

TEASER

EXT. OCEAN - LOW ANGLE - SUNRISE

Eye level with the placid ocean. A morning mist.

A FLYING FISH leaps from the water, skims the surface - then slips into the ocean. It's followed by a second; a third. And then we hear:

THUNDER ROLLING IN?

No. As it comes closer, we recognize the GROAN OF EXERTED TIMBERS - the sound of WIND CRACKING IN SAILS AND -

H.M.S. PETREL

roars by, wiping the screen. Three masted, square-rigged, moving at prodigious speed - the wind taut in her sails.

EXT. PETREL - QUARTERDECK - CONTINUOUS

A HELMSMAN at the wheel. CAPTAIN DUNDAS at his side. A sense of great urgency, exhaustion, men living on frayed nerves.

The Helmsman scans the horizon: sees mist rising off the sea in GREAT SPECTRAL CATHEDRALS. Then -

HELMSAN

SAILS!

CAPTAIN

How do they stand?

HELMSAN

Twenty sail of ships, sir. Twenty Leagues.
Two points west.

Dundas scans the horizon and sees

TWENTY POINTS OF LIGHT: DISTANT SAILS.

Dundas is joined by first mate RICHARD LESTER. Late 20s. Blonde and handsome. A decent and brave man.

LESTER

The convoy?

CAPTAIN

God in heaven, I hope so. Get me a damage report, Mr. Lester. Let's see how fast we can push her home.

LESTER

Aye, aye, sir.

Lester takes a moment to scan THE FOG BANK to their stern - it glows RED, INFERNAL - as if the FURNACES OF HELL might lurk within.

CAPTAIN

Quick as you like, Mr. Lester.

LESTER

Aye, sir.

Follow Lester along what we now see is a HEAVILY BATTLE DAMAGED SHIP. CANNONS line her upper deck. Fatigued, uneasy GUN CREWS, MUSKETEERS and PIKEMEN stand at the ready.

OTHER CREW throw CORPSES overboard. Sewn into white tarpaulins, they float for a moment, spin like petals - pink tinged by the rising sun - before sinking -

EXT. UNDER WATER - DAY

- whirling like seed pods as they float to the depths -

INT. NIGHTINGALE'S CABIN - DAY

BENEDICT NIGHTINGALE - a scholarly gentleman in wig, breeches, and waistcoat - approaches the window. Gloomily considers the sinking bodies.

His cabin contains a PENDULUM CLOCK of complex design, its mechanism sealed in a vacuum tube. A walnut desk is full OF PAPERS: COMPASSES, MAPS, SEXTANTS.

He turns to the clock. Sonorously ticking his life away.

INT. PETREL - GUN DECK - DAY

CANNONS poke through open ports. WEARY, BATTLE-BLACKENED GUN CREWS check charges, ensure axle trees are greased.

Lester hurries through, enters the -

SHIP'S SURGERY

- finds it cramped, stuffy and underlit. Floor covered with blood-soaked sawdust.

A terrified ABLE-SEAMAN lies on a rough bench. He's being constrained by TIMOTHY FLETCH - aged 15, a LOBLOLLY BOY, meaning "surgeon's assistant".

The operating table is attended by a HANDSOME, BLOOD-COVERED MAN in a white shirt. This is TOM LOWE.

He's surrounded by knives, mallets, chisels. We may catch FLEETING GLIMPSES of BLOOD AND HAIR on the blades.

LOWE

Mr. Lester. How are we up there?

LESTER

We've hit upon the convoy. With a fair wind, we'll soon be among friends.

LOWE

And safe?

LESTER

Now there's a big word, eh?

A grin between them - and Lester moves on, leaving Lowe to address his patient. Fast, professional.

LOWE

Now Mr. Gadd, it's no small presumption on my part to dismember the Image of God. I therefore need your affirmative before proceeding.

A moment - then Gadd nods. And obligingly bites down on the WOODEN DOWEL between his teeth as Lowe applies the DISMEMBERING SAW -

INT. PETREL - HOLD - DAY

GADD'S HOWLS OF IMPOSSIBLE AGONY FOLLOW LESTER into the hold.

Which is knee-deep in water. SAILORS work pumps as a crew of CARPENTERS repairs a breach in the deck - slopping it with fresh tar.

LESTER

Mr. Pyke?

CARPENTER

She'll hold, sir - if you'd keep us at an even keel as long as you please.

LESTER

Out of the question, I'm afraid. The long night isn't over, and we've still got the devil at our tail. So make her firm, and let's get home with a tale to tell.

PYKE

Aye, sir.

Pyke and the others get to it. Lester works his way abovedecks - bracing himself against the movement of the ship - when

They're VIOLENTLY ROCKED by a TITANIC EXPLOSION -

A shocked moment - Lester climbs to his feet. Surveys the TERRIFIED FACES of his men.

LESTER

Get to it!

He sprints for the upper deck.

INT. PETREL - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - MORNING

Nightingale on his berth. Saying a SILENT PRAYER. The clocks tick.

INT. SECOND DECK - MORNING

Lowe runs to the port-hole. Looks out. Sees nothing but sea and sky. Wisps of mist. Fletch at his shoulder now.

FLETCH

Are we dead?

LOWE

Oh yes.

Lowe turns to him with a WIDE GRIN - the flickering of a dangerous, reckless joy.

LOWE (CONT'D)

Can you finish up here, Mr. Fletch? I think you can. I think you're ready!

Fletch shakes his head - overwhelmed. As Lowe claps his shoulder -- and exits at speed.

EXT. QUARTERDECK - MORNING

Lester runs onto the quarterdeck to join Dundas. Scours astern with his spyglass.

LESTER'S POV

A SHIP is heading for them out of the mist - at what seems an impossibly acute angle. She slips through the fog - low and fast - now there, now gone - a ghastly, ragged spectre.

On deck: half-hidden by the mist, stand MEN OF ALL COLOURS, in a hundred different kinds of national costume. Some filthy and ragged. Some in modified naval dress. Some are dandies. One man in what appears to be A BLOOD-STAINED WEDDING DRESS. Many white men; many black men; a smattering of Asian men. Tattooed Polynesians. Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. Some carry cutlasses - others vicious boarding axes; flintlock pistols. Bandoliers stuffed with *grenadoes*.

The rigging is heavy with MUSKETEERS. Snipers crouch in the fighting top.

These men look like what they are: murderers, rapists and thieves. Psychopaths. Psychotics. Outcasts. They are terrible. And terrifying.

Above the mainmast thrashes THE JOLLY ROGER. The sight of it, fluttering above these men, sends a shiver down even brave Lester's spine. And ours, too.

BACK TO SCENE

LESTER

It's the Reaver, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Her Captain?

LESTER

Charles Vane.

CAPTAIN

He's Teach's man.

LESTER

He is. We can't outrun her.

CAPTAIN

Then let's show her we're less afraid than we are hurt -

LESTER

Aye, sir.

(calls out)

Hard to port! hard to port! Let's show 'em
our lee!

The Petrel turns hard - harder than we imagine a ship is able -

INT. PETREL - GUN DECK - CONTINUOUS

CANNONS thunder and violently recoil... leaving a VISION OF HELL: smoke filled. Claustrophobic. As GUNNERS reload -- ten to a gun; an almost mechanical process of pistons, rods, muscle and sweat.

TOM LOWE squeezes past, pausing to DIP HIS ARMS TO THE ELBOW in a barrel of water, vigorously washing away the slippery blood.

He makes his way up to

THE MAIN DECK

in time to witness CANON BALLS RUMBLING OVERHEAD LIKE METEORS -- smashing through sails and rigging -- sailors crashing onto the deck. Tumbling into the ocean.

EXT. THE REAVER - CONTINUOUS

Fast and low, the Reaver slips through the morning fog - now there, now gone - the wind moaning through her taut rigging - approaching from the stern -

She pulls parallel - her MUSKETEERS open fire - hammering the Petrel with 200 SHOTS A MINUTE

EXT. PETREL - MAIN DECK - CONTINUOUS

SAILORS duck for cover - Gunners, musketeers and pikemen fall dead - CAPTAIN DUNDAS dances as he's PEPPERED BY A DOZEN SHOTS. He falls.

The Helmsan lies dead across the wheel. Lester wrenches the body free - draws his sword, assuming command.

LESTER

Prepare to be boarded! Spike the guns!
Drop the powder jars!

