

MANY A THING STAYS

By Jerold London

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TIME AND PLACE

Summer vacation, 2019, on board an ocean liner crossing the Atlantic, New York to Paris (via La Harve) and back.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR DOUGLASS, a widower, with four children, from Indianapolis.

MARCUS (Marc) DOUGLASS, age 20, amateur magician.

ALICIA (Alex) DOUGLASS, age 18.

CAMERON (Cam) DOUGLASS, age 16.

HOPE DOUGLASS, age 14, a young artist, sketchbook in hand.

CINDY WILSON, a widow, with three children, from Richmond, Virginia.

DIANA (Dee) WILSON, age 19.

KATHERINE (Kathy) WILSON, age 17.

CHRIS WILSON, age 15.

Ship's CAPTAIN and two sailors (supporting roles).

NOTES

The primary characters are the children, who set about developing a variety show for an evening's entertainment onboard ship. Aside from MARC (being an amateur magician), the others showcase the particular actors' personal talents – such as playing musical instruments, voice, dance, gymnastics, ventriloquism, juggling, etc. The play's variety show is shaped around those talents. (It's not necessary for each actor to be all that "great" and might be better if some aren't.)

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

... // signals the starting point of interrupting (but **not** overlapping) text.

The world has gone mad today
And good's bad today
And black's white today
And day's night today
And that gent today
You gave a cent today
Once had several chateaus
When folks who still can ride in jitneys
Find out Vanderbilts and Witneys
Lack baby clothes
Anything goes.

– Cole Porter, Anything Goes

Times were once when songs of Jolson
Were gauged as being light and wholesome
No one denays.
Not many a thing stays.

And Kingfish, Amos 'n' Andy, Bro,
A million smiles that had to go
With little praise.
Not many a thing stays.

The Uncle Remus tales he'd weave
Beloved of old, they had to leave
Down trails ablaze.
Not many a thing stays.

And few still strive to act Othello
A married, jealous, blackface fellow
In Shakespeare's plays.
Not many a thing stays.

The questions Megyn Kelly dared ask
For which she clueless was brought to task
Correctness pays.
Not many a thing stays.

Ten thousand fiddles in politics
Are played by cads and hypocrites
These cyber days.
Not many a thing stays.

– Jerold London, Many a Thing Stays

MANY A THING STAYS

SCENE 1 – THE SHIP

MAJOR DOUGLASS (a widower) and his four children, MARC (20), ALEX (18), CAM (16), and HOPE (14), have boarded an ocean liner (say the Queen Mary 2) for a three-week cruise, New York City to Paris (via Le Havre) and return, as have CINDY WILSON (a widow) and her three children, DEE (19), KATHY (17), and CHRIS (15). At the rise the families are on the afterdeck apart from each other, looking about and engaging in minor family conversation (not audible to the audience). HOPE is drawing in her sketchbook. A couple of sailors are off to the side, doing something relevant.

CHRIS walks over to HOPE, and they stand a little apart from the rest. HOPE closes her sketchbook.

CHRIS

[to HOPE] Hi.

HOPE

Hi.

CHRIS

I'm Chris.

HOPE

I'm Hope.

CHRIS

Are you on the cruise?

HOPE

Yep.

CHRIS

Cool. So are we.

HOPE

The whole way?

CHRIS

We're going to Paris, and back. For three weeks. I've never been before.

HOPE

Me, neither. I'm psyched.

CHRIS

Cool.

HOPE

[*beat*] Where are you from?

CHRIS

Richmond.... Virginia. Where are you from?

HOPE

Indianapolis.

CHRIS

It's our summer vacation, this year.

HOPE

Ours, too.... And my sister's graduation present.

CHRIS

Oh.

HOPE

She's Alex. That's what everybody calls her.
Her real name's Alicia; and she's just graduated from Herron High.

CHRIS

Cool.

HOPE

It's a number one school... [*pointing*] That's her, over there.

ALEX sees HOPE point and comes over.

ALEX

Hi. I'm Alex.

HOPE

This is Chris. He's from Richmond ... //

CHRIS

Virginia.

HOPE

They're on the whole three-week cruise, too.

ALEX

Cool.

HOPE

I told him it's part, your graduation present.

CHRIS

[*pointing*] My sister, Dee went to Canada for *her* graduation, last year. By herself.... Well, I mean, with some of her classmates.

