. So it really is a spell, then?

Meera Oh, yes. Do you see this ring? It is a Ring of Command. Like every respectable princess, I have a fairy godmother, and it was she who gave me this. There are... some exceptions built in. It doesn't work on my parents, for instance.

JH Possibly that is just as well, Your Royal Highness. So... this plan?

Meera I have a birthday next month. My parents normally give me anything I ask for, within reason, and when you are a king and queen, reason stretches quite a long way. I shall ask for a ship.

JH And I'm to be the bosun of this ship?

Meera Bosun? No, no! You are to be the *captain*. I shall see to it that you have a fine crew, more than a match for these rag-tag pirates, should they try to come after you. And your first voyage will be to take Mr Razey back to Wiltshire.

JH That sounds wonderful, Your Royal Highness, but... what are we to do in the meantime? By the time you have your ship, Captain Spinnaker could have decided to sail us halfway round the world!

Meera Ah, that was the difficult part; but I have thought of a way. At first I thought I would just have the whole crew arrested, but if I did that we couldn't keep them for long enough. Doubtless they have committed a good many crimes, but we have none that we could charge them with.

JH None? But... what about kidnapping?

Meera I came along of my own accord, and I could hardly deny that in court, now, could I? So we could arrest them as pirates, but then we would have to let them go almost at once. And then I had an idea. I got it from the twin brothers. They told me their story, and I thought, that is very good, I'm sure all the rest of the crew have excellent stories to tell. Isn't that right, Mr Higgs?

JH Oh, yes, of course! Especially the Captain and Mr Bowline. They've got yarns you wouldn't believe.

Meera Perfect! So my plan is to invite the whole crew to the palace to tell all those stories. I will command someone to write them down and turn them into a

book. It will be a hit in all the lending libraries. I shall not let them go till I have my ship, and then it will all be very simple.

JH Will... will that be all right with your parents? I mean... we're talking about a bunch of bold, bad pirates here. They're not used to behaving properly. Won't your parents get fed up with them and throw them out?

Meera You forget. I can *command* them to behave properly.

JH Ooh. That's going to be worth seeing...

Scene 10. Back on the deck. HF is sitting on a coil of rope with a pen and paper on his lap, staring intently at it. BB walks up to him.

BB What are you at, Hercules?

HF I drew the short straw. I have to pretend I'm in love with the Princess.

BB Aye, fine, but there's work wants doin' on deck. What's with the writin'?

HF I am trying to write a love poem, Mr Bowline, sir.

BB Oh! Well... good idea... carry on, then...

HF What rhymes with "princess"?

BB Err. "Officers' mess?"

HF I'm not sure that's very romantic, though.

BB Umm. "Dress"? "Guess"? "More or less"?

HF Thank you, Mr Bowline, sir. I'll see what I can do.

BB What have you written so far?

HF *(clears throat)* "Ever since you arrived on board,
I've had a lot of strange feelings what can't be ignored.
I have to say this, and it ain't a joke,
You can do some dumboozlin' strange things to a bloke.
For you are a very beautiful Princess,
And..." ...and that's where I need the rhyme, see.

BB I reckon as how that might need a bit o' polishin'.

HF You do?

BB Aye, matey, I do. I reckon ye probably want to lose that “dumboozlin”. That kind o’ thing don’t go down well with proper ladies.

HF Oh. Well, see, I don’t say it very often, so I thought it’d be good for emphasis.

BB Aye, but she don’t know that. Mebbe say “very” instead?

HF *(altering his manuscript)* Aye, aye, sir! What about the rhyme?

BB How about “So I’m goin’ to have to tell ye so ye don’t have to guess”?

HF Brilliant! You are a very Cervantes¹⁶ of the seven seas.

BB A what now?

HF You got a way with words, Mr Bowline, sir.

Scene 11. Later the same day. Everyone is on deck, including TR, who is handing out glasses of grog to the rest of the crew, and Princess Meera, who already has a glass and is sniffing at it with cautious interest.

Meera So this is the famous pirate grog?

TR It is that, Your Royal Highness. If ye’ll take my advice, ye’ll want to take it a bit slowly. It’s strong stuff.

Meera *(takes a sip)* H’mmm. I see it is... an acquired taste.

BB Puts hairs on your chest, that it do!

Meera I do not *need* hairs on my chest, Mr Bowline.

DD Cap’n? Whichever of you that is? Look to windward.

JS Oh. You’re right, Dai Deadeye. That don’t look good.