QUICK CUTS: GUNNERS ON DECK hammer IRON SPIKES into cannons' touch holes - MEN on yard arms HACK AT ROPES from which dangle POWDER JARS -

QUICK CUTS: PIRATE MUSKETEERS TARGET the powder jars - most shatter harmlessly -- but ONE JAR TUMBLES AND smashes onto the Reaver's deck and EXPLODES -

THE REAVER sends out grappling hooks - as PIRATES hurl grenades - throw multi-colored, fizzing, smoking fireworks -

Through WHIRLING VORTICES OF SMOKE, PIRATES charge the Petrel's deck - firing pistols - slashing - smashing - hacking - headbutting - kicking -

LESTER STANDS FIRM - is confronted by a lithe, short-haired AFRICAN WOMAN in black breeches and a voluminous fencing shirt. She wields A MEAN RAPIER - dancing under his blows - she turns, slashing him across the ear and cheek - then moving on - leaving him to be OVERWHELMED BY PIRATES...

QUICK CUTS: Smoke - noise - wounded - dead - bedlam -

Lowe ducks from cover, takes up a fallen sword and pistol - and FIGHTS HIS WAY ACROSS MAIN DECK. He does so with no little skill and a kind of athletic, savage joy -

But always with a PURPOSE. He's making his way to

NIGHTINGALE'S CABIN

In the hellish melee, the AFRICAN PIRATE WOMAN notes this. Her name is NENNA AJANLEKOKO.

She's fighting back-to-back with THE PIRATE CAPTAIN.

This is CHARLES VANE. He's lean, with cropped, pale blonde hair and striking blue eyes. A sleek predator of a man.

As we meet him, he sweeps the point of his rapier across a YOUNG SAILOR'S THROAT - spins to confront an OLDER SAILOR who falls to his knees, begging for mercy.

We CUT AWAY as Vane BURIES THE RAPIER IN THE OLD SALT'S EYE

INT. PETREL - CAPTAIN'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Nightingale jumps - at a SEVERE BANGING on the cabin door.

LOWE (O.S.)

Mr. Nightingale, open up! It's Tom Lowe.
The physician!

Carrying A BLUNDERBUSS, Nightingale makes his way to the door - opens it. Lowe backs in: sword in one hand - pistol in the other. Kicks the door shut.

NIGHTINGALE
Mr. Lowe? Are we lost?

LOWE
We are.

Lowe shoves him off balance - grabs the blunderbuss - wrestles it from Nightingale's hands - pulls the trigger - BLOWING THE CLOCK TO SMITHEREENS -

NIGHTINGALE
What are you *doing*?!

Lowe kneels at a LOCKED STRONGBOX. Rips A SMALL KEY from a chain round his neck. Opens the strongbox - removes

A SCARLET LOG BOOK

- throws it into a WOODEN PAIL. Removes the glass housing from A LANTERN - and DROPS THE LANTERN into the bucket. The LOG BOOK BURNS.

NIGHTINGALE (CONT'D)
Mr Lowe! Please!

Lowe removes a GLASS VIAL that's slung round his neck on the same chain. It contains a GREEN LIQUID.

LOWE
Mr Nightingale. I fear these pirates have been shadowing us since we left port -

NIGHTINGALE
Why?

LOWE
Because they know you're on board and wish to acquire your invention.

NIGHTINGALE
I'll tell them nothing!

LOWE
You'll tell them everything, because they'll torture you. Cut the secrets from your brain as they'd hack a ring from your finger.

Nightingale backs away - getting it -

LOWE (CONT'D)

But you invention is the property
of the King. I can't allow it to
fall into their hands.

(then)

For what it's worth -- I apologize.

LOWE REACHES OUT - strikes Nightingale in the solar plexus -
causing him to gag - then GRABS HIM - FORCING GREEN LIQUID
down his throat - MAKING HIM SWALLOW.

Nightingale is CHOKING - and the vial is HALF-EMPTY when -
THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN

- and in a single move, Lowe THROWS THE POISON VIAL THROUGH
THE WINDOW... and TURNS TO CONFRONT -

NENNA AJANLEKOKO and CHARLES VANE.

Nenna grabs the bucket. Douses the burning logbook in wine.

Vane kneels at Nightingale's side. Nightingale is convulsing.
Foaming at the mouth. Eyes bugging out.

Lowe backs away, holding up his hands.

LOWE (CONT'D)

I'm unarmed.

Vane puts his rapier to Lowe's eye.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP ON RAPIER'S POINT - MILLIMETERS FROM LOWE'S
EYE - LOWE STRUGGLING NOT TO BLINK.

VANE

And you are?

LOWE

Thomas Lowe. Physician.

VANE

Then save him.

LOWE

That's not in my gift. He's
murdered himself.

The rapier moves forward ANOTHER MILLIMETER - unthinkably
controlled. It enters the orbit of Lowe's eye. Stretches but
doesn't quite break the skin between eyeball and skull.

LOWE (CONT'D)

Torture can't force a man to work miracles.

VANE

On the contrary.

Nenna joins Vane.

Lowe stands frozen - the blade of a sword in the orbit of each eye.

It's agony to watch. Until

LOWE

I'll do what I'm able.

Grinning like a mink, Vane removes the blade. So does Nenna.

Lowe's eye-socket bleeds as he looks from Vane to Nightingale: the man he tried to kill and now must save.

Nenna SCOOPS THE SCARLET LOGBOOK from the pail, douses it with wine.

Lowe scowls minutely. Shit.

OUT ON: the pendulum clocks. Tick tock. Tick tock.

CUT TO:

PALACE - MORNING

THE DEVIL sits on a throne. At least it *could* be the Devil: this tall, spare man with his great, black beard and his blood red brocaded coat. His melancholy eyes.

He's surveying HUMAN BODIES that have been flayed and posed like statues. Among them, on ornate tables, stand MANY TICKING CLOCKS. Clocks of all shapes and sizes. Brass, steel, gold. All of them keeping SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TIMES.

And as their ticking builds to A KIND OF FRANTIC CRESCENDO we

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. PETREL - OCEAN - DAY

The HULK OF THE PETREL lists in the water, casting a plume of black smoke into the sky.

EXT. REAVER - DECK - DAY

PIRATES clean the decks - repair damage. Lowe and Fletch camp on the foredeck - among a kind of pirate encampment.

Lowe crushes charcoal in a pestle, dissolves it in wine. Forces the wine into the comatose Nightingale. Tucks him tight in a cloak. Watches him writhe and sweat; his eyes roll white.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - WOODS ROGERS' OFFICE - MORNING

WOODS ROGERS sits behind a huge desk. He's into his embittered middle years. His movements are slow: not so much considered as deliberately weary.

He dabs his mouth with a napkin. Then pours a cup of tea. And looks up, to see

TOM LOWE

In crisp naval uniform. Sharp as a pin. At attention.

WOODS

Mr Lowe?

SUPER: JAMAICA. FOUR MONTHS AGO

LOWE

Mr Governor General.

WOODS

Capital work in India, I hear.

LOWE

Thank you, sir.

WOODS

Your wounds are healed?

LOWE

Very nicely, thank-you.

Wooles refers to A PAPER on the desk before him.

WOODES

I see you were a physician before you became - what you are.

LOWE

I was.

WOODES

It reads like rather a squalid affair.

LOWE

I've paid my debt. I've been the king's loyal servant for fifteen years.

A moment.

WOODES

I wonder - does acting as commanded make you loyal? Or simply dependable?

LOWE

I'm not convinced that it matters.

WOODES

Let's hope not - because the King commands your service.

He walks to a MAP ON THE WALL. It shows the Bahamas and environs.

WOODES (CONT'D)

We have a fellow here, in the Virgin Isles-

(points to map)

Name of Benedict Nightingale. He's invented something of tremendous value to the crown. A convoy has been arranged to fetch him and this invention with all speed to London.

Lowe waits.

WOODES (CONT'D)

You're familiar with the name of Edward Teach?

LOWE

Of course: Blackbeard. He died years since, if I understand it.

WOODES

Quite the contrary, I'm afraid. Not only does Blackbeard live, he's claimed ownership of one of His Majesty's colonies -

(points to New Providence)
- from which he plunders at will. You'll understand that we cannot, in any circumstance, permit Mr Nightingale or his invention to fall into Blackbeard's hands.

LOWE

Absolutely.

WOODES

Excellent. You'll join HMS Petrel in the Virgin Islands, operating as her physician. A stratagem you've employed before, as I understand it.

LOWE

Indeed. Will that be all?