DEE sees CHRIS point, and comes over.

DEE

Hi. I'm Diana. Or just Dee. Everyone calls me Dee.

ALEX

Hi. I'm Alicia ... Alex.

HOPE

And I'm Hope. Just Hope, even if you hear Brat, sometimes.

CHRIS

You get that, too?

HOPE

Do you know what's the worst thing being the youngest in the family?

CHRIS

Nope. What?

HOPE

Nobody listens to you....

Except once a month.

Once a month Dad makes them; and that's the only fun thing.

I get to pick the day, each month.

ALEX

She's hopeless.

CAM comes over.

HOPE

This is our brother, Cam.

CAM

Cameron.

DEE

Hi. I'm Dee, and this is Chris.

CAM

Cool.... I haven't seen any other kids.

DEE

I'm afraid we're the only ones.

HOPE

We're enough.

CAM

[to HOPE] *You're enough, you mean.*

You're enough trouble for the whole ship. You alone.

HOPE

Speak for yourself, Cam. You've been in a lot more trouble than me.

CHRIS

[to HOPE] How old are you?

HOPE

Fourteen. How old are you?

CHRIS

I'm fifteen.

CAM

And I'm sixteen.

CHRIS

[pointing] And Kathy's seventeen.

KATHY sees CHRIS point, and comes over.

ALEX

And I'm eighteen.

DEE

And I'm nineteen.... And this is Kathy.

KATHY

Hi.

ALEX

Hi. I'm Alex. Pleased to meet you.

CAM

And I'm Cameron....
Just Cam, if you want.

HOPE

Hi, Kathy. My name's Hope.
And I'm the baby here ... again ... obviously.

KATHY

Cool meeting all of you. This is terrific. Are you on the whole cruise?

HOPE

Yep. All three weeks. To Paris and back.

KATHY

[to HOPE] How old *are* you?

HOPE

Fourteen.

KATHY

That's not so young.

HOPE

Wish I were seventeen, like you.

KATHY

Mom always says, "Don't go wishing your life away."

**MARC comes over to join the
conversation.**

MARC

So, what's going on, then?

CAM

Counting, Bro. We're up to nineteen, with Dee, here. And you're a round twenty.

DEE

Hi. I'm Dee.

MARC

[*pause*] ... //

ALEX

[*to MARC, with a punch on the arm*] Where your manners, Boy?

MARC

[*to DEE*] Sorry. I'm Marc.

CAM

And he's no "kid" like us.
He's all grown up. Right, Big Brother?

MARC

Twenty, and counting.

CHRIS

Fourteen ... Hope. [*points at her*]
Fifteen. [*points at himself*]
Sixteen ... Cam. [*points at him*]
Seventeen ... Kathy. [*points at her*]
Eighteen ... Alex. [*points at her*]
Nineteen ... Dee. [*points at her*]
And twenty ... Marc. [*points at him*]

ALEX

Stair steps. And it looks like I'm the odd one out. This trip.

HOPE

You?? I'm the youngest.
It sucks, being the youngest.

CHRIS

Tell me about it. I'm the youngest in our family, and *they're* girls.

HOPE

So?

CHRIS

So ... they monopolize the bathrooms all the time;
and talk; and freak-out, big time, if I even go near their room.
And ... and they're always whispering secrets to each other.
And to Mom, too.
You just don't know.

HOPE

When they won't talk to me, I tell them to shut up.

CHRIS

Does it work?

HOPE

Nope. That's when I tell Dad.

CHRIS

You're lucky.

HOPE

To be ignored all the time?

CHRIS

Not that. To have a dad.

HOPE

Oh?... Don't *you*?

MAJOR DOUGLASS walks over, and begins a conversation (not audible to the audience) with CINDY WILSON.

CHRIS

He died.

HOPE

So did my Ma.

CHRIS

So, we're alike. In a way. Sort of.

HOPE

Yep. I guess. Sort of.

DEE

We're all alike, in a way. We're all on this ship on the same vacation, together.

ALEX

And for some of us, maybe, this might be the one family vacation like this we'll ever have.

KATHY

No way. When it's my graduation next year, I'm going to take everybody to the Great Wall of China.

DEE

Dream on.

CHRIS

The best you can hope for is the great wall of the Indy 500.