BB A storm! Coming right this way! Er... *(He looks uncomfortably at Meera, and then at JS.)*

JS Your Royal Highness, I’m goin’ to need to ask you to let me handle this. It’s all very well you playin’ at bein’ cap’n, an’ sure enough ye can make us do whatever

¹⁶ After all, why would a Spaniard say “Shakespeare”?

ye say, but you ain't never sailed a ship afore and ye don't know how to handle a storm. An' one mistake an' we're all in Davy Jones's locker before ye know it.

Meera Very well. I command you to do whatever you need to do during the storm, then relinquish control back to me as soon as it's safe.

JS Right ye are! All right, me hearties, knock back yer grog an' then get to work. Strike the sails¹⁷ an' lower the mast. Higgs, tie down anythin' loose, or send it below with them as ain't needed on deck. Which is you, Your Royal Highness, an' Razey here, an' Dai Deadeye. Razey, you check all the portholes an' make sure they're all closed good an' tight, an' batten down all the hatches apart from this one here. Dai, I want ye down in the hold to see that we ain't shippin' any water. Samson an' Hercules, take the helm between the two o' ye, one each side, an' Bill Bowline'll tell ye when to pull. Ye won't be able to do a lot to keep us upright, but anythin' ye can do will help. Got that?

The crew Aye, aye, Cap'n!

Meera This is exciting!

JS Well. I got to hand it to ye. You ain't scared o' nothin'. But this ain't a royal party game. We're headin' into deadly danger.

Meera But obviously you have survived storms like this in the past. So, you probably will again. Very well. I will go below. *(Exit down hatch, with TR and DD.)*

*The crew, including JS, run round the deck frantically taking down the mast and sails and following all the other instructions given. As they do so, they start having to battle with the wind, which rapidly grows stronger and stronger. Very soon, all of them are staggering and spinning, with the very noticeable exception of JH, who is tying down the ship's boat. He is clinging to the ropes, and, although he is having obvious difficulty, unlike everyone else he is not spinning.*¹⁸

BB Aaargh! We'll never hold the helm in this, Cap'n! We should all go below an' just hope to ride it out.

JS I'll come an' join ye. *(She makes her way over to the helm, with a massive struggle, clinging to anything she can find on the way.)* Two of us on each side... it still ain't a lot, but it's better'n nothin'. All tied down now, Mr Higgs? Good! Get below. I'd ask ye to help at the helm, but ye'd like as not be blown overboard.

BB You sure? He's holdin' his feet better'n any of us!

¹⁷ That is, lower them. This is the origin of the term "strike" in the context of industrial action.

¹⁸ Those physicists, if they're present, are going to kill themselves laughing. Higgs bosons have no spin. They're famous for it.

JS He's right in the middle o' the deck, that's why.

Exit JH down the hatch.

HF (*mournfully*) My love poem got blown overboard.

SF You wrote an actual poem?

HF Well, I tried.

SF That's some real *quality* pretending to be smitten, that is.

BB An' if you two lubbers don't keep a grip, it ain't goin' to matter. Haul to starboard!

SF Aye, aye, sir!

At this point a small Minion runs across the deck. JS reaches out one arm and stops it in its tracks.

JS Who are you and what are ye doin' on my ship?

Minion Oh. Sorry. Lost. (*JS lets it go, and it runs off and vanishes the other side.*)

JS This storm's so bad it's bendin' the very fabric o' reality!¹⁹

BB An' there was me thinkin' I'd had a drop too much grog.

JS You two! Get yer dumbboozlin' claws out o' my shoulders.

Bertie We've got to cling on somehow!

Gertie Sorry, Jemima! Thought I'd just got your coat.

Bertie I wanna go below. I'm soaking wet.

Gertie Well, tough. Jemima needs to be on deck, so that means we do.

HF Um... Cap'n? I got a question.

JS Ye pick yer moments. What d'ye want to know?

HF The flamingoes. What do they do when you're asleep?

19 Seriously, there had to be *some* kind of justification for a random Minion...

JS Ye want to know *that* in the middle of a storm that's threatenin' to scupper the lot of us?!

HF I mightn't ever get another chance to ask.

Bertie We sit on the bedposts. What did you think we did?

Gertie Oooh, you liar! *I* sit on the bedpost. I've no idea what *you* do at night, but I'm sure it's nothing good.

Bertie A flamingo's got to have a bit of fun.

JS Bertie... what *do* ye do at night?

BB Haul to port!