WOODES

Not quite. Mr Nightingale will have in his possession a book. A scarlet logbook. It is equally imperative this logbook never falls into Blackbeard's clutches.

Woods slides AN ENVELOPE across the desk.

WOODES (CONT'D)

Details are in here. Read and destroy, if you please.

Lowe reaches for the envelope. On top of it lie the SMALL KEY and the GREEN VIAL. Attached to a fine silver chain, which he fits round his neck.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY

Lowe strides across the neat lawn.

He passes TWO FRESHLY-HANGED PIRATES dangling from A GALLOWS.

A CARRION CROW perches on one's shoulder.

PULL BACK to reveal: from the enormous gallows dangle at LEAST TWENTY DEAD MEN. Most of them not so freshly hanged.

But PIRATES. Every last one of them.

BACK TO PRESENT:

EXT. REAVER - FORECASTLE - MORNING

Slumbering on deck, Lowe wakes to the NAGGING SOUND OF GULLS

It takes a moment to register -- then he abruptly sits, to see SEAGULLS perched on the yard-arm -- and MUCH ACTIVITY ON DECK AND IN THE RIGGING. Vane barking orders to the FIRST MATE.

Lowe checks Nightingale's pulse. He's still alive - his breathing rasping and uneven. He's pale as a dead man.

Lowe stands, kicks Fletch awake. Fletch sits up, blinking. Follows Lowe's line of sight.

LOWE'S POV

The Reaver APPROACHES A CARIBBEAN ISLAND. Green and lush. Soaring cliffs. Crashing waves.

She negotiates A SPIT OF HEADLAND, revealing

THE HARBOUR

Which is clustered with pirate ships at anchor. And beyond it:

THE TOWN

Glittering gold and blazing white in the tropical sun. A vision of Athens in the making.

BACK TO SCENE

Lowe's eyes widen in fascination and fear.

FLETCH

Where are we?

LOWE

New Providence. Edward Teach's dominion.

FLETCH
Edward Teach?

LOWE
Blackbeard.

Out on Fletch's terrified awe - and Lowe's grim fascination.

FADE TO:

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE - JETTY - MORNING

Shackled at the wrists, Lowe and Fletch stand on the jetty, close to - but separate from - the abject, beaten crew of the Petrel.

They're being guarded by TWO PIRATES - ALAIN MERSAULT and GODFREY JEST. Together, they watch

VARIOUS PIRATES are working to unload the PETREL'S CARGO. They pause as KATE steps onto the dock, passing Lowe and Fletch. She's 24. Elfin. Cheerful.

KATE
(to Lowe)
Fine morning.

LOWE
It is.

KATE
Although I see it finds you in shackles.

LOWE
Thus releasing me from the tyranny of self-government.

KATE
Then enjoy your liberty, along with the weather.

She moves to the cargo. Directs the pirates, who defer to her as they would a captain

KATE (CONT'D)
Two piles, please gentlemen.
Provisions over here. Goods for sale or exchange, here.
(then)
We'll keep this - and this.
(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)

This we can sell. And this and
this. This is worthless -

Lowe watches her. Turns to Mersault

LOWE

Who is she?

MERSAULT

The Quartermaster.

LOWE

She doesn't look like any pirate I
ever saw.

MERSAULT

She used to be the Governor's
daughter.

Lowe watches Kate with as much interest as admiration until -
SHE HESITATES. Catches his eye - and smiles. Not unkindly.
Then gets on with her work.

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE - DAY

Lowe and Fletch are shove-marched through the STREETS OF NEW
PROVIDENCE.

Fletch is astonished by everything he sees - the multiplicity
and variety of people, the eccentric town -

We'll come to know it very well. But right now, we catch
suggestive glimpses of STONE RAMPARTS WITH CANNONS then

a TOWN SQUARE upon which we pass

A JAIL; an INFIRMARY; an INN; a GALLOWS; a FLAG-MAKER'S; a
BLACKSMITH.

On the hill, we see what used to be the GOVERNOR'S MANSION.

And beyond that: A GREAT HOUSE IN THE COLONIAL STYLE: a CHURCH,
complete with MINARETS AND ONION DOME, glinting gold in the sun.

High above that, what we may recognise as an OBSERVATORY.

PARROTS alight on roofs; so do JACKDAWS, MYNAH BIRDS, PIGEONS.

Lowe and Fletch are led past ETHEL JELBERT, an ancient flag-maker, sitting on her stone stoop, blithely hand-stitching a TERRIFYING DEATH'S HEAD onto a black flag.

FLETCH

This is the kingdom of a madman.

LOWE

Then hold your tongue, or the mad man
will have it.

They pass the INN. THE SIGN outside reads "the LLANDOGER TROW". Outside, prostitutes linger: WOMEN young and old: some very pretty RENT BOYS, hookers of UNCERTAIN GENDER.

Finally, Lowe and Fletch come to a halt outside

THE INFIRMARY

Mersault and Jest unlock their cuffs and shove them inside.

EXT./INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

- up a flight of cool stone steps to -

INT. INFIRMARY - WARD - DAY

- what is recognizably a HOSPITAL WARD, albeit rough and ready. Sick and injured pirates in twenty beds.

An AGED, EMACIATED MAN is cleaning the decks of the infirmary as he would the deck of a ship.

He lurches on an UNGAINLY WOODEN LEG that bites painfully into the flesh of his stump. He wears his beard braided and plaited; its wispy end reaches his navel.

He steps forward, offering a hand.

BILLY

Billy No-Mates. Carpenter and
surgeon.

We'll get to know him better - but right now, Fletch casts him a SCARED, PITEOUS LOOK as they pass *en route* to -

- a HEAVY WOODEN DOOR at the end of the ward. Behind which is

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

- a small room. A cell, really. A single window with open wooden shutters overlooking the square.

On the bed lies Benedict Nightingale.

MERSAULT

All yours, *mes ami*. *Que Dieu guide votre main.*

He gives them an ironic salute - and walks away, leaving Lowe and Fletch alone with the patient.

They exchange a long, apprehensive glance.

FLETCH

What do we do?

Lowe checks Nightingale's pulse and temperature. Not good.

LOWE

I don't know.

FLETCH

But you always know what to do.

LOWE

Then today must stand as an exception.

FLETCH

How so?

LOWE

I have to keep Mr Nightingale alive or Mr Vane will cut my throat. But I can't allow Mr Vane to cut my throat until I've retrieved and destroyed Mr Nightingale's scarlet logbook.

FLETCH

I see.

Another beat. Fletch's brain working like a steam engine.

FLETCH (CONT'D)

So you're not really a physician, then?

SURGEON

Oh, I am that. But granted, it's
not all I am.

And on Fletch's unconcealed awe -

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HOUSE - DAY

Nenna and Vane step into the Great House. Nenna with an OIL-CLOTH PARCEL tucked under her arm.

They wait in the GREAT HALL until -

SELIMA EL SHARAD enters - an Arabian woman of breathtaking poise and elegance, very finely dressed.

SELIMA

You collected the fragments?

Vane carefully empties his bag upon the table: SHATTERED AND MANGLED BITS OF CLOCK - FACE, MECHANISM, GLASS.

Selima examines them with an index finger. Distaste on her face. They're useless.

SELIMA (CONT'D)

The Commodore won't be amused. He trusted this assignment to you, Charles because it's important to him above all things.

VANE

Nightingale destroyed the clock and sought to murder himself. Nothing More could be done.

NENNA

We did find this.

She passes the oil-cloth parcel. Selima sets it down on a side-table and unwraps it, revealing THE SCARLET LOG BOOK. Charred, but essentially intact.

NENNA (CONT'D)

I saved what I could.

Selima examines the damage, then opens the book to reveal

COLUMNS OF WHAT APPEAR TO BE RANDOM NUMBERS AND ARCAINE SYMBOLS.

VANE

I could discern no meaning to the contents.

SELIMA

You're not supposed to, Charles. It's a cipher.

(then)

I'm afraid you've let the Commodore down. Very badly.

Vane silently fumes - as she pins them on the chilliness of her gaze. Then dismisses them with a regal nod.

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE TOWN - DAY

Vane and Nenna stride towards town. Vane boiling with rage.

VANE

What I don't understand is - who died and made her Queen?

NENNA

When you learn to do what she can do, perhaps the Commodore will remember that you're his favourite.

VANE

There are services she can provide I'll never be able to compete with.

Nenna laughs.

