

PRETTY WHITE LIES
AND THE VELVETEEN UNDERTOW.

Draft Four.

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PERUSAL EXCERPT

PRETTY WHITE LIES AND THE VELVETEEN UNDERTOW.

THE CAST

FINIAN WAKE: A young Christian soldier who has never seen battle.

JOANNA WAKE: His bride.

CAPATIN FLIBBERTEEN SCRAGG - A mercenary merchant seaman.

PINCHER: A boy. Scragg's first mate and only crewman.

ORLANDO HARP: Commander in the Empire's army.

FLORENCIA LUSH: Commander in the Empire's army.

SEBASTION HARK: Commander in the Empire's navy.

MARGUERITE WHISP: Commander in the Empire's navy.

TROUT: A man-creature with a culinary liking for little children.

SKULK: A woman-creature and voracious misanthrope.

SUNNI: Keeper of the Vile Creature's door.

PERSIA: Guardian of an infant.

Puppeteers and Musicians.

PERUSAL EXCERPT

Pretty White Lies and the Velveteen Undertow.

Act One Scene One

The stage is rendered in the style of Renaissance Opera meets Carnival. The kind of setting where the ocean is represented by two flat cut-outs of waves, painted bright green and blue, moving in opposition to one another like an indigo saw. The lighting and design convey a sense of heightened and exquisite fakery, like a traveling tent show where great tales of the sea are told to terrified children.

The world is not 'period' it is 'eclectic'; combining era of sword and musket with intrusions of the industrial age when oil became extremely valuable. We might see wooden decks, cogs and springs, steam pipes, ropes and broken masts. The costumes and hair of the characters is heightened and fantastical, influenced by contemporary retro-period chic, ravaged by war.

Combinations of shadow and figure puppetry are used to tell the story as it unfolds. The more the puppetry and music encourage the audience's imagining of the horror – the better. Calico sails, yellowing with age - allow for video projection and larger scale shadow puppetry. The sails can be hauled upwards like a schooner's rigging. When lit from behind they enhance the impression of a carnival side show. The overall feeling is of night and catastrophe, dangerous and haunted.

Underscore – PINCHER - is revealed sitting upon the ground. His face is pale yet he has the disposition of one who loves to tell a great yarn. Before him is a small puppet box, brightly colored and bejeweled. It glows from within and is fascinating in its detail and intricacy as tiny ships act out the tale he tells.

PINCHER: Come one, come all and prepare for the worst. A tragedy awaits full of terror and woe, of pretty white lies and the Velveteen Undertow. No ship larger than a schooner has sailed these waters and lived to tell, for the undertow has appetite for that which carries hubris on its bow. Galleons of Kings, Armada's of Spanish Queens, not even the Empire's Navy could withstand its dark olive power. Oh, they had been warned; o'er and o'er had been showered with omens yet onward they steamed, meat for the grinder as the undertow hungered, the undertow drooled, the undertow opened its gaping mouth and sucked, sucked, sucked each mariner's soul to purgatory, naked upon the grave of a thousand ancient squid.

[Pause]

All but one.

The aft sail-cloth is raised behind PINCHER till it stands eight feet high and the shadow of a man appears, struggling as if in the ocean deep. At the same time a pair of wet hands appear, grasping out of a trap door in the middle of the stage.

One good man; pure of heart, noble of cause whom the undertow had spared, kicking with fervor to try and stay afloat.

PINCHER dangles a tiny figure of FINIAN in his puppet box.

For even a pretty boot is like an anchor upon a drowning man's foot. A reminder of all the seeds a life did sow, awaiting the fate of the Velveteen Undertow.

The mariners appear and each carries a silver bottle which they pour over the hands of FINIAN as he disappears into the stage. At the same time the shadow upon the sail also vanished. Suddenly JOANNA – springs up from underneath a quilt that has been laid downstage. She is dressed in a bridal gown, disheveled but happy, opening a wedding present. Another gift-box is nearby already opened.

Act One Scene Two

JOANNA stands before a very big box with a ribbon tied around it. She opens the present and finds inside another box, then another and another.

Squeals of delight. She continues until she comes to a small gilded box which she opens to reveal a beautiful crucifix - she completes the sign of the cross and places it upon her neck.

JOANNA: Lord God, you have blessed me with a husband upon this day,
True as North and warmer than summer solstice.
I pray, let our consummation be a succulent, fragrant flower,
Not so much in bloom as to offend, nor harboring too thickly the prick of a thorn,
Yet bold in color, passionate in shape and ripe in seed
Scattering like stars over my eager earth.

FINIAN appears in his boots.

FINIAN: Wife, wife, where is my wife? Fire of my loins, trouble and strife.

JOANNA: Come inside husband, you'll catch your death upon the balcony.

FINIAN: I want the whole town to witness the happiest man in the Empire.

JOANNA: I see my wedding gift has found favor.

FINIAN: Wondrous boots, astounding boots.

JOANNA: They really please?

FINIAN: Look here! The coast of Africa, Zanzibar, Egypt.

JOANNA: They mark you the finest soldier in all the empire Finian.

FINIAN: Mesopotamia, China, the Americas!

JOANNA: The woman who made them assured me she had never before received such a commission.

FINIAN: The whole known world.

JOANNA: A stitch equal to a mile.

FINIAN: It hardly seems fair, a miraculous pair of boots compared to -

JOANNA: It's beautiful Finian. I hold it close and the silver warms my very blood.

FINIAN: It lustres your neck like the moon upon a winter lake.

JOANNA: And your boots sir, stand you tall as a virile sapling awaiting spring.