HOPE

And that's where we can all meet again.

CAM

Cool.

**MAJOR DOUGLASS and CINDY
WILSON join their children.**

CINDY

You seem to have made new friends.

HOPE

[to MAJOR; *with some excitement in her voice*] Dad

This is Chris [*indicates*];
and this is Kathy [*indicates*];
and this is Dee [*indicates*].
And they're from ... //

MAJOR

Richmond, Virginia. So I've heard. A pleasure meeting all of you.

**The three children individually shake
Major Douglass's hand.**

KATHY

And Mom ... these are Marc, Alex, Cam and Hope [*indicating*]. Our new friends.

CINDY

I'm so happy to meet you, and be on the same cruise with you.
What luck!

MAJOR

It's our first trip to Europe; and I understand, yours, too.

DEE

Dad travelled a lot.
To Europe, and all over.
But he died; and, well ...

CINDY

We just waited for our chance. You know.

MAJOR

I completely know.
Raising a family, yes, single-parent style ...

CINDY

Trendy, but challenging.
We've been there. Trust me.

MAJOR

I'm impressed. Your children are so grown up.

CINDY

Yours, too.

MAJOR

Oh, they have their moments.

HOPE

[*to her Father*] You mean Cam does.

MAJOR

Hope started talking late, and has been catching up, ever since.

MARC

We even have to have rules, about talking, whose turn it is,
when Hope's around.

HOPE

[to CHRIS] See what I mean? It's hopeless, with them.

CHRIS

[to HOPE] What do you have there?

HOPE

My sketchbook [*showing him the book*].

MAJOR

Okay. That's enough. It's time to go to our cabin, and get things unpacked.

CINDY

Us, too.

MAJOR

Come on, kids.

[to CINDY] We'll catch you later.

CINDY

[to MAJOR] Later.

HOPE

[to CHRIS] Catch ya later, Alligator.

CHRIS

[to HOPE, *with a smile*] With a smile, Crocodile.

CHRIS and HOPE give each other a high five.

MAJOR

Come on.

MARC

[*directly to DEE*] Soon.

HOPE

I can't wait. This is going to be the best vacation ever, ever.

MAJOR DOUGLASS begins walking off, and his children follow. DEE nods to MARC, as both families exit, talking excitedly (not audible to the audience).

SAILOR 1

Remember when cruises used to be loaded with celebrities?

SAILOR 2

Yeah. Donkey's years ago.

SAILOR 1

And big-tit showgirls?

SAILOR 2

Amen to that.

SAILOR 1

And covered by the press?

SAILOR 2

Happy days were here again.

SAILOR 1

Not anymore.

Just juveniles, and their doting parents.

And national crises, Brexit, and shit, trailing in our wake.

Two blasts from the ship's horn.

SAILOR 2

[*calling out*] All ashore that's going ashore.

All ashore that's going ashore.

Final call.

Sailors exit together.

SCENE 2 – THE PLAN

Again the afterdeck. Empty. MARC enters, looking around.

CAM enters, walks up behind his brother, and when MARC notices him, CAM just stands there and stares.

MARC

[*finally remembering*] O crap. We were going to ... //

CAM

I'd say, forget it, but obviously you already have.

MARC

Sorry.... [*beat*] What do you want me to say?

CAM

You're headed for trouble, Big Brother, if you keep acting this way.

MARC

Who says? And why do I have to even put up with you?

CAM

Someone's going to blow the whistle on you two; and it ain't going to be pretty.

MARC

No one's going to blow no whistle.

CAM

We're brothers, Marc. Have you forgot?

MARC

What's that mean?

CAM

She's *white*.

Have you forgot that, too?

MARC

That's for her and me to decide. Not little brothers.

It's none of your beeswax. Understand?

CAM

It's Dad's business.

And it's her mother's business.

And it's stupid.

You're going to ruin this whole, complete trip for us.

And all it's costing Dad.

MARC

We're not going to do anything stupid.

This isn't the Titanic.

We're just friends. Like you and Kathy.

**ALEX enters, headphones in her ears.
She pulls them out, and comes over to
MARC and CAM.**

ALEX

I'm a fifth wheel on this boat. And it's *my graduation* we're supposed to be celebrating. Everybody's got somebody special, except me. And ... //

CAM

[to MARC] See what I mean?