VANE (CONT'D)

She'll seek to embarrass me for not capturing the Clockmaker alive.

NENNA

He's alive.

VANE

For the moment.

NENNA

Then, if he should die -

VANE

What?

NENNA

Give that failure a face - and make sure it's not yours.

A moment. Then VANE smiles... and KISSES HER.

And after he's kissed her, he claps her shoulder like a comrade.

A beat. Then she claps his shoulder in return. And strides off.

He watches her for a moment, then heads to the infirmary.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Lowe and Fletch attend to Nightingale: take his pulse, mop his brow. A candle BURNS TAR, fills the room with "cleansing" fumes.

They freeze - as Vane ENTERS. Watching them. A wolf in the room.

VANE
You. With me.
(to Fletch)
You stay here.

Out on Lowe's expression.

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE TOWN / GREAT HOUSE - DAY

Lowe follows Vane up the hill - through the town - to the DOOR OF THE GREAT HOUSE

INT. GREAT HOUSE - DAY

Up the SWEEPING STAIRCASE - along ENDLESS CORRIDORS - rococo, hung with fine paintings and rich tapestries.

Lowe is nervous, watchful.

Finally, Vane knocks on DOUBLE DOORS, then leads Lowe into

INT. BLACKBEARD'S MUSEUM - DAY

The light in here is slow, rich and golden. The room is filled with BRASS INSTRUMENTS: astrolabes, armillary spheres, astrariums. With Greek, Roman and Egyptian statues. With maps and globes. With bell jars. With preserved exotic creatures - with infinitely creepy Medieval automata.

In the centre of the room

BLACKBEARD

stands in a corona of golden light. Towering and
Mephistopholean. Contemplating those posed, FLAYED CADAVERS.

And those many, many TICKING CLOCKS.

BLACKBEARD

Please allow me to introduce myself

Lowe hesitates in the doorway. Overwhelmed. And very scared.

FADE TO:

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The REMAINS OF THE PETREL'S CREW are gathered in the sunlight, Lester at their head. He's unbowed, his men blinking and anxious -

- as a VERY FINE GENTLEMAN approaches: a swaggering, handsome figure we'll come to know as STEDE BONNET.

He watches the Petrel's crew for a moment, then nods for his pirates to THROW FRESH FRUIT to them.

The filthy, starving men hesitate. Then - upon Bonnet's silent assurance - they fall upon the ripe fruit and hungrily devour it.

All of them EXCEPT RICHARD LESTER. Bonnet catches his eye, then turns to the famished sailors.

BONNET

So - who among you would stand with us
as free men?

LESTER

None of us, sir.

BONNET

None of you? Not a one?

LESTER

We stand before you loyal to the King.

BONNET

"We"?!
(to sailors)

Always, "we", when the currency is lives,
blood, sinew and bone. Never "we" where
the currency is... well, *currency*.

He nods a command and pirates quickly step forth - manhandle Lester - throw A NOOSE AROUND HIS NECK - and HOIST LESTER OVER THE GALLOWS.

He hangs there - choking - slowly spinning - supporting his weight on the very tip of his toes.

The men stop eating. Stand there and stare. Aghast.

BONNET (CONT'D)

Who are you to speak for these men?

LESTER

Their captain.

BONNET

By whose authority?

(to sailors)

Did you *choose* this man?

A baffled silence - of *course* not.

BONNET (CONT'D)

This fellow says you belong to the King. But how many of you were pressed into service? Stolen from your sweethearts, your wives, your children - at the conceit of a master who demanded but never earned your blood loyalty? Well, damn them. Damn your captain, and damn your King.

He paces the ranks - meets men eye-to-eye.

BONNET (CONT'D)

They call us pirates. But the only difference between them and us? They rob the poor under cover of law - and we rob the rich under cover of nothing but our resolution.

CUTTING BETWEEN: Stede - the perplexed sailors - and Richard Lester, slowly strangling to death.

BONNET (CONT'D)

As pirates, none of you shall earn less than twenty times what he was paid by the crown ... if he was paid at all. You'll die free and live rich.

(broad grin)

It may be a short life, but dear God above, boys... it's joyous.

His eyes shine with glee. A man in love with his life.

BONNET (CONT'D)

Any among you who'd join us, let him raise his right hand and step forward. As to the rest? Damn you for a jackass.

A long wait. Then - making a show of reluctance, and avoiding Lester's outraged gaze - one by one sailors SLOWLY raise their RIGHT HANDS... and shuffle forth.

Leaving Lester alone. Hanging there. Choking.

BONNET (CONT'D)
Comfortable, Captain?

Bonnet plants a boot in Lester's ass - and kicks. Making Lester SWING LIKE A PENDULUM.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BLACKBEARD'S MUSEUM - DAY

NAUTICAL CLOCKS IN BLACKBEARD'S MUSEUM tick resonantly as Lowe crosses the parquet floor - Vane at his heel - and waits.

Blackbeard shows Lowe his profile as he considers the clocks.

BLACKBEARD
Thomas Lowe, is it? Ship's physician?

LOWE
Yes, sir.

BLACKBEARD
Mr Vane suggested I meet you. He knows it's always a great solace to me, to spend time in the company of a book-learned fellow.

Lowe is aware of VANE'S COLD EYES over his shoulder. And Blackbeard, scrutinizing him.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)
What drives a man to become a physician?

LOWE
(re: flayed corpses)
An interest in the mechanism of the human body.

BLACKBEARD
Is that what the human body is? A mechanism?

LOWE
In many respects. In most.

BLACKBEARD
That doesn't strike me as a very Godly proclamation. Do you accept God, Mr. Lowe?

LOWE
I fear Him. But I've no love for him.

BLACKBEARD

Why ever not?

LOWE

Because He wishes me to fear Him.

A moment.

BLACKBEARD

Now that... is a splendid answer.

LOWE

And you, Commodore? Do you call yourself a Christian?

BLACKBEARD

Why would I not?

LOWE

Because many legends cluster about you, sir. Not all of them flattering.

BLACKBEARD

Legends such as?

LOWE

You're the Devil. You spit upon the cross at sunset, and feast upon the flesh and marrow of infants.

Blackbeard breaks into a GREAT, SATANIC SMILE.

BLACKBEARD

Here's my creed: God is a clockmaker. He wound Creation up - and now sits back and watches it unwind. Whether to His pleasure or otherwise, is any man's guess.

LOWE

That's a cold theology.

BLACKBEARD

It was Newton's before it was mine. And he's an ingenious fellow, or so I hear.

LOWE

Is there room for the Devil in it?

BLACKBEARD

Of course! The Devil is an Englishman.

LOWE

Are you not an Englishman, then?

BLACKBEARD

No longer.

LOWE

Then what?

BLACKBEARD

A fellow with no wish to be governed, inspected, indoctrinated, preached at, taxed, stamped and measured, licensed, harassed, imprisoned, judged, condemned, hanged or shot.

(beat)

They don't fear me because I'm the devil, Mr Lowe ... but because I've cast out the devil: that depraved distinction between rich and poor, great and small, master and valet. Governor and governed.

LOWE

But I'd thought you king of this island.

BLACKBEARD

This island has no king, nor wants one.

LOWE

But you are its leader?

BLACKBEARD

I serve at the pleasure of my people - until it's no longer their pleasure.

Lowe turns to the skinless cadavers.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Do you like them?

LOWE

Very much. How did you acquire them?

BLACKBEARD

They're the flayed cadavers of men who betrayed me.

LOWE

Then I fear that someone close is lying to you, Commodore.

BLACKBEARD

And what makes you say so?

LOWE

They're made of wax.

A huge, infernal laugh.

BLACKBEARD

Stolen from an Italian Merchantman en route to Geneva. Cast from the life. Or the death, I suppose.

A moment between them: the first, faint flickers of friendship.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Mr. Nightingale, the Clockmaker. He has knowledge that I very much covet. But distressingly, it seems he sought to murder himself before I could take it for my own.

Somehow, Lowe meets Blackbeard's gaze.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

We have his cipher. But ciphers are troublesome beasts. Consequently, Mr. Nightingale is denied permission to die. And since our nation finds itself wanting a physician, the obligation to keep breath in his body must fall to you.

LOWE

And if I were to refuse?

BLACKBEARD

I shall be obliged to see Hell visited upon you.

LOWE

I don't fear death, Commodore.

Blackbeard shoots out a MIGHTY HAND - GRABS LOWE'S THROAT - AND SQUEEZES - Lowe choking, struggling -

BLACKBEARD

If Mr Nightingale dies, I'm afraid death is what you'll soon be pleading for. And it's exactly what you won't be granted.