Bertie That's right! Haul to port!

Gertie You're avoiding the question.

Bertie So what? I've got a right to a private life!

Enter DD again, through hatch.

DD Cap'n! We've a breach in the hold.²⁰

JS Dumboozle! How bad is it?

DD Very bad. I've asked Mr Higgs to bring the Princess up on deck. We're going to need to abandon ship.

JS If that be so, we got a problem. There's only room in the ship's boat for six. Seven, at a pinch, not countin' the flamingoes, who don't take up any space. An' there's eight of us includin' the Princess.

BB Then we ditch the Princess an' that solves everythin'.

JS No, it don't! You're forgettin' about the ransom money, Bill Bowline.

SF Well... it's traditional that a captain goes down with their ship.

JS I ain't doin' anythin' so stupid just because o' tradition!

²⁰ Along with a few other scattered lines, this was originally given to JH until Natalie told me she'd like the part cut down because she won't be able to attend many rehearsals. DD got most of those lines.

BB Well, we got to leave someone behind. How about Razey? Can't cook in a lifeboat!

JS Aye, that ain't a bad idea. Mebbe next time we can get a cook who's more of a pirate.

Enter Princess Meera, TR, and JH, through hatch.

JS Razey, I got bad news for you. There ain't enough room in the ship's boat for everyone. You're the one who'll be staying behind.

Meera What? No. I cannot allow that.

JS You did put me back in charge while the storm lasts. An' we got a breach in the hold, so we need to get off pretty quick. *(As she says this, the ship keels over dramatically, so that everyone ends up leaning hard against the rail on one side.)* Like... now.

HF What if we draw straws again? That'd be fair.

JS We ain't got time to draw straws!

JH "Again"?²¹

HF Oh... er... never mind.

Meera I command you all to get into the boat.

TR/JH What?!

Meera You heard me. This is my fault. I thought I could command a ship, but Captain Spinnaker was right. This isn't a game. Most of you are wicked pirates, but even so I will not have one of you sacrificed for my mistake. I will cling to the mast and take my chances; we are not too far from land.

BB cuts the ropes tying the ship's boat and the crew all obediently get in, except for TR and JH.

TR No, Your Royal Highness. *You* get in the boat. You weren't to know.

JH I'm with Tom. You went out of your way to help us, so now we owe you.

Meera What? But... I commanded you...

21 JH doesn't know that SH and FH drew straws to see who would pretend to be in love with the Princess.

Gertie No magic will work on a heart that is acting on a pure and noble impulse!

Meera But...

There is a terrible judder. All the crew spill out of the boat, and everyone ends up sprawling on the deck.

BB Why... I don't believe it! We've run aground!

Meera I knew we were close to land. I didn't know how close.

JS Couldn't see a dumbboozlin' thing in this rain. I reckon we're in that bay where we anchored when Samson an' Hercules went to get you, Your Royal Highness.

JH (*peering through the rain*) Looks a lot like it, Cap'n. Well, now we're safe, but we'd best get off the ship before she breaks up. I'll go and fetch the rope ladder. (*Exit*)

Meera We're safe?

JS Aye. Wish I could say the same for the *Adeline*, though. Mebbe she's repairable, but I won't know till the storm calms down enough to go an' look.

Meera Then I am in command again, and I command you to...

JS Shan't!

Meera You shall!

JS Try an' make me.

Meera You don't even know what I was going to command you to do.

JS It don't matter. Your spell don't work any more.

TR Oh... have I gone an' broken it? (*He looks appalled.*)

Meera I think... you probably have. But you and Mr Higgs acted for the best of reasons. I... can probably manage without the spell now.

Enter JH again, with the rope ladder.

JS Thank'ee, Mr Higgs. Right, abandon ship, the lot o' ye! Bill Bowline, you go first an' make sure there ain't no monkey business, an' I'll bring up the rear. The rest o' ye, sort yerselves out how ye want.

Meera Well. Just so you all know, you are all invited to come and stay at the palace.

BB What? Is this some kind o' trick?

Meera Not at all. You see, I've been told that you all have some wonderful stories to tell... yarns, yes? That's what you call them?

JS Aye, but... we kidnapped ye. Why d'ye want to invite us to the palace?

Meera No, you didn't. I came of my own accord. If I hadn't wanted to come here, don't you think I could have commanded Samson and Hercules to go away? I want to invite you to the palace so that you can all tell your stories, and I will have them written down and made into a book. You will be famous!