FINIAN: Not so virile to have yet shed blood upon the field of battle.

[Beat]

Other soldiers will expect much of a captain who wears such finery.

JOANNA: You have worked hard to overcome your station, secured a commander's commission upon merit alone when others weigh upon their father's favor. A man as true as you was born to lead.

[He smiles]

FINIAN: Your wedding gift has within its centre a small relic from the cross of Jesus.

JOANNA: Leave the certificate husband and remove your boots.

FINIAN: Wife.

JOANNA: Husband.

FINIAN: Two words so simple yet...

JOANNA: Come - my new crucifix awaits your blessing.

FINIAN: Did you not the hear the priest? Virginitly is a treasure to be defended.

JOANNA: And we have both held the fort valiantly till this day, though tis nigh time the barricades were breached.

FINIAN: You mock the sermon?

JOANNA: I mock the priest.

Finian is nervous he will not stand still.

FINIAN: A fine man cut from the cloth of Jesus himself.

JOANNA: A wood-cock with the brain of a newt.

FINIAN: He had a fine speaking voice, melodic and light.

JOANNA: He confused our vows with the funeral rite.

FINIAN: He straightened his course.

JOANNA: He had me buried in Coventry Spit.

FINIAN: Twas a moving eulogy.

JOANNA: Husband! You dance as if the cobbler placed too much spring in your step.

FINIAN: Perhaps I should bless your crucifix with them on.

JOANNA: You are nervous of the advance.

FINIAN: Twill make it all the more memorable.

He throws himself upon her on the bed. Giggles, laughter, fumbling then FINIAN pauses. He kisses JOANNA'S shoulder, she holds his face.

JOANNA: God will not be angry, consummation is his marriage blessing.

FINIAN: I am not afraid of God, I am afraid of love. When I stare upon the purple of your soul I drown in a universe of happiness. Love so strong it makes me not a soldier. If I could throw you upon this bed with lust alone. I would devour you as a tiger does a carcass. Primal unashamed, I would tear the dress from your body with the teeth of a predator, but love makes me soft when I need to be hard.

JOANNA laughs.

FINIAN: I bare my soul.

JOANNA: Yes, my love now time to bare the rest.

They wrestle until there is a loud knock on the door.

FINIAN answers in a too-strong voice.

FINIAN: Who stands before the Commanders door and dares to trespass upon his wedding night?

He opens the door. PINCHER stands there, scroll and silver bottle in hand.

PINCHER: They call me Pincher sir. I come bearing orders from the empire's navy destined for Finian Wake.

FINIAN opens the door and pulls PINCHER in.

FINIAN: Commander Finian Wake.

PINCHER: Lovely crucifix mistress.

FINIAN: You said you have orders.

PINCHER: Is that Africa upon your boots sir?

FINIAN takes orders. PINCHER ogles all the food on a table nearby.

JOANNA: Would you like something to eat?

PINCHER: French Champagne!

JOANNA: Take an apple it better suits your complexion.

FINIAN: The orders speak of a silver bottle.

PINCHER: Do they sir?

FINIAN: Where is it?

PINCHER: Where's what?

FINIAN: The bottle.

PINCHER holds the bottle in his hand.

PINCHER: My mind feels weary from the journey. Tis a symptom most oft cured with a draft of something wet.

FINIAN: Give me the bottle or I'll cure thy memory with the back of my hand.

PINCHER: If you don't mind me saying sir, you want to practice the timbre of your snarl if you wish to intimidate anything larger than a field mouse.

JOANNA: Here.

JOANNA pours some champagne.

PINCHER: You have married a lady true sir, manners and all.

PINCHER drinks and the bubbles tickle his nose.

FINIAN: What is you name?

PINCHER: Pincher sir.

FINIAN: Well Pincher, are you hungry as you are thirsty?

PINCHER: You have mind to strike a bargain.

FINIAN: I have mind to strike your backside with my blade.

He grabs PINCHER by the ear.

It came to my notice, while carrying my beautiful wife to our bridal boudoir, that the inn keeper downstairs has a pork pie upon his shelf.

He lets his ear go and produces a coin, giving it to him.

FINIAN: A full stomach in return for doing your duty.

What? Not enough for a piece of pie?

PINCHER: It is enough for ten pies.

FINIAN: Then spend it wisely, and mock not those who risk their life defending God and empire.

Pincher swaps bottle for coin. JOANNA returns the Champagne to PINCHER.

PINCHER: A blessing to you both, though truth be told dear lady, if consummation awaits I would take the time to flee and seek a husband with greater manners and a more temperate disposition.

PINCHER bolts out the door as FINIAN raises his sword. Upstage an eccentric group of four soldiers - SEBASTION, FLORENCIA, ORLANDO & MARGEURITE - stand silhouetted together, swords and pistols poking out at odd angles, hair-do's wild and weird, clothing a mixture of Victorian frill and modern cut. They sing of a "call to arms". These are men and women who have known battle and have lived to lead others like themselves.

Underscore. Drums, beating, war.

SEBASTION, FLORENCIA, ORLANDO & MARGUERITE:

To defeat the force of terror and woe, for the Empire's liberty we shall go,
Blood to be shed, death to sow, o'er the Velveteen Undertow.

JOANNA: Husband.

FINIAN: My ship sails within the hour.

JOANNA: Lay beside me Finian.

FINIAN: I must be strong, I must prepare.

JOANNA: The harbor is but a stone's throw south.

FINIAN: I cannot tell you of my mission, the orders strictly forbid.

JOANNA: I knew this moment would come, I am prepared.

FINIAN: Where is my musket?