ALEX

And I hate it. I *hate it*.

MARC

[pause, looking at the two of them] I've got an idea. That might fix things.

ALEX

What?

MARC

Actually. It's a *great* idea.

CAM

What? What's your *great* idea?

MARC

Let's put on a variety show.... For the passengers.

CAM

A *what*?

MARC

A variety show. The seven of us, together, each doing his, *or her*, special thing. Like, I can do a little magic, you know.

[to ALEX] And you can [*description of the actor playing Alex's special talent*].

[to CAM] And you can [*description of the actor playing Cam's special talent*].

And Hope can talk ... nonstop ... for a world record. That's her talent.

CAM

The audience would love that.

MARC

She'll figure something out. Something she and Chris can do together, maybe.

DEE enters, sees them, and comes over.

DEE

[*beat; then casually*] What's going on?

ALEX

[*to DEE*] Marc has an idea.

CAM

A pretty sucky idea, if you ask me.

DEE

[*to MARC*] What? What's your idea?

ALEX

[*to DEE*] For us all to put on a variety show, for the passengers.

MARC

Just an idea.

DEE

Sounds interesting to me.

I could [*description of her special talent*].

And Kathy's pretty good at [*description of the actor playing Kathy's special talent*].

CAM

For *everyone* on the ship?

MARC

[*gaining enthusiasm*] Why not?

It could be at the last seating for supper.... After it. In the dining room.

And it wouldn't be a long show.

Just fun.

For everyone.

You know how Dad likes to watch, when we do things like that at home.

He loves it.

ALEX

He loves *us*, you mean.

MARC

Same difference.

DEE

Mom would love it, too.

CAM

[to DEE] Don't say that, [*pleadingly*] *please*.

DEE

But she would.

CAM

[to DEE, *pleadingly*] *Dee*.

DEE

I'm just saying I like the idea.
It's not like it's supposed to be anything Broadway.
Not some Christmas spectacular, or something.

CHRIS enters, and comes over to them.

CHRIS

[*beat*] What?
What are you saying about me?

CAM

Marc's talking about the seven of us doing some kind of dumb variety show....
For the passengers.
After the last seating for supper.
To spoil everyone's dinner.

CHRIS

All of us?

DEE

Yep. All of us.
You, too.

CHRIS

Me?! What can I do?
I don't do anything.
I just play chess. That's all.

DEE

He's a champion. The junior chess champion of Richmond, Virginia.

CHRIS

Oh, sure. And you want me to get my chess set out?
And move the pieces around, for everyone to watch?
For an hour or two?
Wouldn't that be thrilling? Another search for Bobby Fischer.

MARC

I don't know.
Maybe have a match with somebody, in the audience.
How long does it take?

CHRIS

If there *is* someone else on this ship that plays chess.

DEE

No. I don't think that would work.
No offense, Chris.

CHRIS

I don't think it would either.

CAM

Whew! You had me scared there, for a minute.

CHRIS

So, what *can* I do in our variety show?

MARC

Something. There must be something.

CHRIS

I'll tell you what.
I'll be off, to the side, cheering the rest of you on.
Every talent show needs a family member to be off to the side,
jumping up and down, and cheering.

KATHY enters, and comes over to them.

KATHY

[*beat*] Cheering? for what?

DEE

Marc just had this idea. Of our doing a talent show together.

MARC

Sort of a variety show.

KATHY

For whom?

CAM

For What did you say?

KATHY

I was asking who the audience would be.
For the variety show.
You know, Marc's idea.

CAM

But what did you *say*?

KATHY

I only asked, for whom?
Why?

CAM

Because I don't know anybody our age who says, "*whom.*"
Only teachers. Some of them.

ALEX

Give it up, Cam. You're acting ignorant.

MARC

We'll do it for everybody on the ship.
After the last supper. In the dining room.

KATHY

[*beat*] Actually, I think I'd get a kick out it.
I could [*description of her special talent – same as above*].

DEE

I told them.

KATHY

Whom?... Just kidding.

ALEX

It's not a bad idea. Really. When you think about it.

KATHY

It's certainly better than nothing to do.
What else is there to do?

MARC

Not drink.

DEE

Certainly not drink.

KATHY

Definitely not. Or smoke.
But it's only a hope and a prayer we could pull it off.