Blackbeard releases him. Lowe drops to the floor. Blackbeard grinning down at him with malevolent glee.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Not all those unflattering legends about me are untrue.

He turns away, meaning Lowe is dismissed.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY

The Reaver's QUARTERMASTER leads the PETREL'S CREW into what used to be the Governor's Mansion -

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY

- and which now is a SQUATTED, CHAOTIC MESS. The dry-land equivalent of a pirate ship.

QUARTERMASTER

This is what you call home while you're ashore. Sleep where you will.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

We follow bewildered sailors as they spread through the mansion - through THE BEDROOMS - THE BALLROOM - THE KITCHEN - THE LIBRARY. Exploring its baffling chaos: bedding and hammocks and swords and axes and bottles and barrels and crates and clothing. Its hookers, its many pirates. Its smoke and its noise and its smells.

Some in evident fear. Others in tentative wonder.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE TOWN - DAY

Lowe and Vane head back to the infirmary. Vane with a glint of triumph in his eye. Lowe with a cold glint of fear in his.

Then LOWE STOPS. Vane shoves his shoulder: *hurry the fuck up.*

But Lowe shrugs him off, frowning. Distantly off screen, he can hear the SOUND OF A DREADFUL STRUGGLE. It's coming from

THE INFIRMARY!

Lowe curses - breaks into a run -

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

- sprints down the ward - NIGHTINGALE'S SCREAMS louder now -

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Lowe bursts in -- finds Fletch struggling with Nightingale, who's in seizure - spasming - howling - bellowing -

Lowe joins him in pinning Nightingale to the bed -- until the thrashing finally stops.

Vane arrives. Shoves aside the rubbernecking Billy No-Mates and stands in the doorway, entertained by their plight.

Then he wanders away. Leaving Lowe and Fletch alone.

FLETCH

(mutters)

Mr. Lowe.... can he even be saved?

LOWE

If he can't, we're dead men. And not prettily.

FLETCH

But his heart -

LOWE

Beats. So please - let me think. Just let me think.

Out on Lowe. Looking down at the dying man on the bed.

FADE TO:

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

INT. INFIRMARY - SUNRISE

Lowe steps away from Nightingale's bed. He's unshaven. Weary. Picture of a man who hasn't slept all night.

Fletch is asleep on the floor. Lowe moves so as not to wake him.

Vane slumbers in a chair in the corner. He opens a silent, watchful eye -

- as Lowe creeps past. To open the HEAVY WOODEN SHUTTERS. Early morning light floods the room.

Lowe gazes out. Considers the silence of the morning. His gaze sweeps the town, the port, the bay and finally settles on a

CRESCENT OF WHITE SAND

A glorious beach, palm edged. On which a BEARDED MAN in A RAGGED RED COAT wades ashore from a row boat, carrying a brace of sardines.

He kneels at a stone barbecue set into the white sand. Guts the sardines, sets them to cook.

He's joined by A WOMAN - long, grey hair. A dress that, months or years before, would have been considered formal attire.

They sit together on the beach. An image of perfect contentment

BACK TO SCENE

Lowe turns to Vane. Who's unashamedly watching him.

VANE

A man has a right to live as he chooses.

Lowe is about to answer when

NIGHTINGALE ABRUPTLY SITS UP in bed - rigid and SCREAMING -

And BLEEDING HEAVILY FROM THE EYES.

CUT TO:

INT. PRISON CELL - BEFORE SUNRISE

Richard Lester JOLTS AWAKE in the semi-darkness. Wonders for a moment where the hell he is. Then scrambles to the corner at the sound of APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS. A KEY TURNING IN THE LOCK.

The door opens... and there's Stede Bonnet. A bit unsteady with drink. Bottle of wine in one hand.

BONNET
Morning. Drink?

LESTER
No. Am I to be hanged?

BONNET
Again? Well, yes -- I suppose so. If that's that what you'd like.

LESTER
So your republic is so free that an innocent man may choose his method of execution?

Bonnet gives him a look. *Seriously?*

BONNET
And to whose benefit would this execution be? To you, of course, there's immediate entry to the Kingdom of Heaven. To me, there's a wasted rope and a carcass to bury. All things considered, I'd rather send you home.

A beat. Home?

Playful eye contact. On Bonnet's part, anyway.

BONNET (CONT'D)
We do it often, Mr. Lester. We'll drop you on an island on the shipping lanes. You'll get picked up and make your way back to England.

LESTER
What would I have to do?

BONNET
Provide certain assistance.

LESTER

What manner of assistance? I'm still
the king's man.

BONNET

Well, I could still have you executed
- if you think that's what the king
would prefer.

Bonnet swings open the cell door. And waits.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - MORNING

Nightingale has slipped once more into unconsciousness.

Fletch finishes bathing the blood from his eyes -- then steps
back, freaked-out and exhausted.

Lowe lays a hand on Nightingale's brow -- puts an ear to his
cracked lips. Hears the shallow rattle of his breathing.

LOWE

Mr. Nightingale's circumstances are
changing. I need more supplies.
Medications. Remedies.

VANE

You believe there's a remedy for
this man's condition?

LOWE

I do.

A knowing look between Vane and Lowe. Then Vane breaks into a
BROAD, MOCKING GRIN.

VANE

Then I bow to your optimism.

He shoves Lowe through the door - then turns to Fletch. Draws
his rapier. Puts it to Fletch's heart. Just hard enough to
draw blood. It forms like the image of a rose on Fletch's
shirt.

Vane warns Fletch with a silent glare. Then sheaths his sword
and leaves, slamming the door behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRADING POST - MORNING

Vane and Lowe approach a LARGE WAREHOUSE near the port. Out front is AN AWNING. And under the awning, on barrels, are arranged - fruits, bread, food, clothing, sundry provisions.

Attending them is Kate.

KATE

You've lost your chains, I see.

LOWE

A number of them, yes.

She smiles. It's a smile designed by God to break the heart of a clever man. And now the conversation between them proceeds like a mating dance.

KATE

So how can I assist?

LOWE

I need some vessels in which to heat fresh water -

KATE

We've plenty of beer -

LOWE

No. I need water. And salt. Plus Ashes of burned leather, if available.

KATE

Distressingly, no.

LOWE

Milk?

KATE

No.

(off his expression)

It's a rare pirate who's given to keeping livestock.

LOWE

Do you have vinegar?

KATE

By the gallon.

LOWE

Leeches?

KATE

I know how they can be come by.

LOWE

Castor oil? Enough to induce a healthy vomit.

KATE

I have a little.

LOWE

Excellent.

KATE

Although this all comes at a price, naturally.

A moment.

LOWE

What kind of price?

KATE

You do have money, I presume?

LOWE

My ship was raided by pirates. I'm lucky to be in possession of my own teeth.

KATE

Then how do you expect to pay?

LOWE

I didn't. I'm here at Blackbeard's bidding.

KATE

Then Blackbeard gave you money?

LOWE

No.

KATE

Then how do you expect to find eighty pounds to pay me?

LOWE

Eighty *what*?!

KATE

Pounds.

LOWE

That's a year's wage!

KATE

To an honest man.

LOWE

For some castor oil and a little vinegar?!

KATE

This is an island. Certain commodities are in short supply.

LOWE

I need these things to save a man's life!

KATE

And thereby your own?

LOWE

Yes!

KATE

And there's the source of its worth. Even a spoonful of castor oil has great value... to a man who needs it to save his own skin.

LOWE

You do know, I presume, that this is usury?

KATE

I'd dispute that -

LOWE

You may consider me less than astonished.

KATE

I'd call it charity.

LOWE

I'd like to know how a human head can reconcile two such immoderately opposing concepts.

KATE

Well, it's elementary -

LOWE

Then I beg you to enlighten me.

KATE

The chances of you living long enough to repay me seem minimal at best. Ergo, I hope for but do not expect repayment. Thus, it may be considered charity.

Lowe laughs, delighted and outraged.

LOWE

They told me you were the Governor's daughter.

KATE

And so I was.

LOWE

Then where is the Governor?

KATE

He left. As did my mother and my sisters.

LOWE

And you - chose to remain?

KATE

As you can see.

LOWE

I can't help but wonder why?

She gives him the FULL WATTAGE OF THAT LOVELY SMILE.

KATE

To become a pirate.