BB Oooh!

JS Well... um... can we talk about this more once we're on land?

Meera Naturally. I will follow Mr Bowline.

JH If you don't mind me saying so, Cap'n, it sounds like a good idea. After all, the crew'll need something to do while the ship's being repaired.

JS (*glumly*) If she can be repaired.

JH And we'll have something better to eat than seagulls.

JS (*brightening*) Aye, Mr Higgs, there's that.

Scene 12. A few weeks later. Princess Meera and all the crew are standing on the dockside at Stoneport.

Meera I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed all your yarns. Of course I shall send you all copies of the book as soon as it's printed.

TR (*embarrassed*) I can't read, Your Royal Highness.

Meera I had not forgotten. But you said your brother could, yes? And you are setting off for home today. He can read it to you.

JS Wait, what?

Meera Do you see this ship? This is my birthday gift – the *Indomitable*. It already has a full crew, with one exception. The captain. Step forward, Mr Higgs!

He does so, saluting smartly.

Meera Are you ready to take charge of your new ship?

JH Yes, Your Royal Highness.

Meera Good. You will find your new uniform waiting in your cabin. Congratulations, Captain Higgs, and may you have a long and distinguished career.

JS You're makin' him a captain?

Meera That is somehow not obvious?

JS But he's the best bosun I've ever had, even if he ain't no pirate! What am I to do for a bosun?

Meera Have patience, Captain Spinnaker. I am coming to that. Mr Razey?

TR Aye, aye, ma'am!

Meera Your good friend Captain Higgs will take you home now. You will not need to do any cooking, unless, of course, you wish to. I have arranged a fine guest cabin for you.

TR I thank ye with all my heart, Your Royal Highness.

BB So now we've lost our bosun *and* our cook?

Meera I am coming to that. You have also, if you recall, lost your ship.

JS (*bitterly*) No need to remind me o' that.

Meera But you lost it through my fault, therefore I owe you a ship. However, there is a little problem. You are, of course, pirates. I could simply provide you with a new ship, but I don't want to be the cause of you pillaging and plundering all over the high seas. So... I have thought of a solution which, I think, will make everyone happy.

BB (*aside to JS*) This had better be good.

Meera I have learnt a great deal from your yarns. Pirates like two things most of all. One of them is treasure, and the other one is fighting; and generally they need to do the fighting in order to get the treasure. So I have had a little word with my father the King, and we decided: what if we gave you a lot of treasure to fight... for us?

JS H'mm. I'm interested. Tell me more.

Meera We thought you might like to crew a warship. Obviously, not just you. A fine ship of the line needs more than a handful of sailors, no matter how brave and experienced. You would, of course, still be the captain, but there would also be a squad of soldiers on board with their own captain. He, or she as it might be, would be in charge of the soldiers, and you in charge of the sailors. How does that sound? Oh, and the pay, naturally, would be commensurate with your well-honed abilities.

BB The pay'd be what now?

JS Dumboozlin' good, Bill.

BB Oh! Well, then, I'm up for it.

SF Danger, excitement, *and* a reliable source of treasure? Sign me up now!

HF And if we're part of a regular navy, we'll never run out of split peas.

DD There's lovely!²²

JH And everyone will live happily ever after.

Bertie Hang on. What about us? We're *pirate* flamingoes, me and Gertie!

Meera Oh, I haven't forgotten you. I have arranged for special squid rations daily.

Gertie Oh, well... I reckon we could soon learn to be warship flamingoes, don't you?

TR Write an' let me know how you're gettin' on. I'll get my brother to read me the letters.

Meera One day you will learn to read and write. Then, write to me and tell me all about Devizes.

TR I will that, Your Royal Highness. (*He boards the ship, along with JH.*)

²² Normally when I want a word emphasised, I put it in italics, but it somehow doesn't work for this phrase. There should be a strong emphasis on the first word. It's a very traditionally Welsh expression.

Song: the crew. Tune: Wellerman.

Oh, we were pirates brave and bold,
Who sailed the seas in search of gold,
With a cask or three of rum in the hold
Of the good ship *Adeline*.

(Chorus) Now we're a martial crew,
And fighting still is what we do;
But now we fight for you
For our food and gold and wine.

And every week we'll get our pay
The same, regardless of our prey;
So we'll make merry every day
As a warship of the line.

(Chorus)

We're still the terror of the seas,
But you can set your mind at ease:
You pay us, so we'll aim to please,
And everything is fine!

(Chorus)