HOPE enters, and comes over to them.

HOPE

Pull what off?
What are you all plotting, behind my back?

CHRIS

They're going to put on a variety show.
For the whole ship.

HOPE

Who is?

DEE

We *all* are ... you included.

HOPE

Me? What can I do?

CAM and ALEX

Talk.

HOPE

Talk about what?

CAM

Just kidding.

ALEX

Talk like you're in a beauty pageant, about your goals in life.

HOPE

Oh, I can do that. Just listen.
[*in a mocking way*] I'm going to make the world a better place to live in.
And I'm going to start at age twenty-two.

CHRIS

Doing what?

HOPE

Choosing a team....
But, I suppose I can start now, can't I? In advance.

CAM

Start now doing what? Talking?

HOPE

Start choosing my team....
[*turning to CHRIS*] And I'll start with Chris, if he'll join me.

CHRIS

To do what?

HOPE

Making the world change. For the better. It's my dream.

CAM

How do you think *you're* going to change the world, little girl?
You're no Martin Luther King, you know.
And you're not going to be.

HOPE

By magic.

CAM

What?

HOPE

Believing in magic.
And believing in yourself, 'cause *that's* believing in magic.
'Cause magic's *in us*; and with it we can do anything we try to.

MARC

That's *my* thing.

ALEX

Ma cursed us, didn't she?
When she named you Hope.

CHRIS

I don't know.
I've never believed much in magic.
But I'm willing to try ... for you.
But just for one evening.

MARC

Watch this.

MARC performs a simple rope trick.

KATHY

[to MARC] Say, you're kinda good.

DEE

What would *you do*, Hope, if *you* could do magic like that?

HOPE

I'd go to a sandy beach.
And start digging.
Until I found some buried treasure.
And I'd use it to feed the poor.
And give some to Dad....
And some for your Mom, too.

CHRIS

I don't have any special talent either.
Maybe we could do something together.

HOPE

Okay. Let's talk about it.

MARC

Let's all go, and talk about it.

ALEX

[to MARC] In pairs? or by ourselves?

MARC

[to ALEX] In pairs, I guess.

DEE

[to ALEX] You can come with Marc and me.

KATHY

Let's go then.

MARC

All right. Let's. And we'll meet here, after dinner, and see what we think....
But till we decide, mum's the word. Okay?

Puts a finger to his lips.

Okay, team? Keep it to yourselves

They exit in pairs, in separate directions: CHRIS with HOPE; CAM with KATHY; and MARC with DEE and ALEX, several agreeing, "Okay."

SCENE 3 – HOPE AND CHRIS'S SPECIAL PLAN

Again the afterdeck. Empty, except for the same two sailors, off to the side doing something relevant. HOPE and CHRIS enter together, wearing bathing suits and carrying towels, and talking.

CHRIS

Where do you people come up with these things, anyway?

HOPE

You people?

CHRIS

Hold on a minute. I didn't mean, "you people" that way.
I meant you, the Douglasses, that's all. You and your brother.
Where do you *Douglasses* come up with these off-the-trail ideas?

HOPE

Oh.

CHRIS

Let's declare a truce. I'm no racist. I just want to wing it, and not have to worry over every word. You know. "Politically correct," like the rest of the world. Okay?

HOPE

Okay. Truce.

CHRIS

Because a lot of us whites don't get it, exactly, at first, what's offensive. We just don't. But that doesn't mean we don't care.

HOPE

Ignorance is no excuse, Father says.

CHRIS

But how do you learn?
They don't teach it in school.

HOPE

Friends.

CHRIS

Oooooooooo.

HOPE

[*beat*] Not so many black friends, huh?

CHRIS

What about you?
Do you have a lot of white friends?

HOPE

Honestly, I do.
I guess it's because I'm a talker, all the time.
And outgoing.
Or maybe, Cam says, it's because of how yellow I am.

CHRIS

[*beat; then quizzically*] Yellow?

HOPE

You don't know what that means do you?

CHRIS

The things I know yellow means don't apply to you.
Not that *I* know of.
Like, you're not afraid of much, I'd guess.
And you're certainly not from where some people might say yellow's from.

HOPE

Yellow means light skinned ... like I am.

CHRIS

Oh.

HOPE

You know. Like the Yellow Rose of Texas.