LOWE

Then I congratulate you on your success.

She smiles, flattered and happy. She's lovely.

She leans down to dig out A LEDGER. Finds a page. Writes in it.

Lowe watches her with unabashed admiration. Then looks away as she turns the book for him to sign.

KATE

Sign here, please. And Welcome to New Providence.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOONER - MORNING

A two-masted schooner. A vast blue ocean. A percussive white sun. A CREW OF SIX, plus Bonnet and Lester.

Lester stands at the mast. Enjoying this transitory freedom.

LESTER

Where are we headed?

BONNET

Dead ahead!

Lester moves to the bow. Squints into the harsh sun.

Ahead of them lies THE WRECK OF THE SANTA MARIA: the very tip of her main-mast protruding from the deep ocean.

They pull alongside. Drop anchor.

Bonnet stands at the edge of the schooner. Looking down.

BONNET (CONT'D)

The Santa Maria. Spanish treasure ship. Floundered in heavy weather with the loss of all souls. She broke up. Down here is her treasure.

LESTER

And I'm expected to - what?

BONNET

Retrieve some of her gold.

Lester glances from Bonnet to the deep ocean.

LESTER

That's impossible.

BONNET

Oh, not at all!

(then)

It is however very, very difficult.

Lester stares at the ocean - then at the GRINNING PIRATES - the smirking, half-drunk Bonnet.

And back to the ocean. Glittering in the sun.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Fletch looks on in horror -- as NIGHTINGALE'S EYES OPEN. He reaches out a parched hand: *please. Help me. Please.*

Tearful, moved, Fletch takes the hand -- then leans in close, as Nightingale tries to speak: cracked words from a parched throat...

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOONER - OCEAN - DAY

Lester strips to the waist. Stands muscular and English-pale. Bonnet at his shoulder.

BONNET

If you're afraid -- they do say
it's a pleasant way to die.
Although how on Earth they could
know is beyond my capacity to
imagine.

LESTER

Do I look afraid to you?

BONNET

No.

LESTER

Good.

And LESTER DIVES.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

He swims down. And down. The water turning from blue to purple, from purple to velvety darkness. Which is when he sees

TREASURE CHESTS! Sitting exposed on the WHITE SAND. Crawling with CRABS and STARFISH. ANEMONES wave like spectral fingers.

Far below. Out of reach.

Lester spins in the water, looks up.

THE SUN is a PALE BALL high above the water. The hull of the schooner a cigar-shaped shadow

Lester's in agony. It's too far down. And he knows it. But he pushes himself. Swims down a little more -- a LITTLE MORE -- and still a LITTLE MORE.

He REACHES OUT - straining past the point of human endurance.

He can't do it! He can't hold on! A CASCADE OF BUBBLES escapes his mouth and in a panic, he spins... swims for the surface - his agony written on his face.

It's so far! He's NOT GOING TO MAKE IT: he knows it. And we know it.

But he keeps swimming, anyway. Towards the pale sun.

EXT. SCHOONER - DAY

Bonnet waits, squinting, watching sunlight reflect on unbroken water. Until at last, he turns to his crew. More disheartened than he'd care to admit.

BONNET

Let's take her home, shall we?

Pirates spring into action, preparing the ship for departure: trimming sails, hauling in the anchor.

Bonnet is about to pitch his bottle into the ocean when he sees -

- RICHARD LESTER BREAKING THE SURFACE, GASPING FOR AIR.

A smile of admiration spreads across Bonnet's face. All the way to his beautiful eyes.

TIME CUT TO:

Pirates haul Lester in with boathooks: a crippled, almost boneless thing. He lies on deck, gasping for air.

Bonnet stands near. Gazes into the water.

LESTER

It's there. I saw it. I could almost touch it.

BONNET

I know. Annoying, isn't it?

CUT TO:

INT. SELIMA'S STUDY - DAY

The same slow light. The light of a fine library. Books without number.

Selima sits at her desk, pouring over NIGHTINGALE'S SCARLET LOG BOOK - referring at the same time to any one of a DOZEN BOOKS, SCROLLS AND CODICES she has scattered about - in English, Latin and Arabic.

She stops. Straightens in her seat. Elegant and lovely.

BLACKBEARD stands in the shadows behind her. A slash of red in the darkness. He's been watching her.

SELIMA

The cipher is after a French design, I believe.

BLACKBEARD

Can it be broken?

SELIMA

Perhaps - eventually. But it may take many months. Years, even. And I'm not persuaded it should even be done.

He waits. She keeps her back to him.

SELIMA (CONT'D)

Until today, you've been an exasperation to England: an antagonist, not a rival. But this -
(the scarlet logbook)
- will make you a rival; a greater threat to their power than can be permitted. You risk leaving them no alternative but gather a fleet and annihilate you.

BLACKBEARD

Do you believe for a moment that I fear England? Or Spain, for that matter? Portugal? Any nation?

SELIMA

I fear that you fear too little.

BLACKBEARD

Then be assured: I fear just enough. So please. Break the cipher.

SELIMA

I may choose not to.

BLACKBEARD

But why would you?

SELIMA

From love of the republic you created - and dismay that your conceit may see it destroyed.

A moment. Amusement in his eyes.

BLACKBEARD

Would you like to know something about yourself?

SELIMA

Very much.

She waits. She's still yet to look at him.

BLACKBEARD

Your beauty pales beside your genius. And your beauty is very considerable. But you live for such puzzles and enigmas as will exert your wits. There never was a riddle you could stand to leave undeciphered... Mr Nightingale's code is no exception.

A long, long beat. At the end of which, SHE SMILES.

SELIMA

The cipher is rather beautiful. Would you like to see?

This is an invitation for Blackbeard to lean over her shoulder and closely consider the coded book.

SELIMA (CONT'D)

There's no repeating sequence. Each figure seems to appear with a frequency of about one per cent...

A TABLEAU: framed and lit like an Old Master: the golden light: the beautiful woman seated. The uniformed man in the elaborate red brocade.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Vane and Lowe enter the infirmary.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

They cross the bright, clean ward. Their heels click.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

They enter the private chamber... and freeze for a beat.

Fletch is at the bedside, looking at them - wide-eyed in horror.

Then he breaks the stasis - steps back from the bed as if burned.

Vane approaches Nightingale. TAKES THE PULSE IN HIS NECK.

A long, unbearably tense moment. Then

VANE

How long has he been dead?

Lowe doesn't respond. Nothing to say.

Vane DRAWS HIS RAPIER.

Before he can bring it to bear, Lowe has STEPPED INTO IT - batted it away with his forearm -

Lowe HEAD-BUTTS VANE, disarms him, rams his head into the wall - fighting fast and dirty -

Vane staggers back, into the ward - draws his pistol -

Lowe slams the HEAVY WOODEN DOOR - as A BULLET SLAMS INTO IT.

Hurriedly, Lowe BARS THE DOOR. As it's hit by ANOTHER BULLET.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Vane bellows at the door.

VANE

I know you poisoned him, Surgeon!

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Lowe hurries to the window

HIS POV

Vane's shouting is bringing PIRATES RUNNING to the infirmary

BACK TO SCENE

As Lowe SECURES THE WOODEN SHUTTERS against the window - then presses his back to the wall as -

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

- Vane draws another flintlock - PIRATES surge into the infirmary
- read the situation - produce weapons

VANE

(bellows at door)

The punishment for failing to save him, that's one thing. The punishment for murdering him - that'll be quite another.

He grins as TWENTY PIRATES AIM FLINTLOCK PISTOLS.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Lowe and Fletch press their backs to the wall as A VOLLEY OF BULLETS RAINS INTO THE DOOR.

Lowe exchanges a look with poor, terrified Fletch.

What the fuck do they do now?

FADE TO:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Lowe and Fletch shove the heavy bed - complete with corpse - against the door -

EXT. NEW PROVIDENCE TOWN - SQUARE - DAY

Hearing the commotion, a VAST BULL OF A MAN, emerges from the blacksmith's. This is Mr. SMITH. And he's carrying A SLEDGE HAMMER.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Lowe passes Vane's rapier to Fletch.

LOWE

The window's our weakest spot: defend it, if you please.

FLETCH

With this?

LOWE

What do you think?

FLETCH

I never fought a man. Not with a sword. Or a gun neither. I punched a boy once. Well, I say a boy. My sister.

But he stands at the shutters anyway - sword in hand - as -

Lowe begins to SEARCH NIGHTINGALE'S BODY, patting him down as if looking for contraband - *Come on! Come on!*

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

The pirates step aside, allowing passage to Mr. Smith.

Vane nods a command. And Mr. SMITH SMASHES THE HAMMER INTO THE DOOR.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Lowe gapes at the door, quivering in its frame: Holy fucking *shit*. What was *that*?

INTERCUT LOWE/MR. SMITH

As Lowe searches Nightingale's body ever more frantically - opening NIGHTINGALE'S MOUTH and ROOTING AROUND INSIDE - finding nothing - wiping hands on Nightingale's waistcoat -

FLETCH

What are you looking for?

LOWE

A way to save your skin and mine, Mr. Fletch.

Bed and door vibrate with EVERY MIGHTY BLOW OF THE HAMMER - with every kick of Mr. Smith's great, flat foot.

Lowe reaches Nightingale's BOOTS - finds ONE OF THE HEELS IS LOOSE. Aha! He removes the heel - finds it hollow - empties it on the bed. It contains rings, pearls, jewelry.

Useless.

He looks up to the ceiling. The SOUND OF MORE HAMMERING. He curses to himself, keeps searching.

EXT. INFIRMARY - ROOF - DAY

PIRATES have gathered at the edge of the roof: they're hammering in a SPIKE, to which they attach a rope... the other end of which wraps round NENNA'S WAIST.

Nenna rappels off the roof - swings - hits the window shutters with both feet - then removes TWO FLINTLOCK PISTOLS from her bandolier and FIRES -

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Bullets hit the shutters - which splinter -

Lowe checks Nightingale's ears. Hair. Ever more frustrated.

LOWE

Give me your sword.

The hammer slams once more into the door.

FLETCH

I think I may have need of it.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Mr. Smith SWINGS THE HAMMER - and the DOOR FRACTURES down the center like a bone - showing its white heart

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Lowe manhandles Nightingale into a sitting position - removing his WAISTCOAT, spreading it on the floor like a map.

The MUZZLE OF A MUSKET intrudes into the room - pokes through the broken door - DIRECTLY AT LOWE'S HEAD.

LOWE

Mr. Fletch! If you please!

Fletch CLUMSILY STRIKES OUT with the rapier - hits the BARREL of the musket - knocking it askew as it fires. The bullet buries itself in the wall inches from Lowe's head.

But Lowe's too busy to notice - picking at the waistcoat's stitching with his teeth.

ANOTHER MUSKET pokes through the door: Fletch strikes out: the bullet PARTS HIS LONG HAIR as it passes.

FLETCH

My hair's afire!

LOWE

Your arse will be afire if you don't let me concentrate -

He rips the lining from the waistcoat... revealing a SQUARE OF SILK... on which is written COLUMNS OF NUMBERS AND FIGURES

Lowe flattens out the silk and kneels to READ IT: Scanning first along, then down the columns -

FLETCH

Mr. Lowe, sir!

LOWE

Quiet please, Mr. Fletch.

BULLETS slam into the shutters -

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Pirates line up behind Mr. Smith, arrayed with pistols and swords.

Vane is enjoying himself immensely -

VANE

Drag him out alive! I'll have him wear
his privvy member for a bonnet.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Fletch cowers under the bed as the SHUTTERS EXPLODE INWARDS - and
NENNA SCRAMBLES THROUGH THE BREACH -

Lowe stands and ELBOWS HER IN THE FACE - sends her tumbling out
the window - then kneels once more, grabbing up the silk square;
reading --

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Finally, Mr. Smith smashes the door to kindling. Pirates join him
in HAULING THE BED FROM THE ROOM, still with Nightingale's corpse
on it.

Then they SURGE INTO THE SMALL ROOM -- AND FALL SILENT

THEIR POV

LOWE STANDING THERE - in an epic stance - silk square bundled up
in one hand - in the other hand the CANDLE WITH ITS NAKED FLAME.
And a lunatic glint in his eye.

LOWE

Get me Blackbeard. Or by God his
treasure's up in smoke - and he'll wear
your guts for garters.

(to Vane)

Or perhaps a bonnet.

And on the pirates' stunned reaction, we

FADE TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Blackbeard heads to the infirmary. His stride is massive.
Imperious. He leaves a silence before and aft.

He enters the infirmary -

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

- and strides along the silent ward - through a gauntlet of sick-beds and uneasy pirates.

Blackbeard and Vane make eye contact: a silent question. A defiant answer.

Then, through the SHATTERED DOOR -

BLACKBEARD'S POV

Tom Lowe - backed into a corner - surrounded by bristling pistols and swords. Fletch cowering at his feet.

The silk square still dangling above the candle's open flame.

INT. INFIRMARY - PRIVATE CHAMBER - DAY

Blackbeard steps into the room.

BLACKBEARD

So, poor old Mr. Nightingale had the poor manners to die.

LOWE

He did.

BLACKBEARD

And yet, Mr. Lowe, you seem heartily disinclined to join him.

LOWE

Oh, I am that, sir. Most heartily disinclined.

BLACKBEARD

And here's me thinking you had no fear of death?

LOWE

No fear of it - but no impatience for it, neither.

BLACKBEARD

What'll that be, in your hand?

LOWE

Your winnings, Commodore.

BLACKBEARD

I'm lost, Mr. Lowe.

Lowe shows blackbeard the square of silk - crawling with numbers and arcane symbols.

LOWE

The key to Mr. Nightingale's cipher.

BLACKBEARD

And if I suffer you to keep breathing you'll furnish me with it, I suppose?

LOWE

Oh, very gladly.

BLACKBEARD

Capital. But for one quandary.

LOWE

Being?

BLACKBEARD

Once you've given me the key, what's to stop me stringing you up by the ballocks and letting my boys hang draw and quarter you with blunted knives?

LOWE

An excellent question, well posed.

BLACKBEARD

To which your answer is - ?

LOWE

This.

Lowe SETS THE FLAME TO THE SILK and STEPS BACK WITH A FLOURISH -- as it BURNS IN THE AIR like a magic trick. In a second, it's gone!

Pirates react - Blackbeard silences them with a single offhand gesture.

BLACKBEARD

Now... that smacks of incivility.

LOWE

Then you misread my intention, for which I apologize.

BLACKBEARD

But the key is no more - which means I have to wrack my brains contriving new ways to slaughter you.

LOWE

You could. Certainly, it would accord with your notoriety as a barbarian and a maniac. But it would be injudicious.

BLACKBEARD

And how so?

LOWE

Because I've taken the liberty of transferring the contents of poor Mr. Nightingale's brain into mine.

A long beat - as Blackbeard works it through, not without some evident glee.

BLACKBEARD

You memorized the cipher?

LOWE

Indeed.

BLACKBEARD

All of it?

LOWE

Oh yes. Give me life, and I'll happily decipher Mr. Nightingale's log book for you.

BLACKBEARD

You'd betray your king? Your country?

LOWE

In a heartbeat.

BLACKBEARD

And all for a little more time on earth? Because that's all you'd be buying yourself. Just a little time.

LOWE

Show me a man on his death-bed who wouldn't trade all his riches for just one more second of it.

Lowe stands there. Blackbeard's bright gaze lasers into his soul.

BLACKBEARD

Whether you'll allow it or not, Mr. Lowe, you have something of the pirate about you.

LOWE

I'll take that as a commendation.

BLACKBEARD

Take it as you damn well please.

A moment between them. By no means unfriendly.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Follow me, please. Feel free to bring
your pet.

A beat. Then Lowe kicks Fletch to his feet. And they follow
Blackbeard - past the blue, incandescent eyes of Vane. The
gauntlet of flabbergasted pirates -

- and out, into the open air of New Providence.

FADE TO:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. BLACKBEARD'S PALACE - DAY

Lowe and Fletch are led at sword-point to a doorway on the upper floor.

Doors are flung open - revealing a SUMPTUOUS BEDCHAMBER.

BLACKBEARD
Your prison, Mr. Lowe.

LOWE
I've been in worse.

BLACKBEARD
Now... that's a curious claim for a man of the king to make to a pirate.

Lowe's face perfectly innocent.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)
Because it does rather beg the question, doesn't it -- which prisons have been worse, exactly?

LOWE
Most of them. May I?

BLACKBEARD
Please.

Lowe steps over the threshold. Followed by the timid Fletch.

INT. BLACKBEARD'S PALACE - LOWE'S ROOM - DAY

Fletch looks around in awe, having never seen such opulence.

Lowe stands with Blackbeard. Crosses his arms and waits... until Selima enters, carrying the SCARLET LOG BOOK.

Lowe's eyes flit to it. Then back to Selima.

BLACKBEARD
(to Selima)
This is the physician of whom we spoke. Although I'm beginning to suspect the word "physician" doesn't begin to describe half his talents.

Selima pins Lowe on her arctic, imperial disdain. Then passes him the logbook.

SELIMA

If you provide a false translation,
I'll know it - and the Commodore
will punish you accordingly.

Lowe lays the logbook down. Flicks through encrypted pages.

LOWE

I presume you have a notion of what
this all signifies?

SELIMA

Do you?

LOWE

I can only conclude this book
contains the secret of determining
Longitude at sea.

Selima and Blackbeard exchange a glance. Lowe doesn't miss this.

BLACKBEARD

So it does. Do what's asked of you,
Mr. Lowe, and you'll have played no
small part in establishing New
Providence as the most powerful
little nation on Earth.

Out on Lowe's deeply ambiguous reaction.

CUT TO:

INT. LLANDOGER TROW - DAY

Among the general pirate revelry - which includes those new pirates, the crew of the Petrel - Nenna and Vane sit and drink in sullen silence.

NENNA

I'm going to skewer that asshole.

VANE

After I've cut his member off and
choked him on it.

A beat. They chink cups. Drink.

CUT TO:

INT. BLACKBEARD'S PALACE - OUTLOOK TOWER - DAY

Blackbeard enters. Finds Selima surveying the town on a HUGE CAMERA OBSUCRA - a cinema screen in the form of a large, stone table. It shows New Providence.

This is an 18th century live feed. With Selima as Big Brother

BLACKBEARD

All those moving dots, eh? Like flies.

SELIMA

Would you really feel any pity if one of them stopped moving?

BLACKBEARD

Oh yes.

SELIMA

Why?

BLACKBEARD

Because I love them dearly.

SELIMA

You love the *idea* of them.

BLACKBEARD

Isn't that the same thing?

SELIMA

Not at all.

(then)

Tom Lowe. Be vigilant. The English are much to be feared in games of this nature. Deception suits the English soul.

BLACKBEARD

To which I say -- "thank God I was born an Englishman".

She warns him with a look.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Marry me.

SELIMA

(with a smile)

How many times must I say no?

BLACKBEARD

Ten times a thousand. And a thousand times after that.

SELIMA

Then a hundred thousand times: no.

BLACKBEARD

Is it because I lack the poetic spirit? Because there's a poet in here somewhere. I contain multitudes.

He walks to the door. Stops. Turns with a flourish.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

"Had I but world enough, and time..."

She waits - eyebrow raised.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Te-tum te-tum. Et cetera.

The eyebrow raises a little further.

BLACKBEARD (CONT'D)

Well, granted. The poet may have said it better. But by God, he didn't mean it more.

And now she gives him a beautiful, indulgent, gloriously loving smile.

He soaks it up like sunlight, and is gone.

FADE TO:

INT. BLACKBEARD'S PALACE - OUTSIDE LOWE'S ROOM - EVENING

PIRATE GUARDS are posted at the door. The shadows lengthen.

INT. BLACKBEARD'S PALACE - LOWE'S ROOM - EVENING

The sun sets, trapping the HUNCHED LOWE in a ROSE-TINTED, CREPUSCULAR RAY - quill in one hand. Painstakingly decoding the logbook.

Fletch wanders, inspecting the room: the wonderful paintings, the ornate bed. He glances out the window. Sees MORE GUARDS posted there.

Then approaches Lowe for what - to judge by Lowe's reaction - must be the ninetieth time this evening.

FLETCH

So Blackbeard must keep you alive until you've decoded those pages.

LOWE

Indeed he must.

FLETCH

Because they contain the secret of calculating Longitude at Sea.

LOWE

Indeed they do.

FLETCH

And what's that?

Lowe scowls at him. *Really?*

FLETCH (CONT'D)

Well, how am I supposed to know?

Lowe keeps scowling. Then sets down the pen - and points to a VERY BEAUTIFUL, VERY HEAVY GLOBE on a mahogany stand

LOWE

Fetch me that.

Fletch does. Weaving under its weight. Placing it on a nearby table.

Lowe stands, addresses the globe. Fascinated by it.

LOWE (CONT'D)

The wealth of empires travels by sea. But the sea is vast and ships are small. Once a mariner loses sight of the land -

(places a finger in the vast Pacific Ocean)

- he can do little more than guess where on the face of the Earth he may be. For this reason, ships follow the Latitudes -

His finger traces LINES OF LATITUDE. They run HORIZONTALLY ROUND THE GLOBE, like belts.

LOWE (CONT'D)

- which can easily be determined by
the height of the sun at noon.

His finger traces the SHIPPING ROUTE FROM NEW PROVIDENCE TO ENGLAND: it goes up - up - up. Then along at a right-angle.

LOWE (CONT'D)

- but this makes them easy prey for
pirates to plunder.

FLETCH'S GAZE flits to Lowe - who's taking an unexpected satisfaction this demonstration. As if we're glimpsing the man he might otherwise have been.

FLETCH

What has this to do with clocks?

Lowe gives an approving look. Good question.

LOWE

To determine his bearings, a
mariner needs to know both Latitude
and Longitude -

He traces THE LINES OF LONGITUDE - which run VERTICALLY from pole to pole. Like pinstripes, or the segments of an orange.

LOWE (CONT'D)

- which is no easy task. One way
would be to know the exact time in
two places at once: both aboard
ship ... and at home. In London,
say.

FLETCH

How so?

LOWE

Say it's precisely mid-day at his
location.

He places his finger on A line latitude towards the top third of the globe.

LOWE (CONT'D)

He then consults a clock which
gives him the time at home. Say
it's only 10 a.m. in London. That
gives him a time difference of two
hours. Which translates to thirty
degrees of East Longitude -

With his other hand, he TRACES THE LINE OF 30 DEGREES EAST LONGITUDE - running DOWN from the South Pole.

LOWE (CONT'D)

Putting his ship... exactly here.

His FINGERS MEET in the OCEAN JUST SOUTH OF GREENLAND. And he smiles to himself. Well satisfied.

Fletch nods - seeing it. Eager as a puppy.

LOWE (CONT'D)

But for this to work, the mariner has to *know for sure* it's 10 a.m. in London. But clocks can't be relied upon: they speed up, or slow down. Thus, whoever invents a clock that *doesn't* speed up or slow down while at sea has invented a way to determine Longitude... and whoever can do that controls the oceans of the world.

FLETCH

And that's what's in the Logbook?

LOWE

Apparently so. Precise instructions as to the design and construction of Mr Nightingale's Nautical Chronometer.

FLETCH

And once you've decoded it, Blackbeard will kill you. And control the oceans, to boot.

LOWE

You've certainly developed a grasp on the rudiments of the situation.

Fletch returns to the window. Looks out. The town, placid at night. The black ocean. The shadowy forest across the bay.

FLETCH

But if you don't decode it -

LOWE

Then it's the gallows dance for us both. If we're fortunate.

FLETCH

Then why are we still here?

LOWE
I beg your pardon?

FLETCH
You have the Scarlet Log Book.
Let's destroy it and be gone.

LOWE
What's your haste?

FLETCH
I don't want to get my neck
stretched. Or stabbed through the
vitals, neither. Or have my eyes
torn out with hot pokers.

LOWE
There's work to be done, first. And
much to think about.

FLETCH
Such as?

LOWE
I have another job to do.

ANGLE ON Fletch's vexation.

FLETCH
What job?

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY

Lowe strides across the neat lawn. He passes TWO FRESHLY-
HANGED PIRATES dangling from A GALLOWS.

PULL BACK to reveal: from the enormous gallows dangle at
LEAST TWENTY DEAD MEN. Most of them not so freshly hanged.
But PIRATES. Every last one of them.

WOODES
Mr Lowe?

He turns. And there's Woodes Rogers.

WOODES (CONT'D)

There is another service you could
perform, should the chance ever
arise -

BACK TO PRESENT:

Lowe turns to Fletch. The gallows humor has left his eyes.
Instead, they burn with a quiet, passionate intensity: a
darkness at whose depths we have so far only guessed.

LOWE

I'm to kill Blackbeard. And return
his head to the Governor of
Jamaica.

MOVING CLOSER on LOWE'S INTENSE GAZE we

SMASH CUT TO:

END OF EPISODE

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