CHRIS

The Yellow Rose of Texas? The old song?

HOPE

You've got a lot to learn, amigo.

CHRIS

Yep, I sure do.

But one thing I've learned, in all caps, is that you don't do blackface.

Ever.

Never.

It's berserk.

All the people getting in trouble because of it, and losing their jobs.

How did you get a lame idea like that?

HOPE

I don't know.

Ideas just come to me.

When I read about things.

Or in my dreams. With my eyes closed.

They just pop into my head. Like magic.

CHRIS

This one would really pop. Pop people's eyes out.

Putting charcoal on your face?

What the snap?

HOPE

I just thought ... you being from Richmond and all ...

and all the stupid fuss over blackface in some old college yearbooks ... //

CHRIS

You mean?...

Blackface doesn't offend you?

HOPE

Not one bit. Why should it?
If some white college kids want to buffoon around and put polish on their faces,
they're not saying anything on me. They're the stupid ones. Not me.

CHRIS

Then why do you want to color your face up with charcoal pixie dust?

HOPE

My one talent, if you can call it that, is charcoaling.
Would you prefer I go around making sketches of a room full of people?
Think how boring that would be.

CHRIS

I don't know....
It seems awful dangerous, to me.
Some important people have lost their jobs, even talking about blackface.

HOPE

Does it offend you?..
Be honest now.

CHRIS

No, of course not.
It just scares me.

HOPE

It shouldn't.
It's just one of those things we let offend us,
when there are a million really important things to get mad at.

CHRIS

You're saying blackface isn't offensive?

HOPE

Not pictures of it. It's a ... it's a ... //

CHRIS

A scapegoat?... Is that what you mean?

HOPE

Yeah. Yeah. People aren't offended by it, itself. Or pictures of it.
It's how actors used to act, wearing it, I guess.

CHRIS

People aren't offended by it? You mean blacks?

HOPE

Right. From the kids *I've* talked to, no one gets excited about it at all.

It's our parents.

It brings back memories how white actors used to use it to try to make fun of us.

But that was ages ago. When my Dad was a kid, I guess.

And it's those old memories that make them mad.

So, today, it's a scapegoat for bad memories.

CHRIS

Are you sure?

HOPE

It's not some ignorant blackface guy in a picture, with an even stupider grin on his face. I promise you. That's not what's offensive. To teenagers, it's all a joke.

What's offensive is the meanness of trolls who mine those old pictures,

and publish them, and think they can fool us into hating the people they hate. That's the true meanness.

CHRIS

[*pause*] Mom tells us

Promise you won't get mad? We're just talking here.

HOPE

I won't. I promise.

CHRIS

Because, how can we learn if we can't talk about things with each other?

HOPE

We can't. That's the point....

[*more to herself*] And I'm starting to get a picture in my mind....

Go ahead.

CHRIS

Mom says whites have put blacks through Hell. She calls it a black Hell.

Slavery. And splitting up families. Sometimes forever.

And what some slave-owners did to slaves.

And then the Civil War. And Jim Crow. And segregation. And the KKK.

And how our court system, and police, sometimes, discriminate today.

You know what I'm saying?

HOPE

Are you kidding? Sure I know.

CHRIS

Well, she says it's lit an angry fire in the hearts of blacks, that won't go away. They want revenge. Mostly black men, I think she thinks.... But maybe not. Anyway, until whites, like us, but more especially whites in government, can stand up, and look them in the eyes ... square in the eyes, and say, "I'm sorry." And *mean* it ... //

HOPE

They want *vindication*, not revenge.
They want dignity, and recognition. Just like everybody.
Sure. I relate to that.

CHRIS

And reparations.

HOPE

Your mom said, "reparations?"

CHRIS

Yes. But she's not meaning money. She's meaning for whites to go, like to school, and learn just how awful we've hurt black people. And what it's done to us, too.

HOPE

What it's done *to you*?

CHRIS

She tells us: Think, in your minds, what if whites had been held slaves, like the blacks were? And treated the way blacks were treated for three hundred years? What would *you* do? if you had to be around them now?

HOPE

I'm sorry.... Be around who? Who was your Mom saying were the slave-owners?

CHRIS

I don't know. Blacks, maybe. Or Nazis, maybe.
It didn't matter, because I couldn't imagine it ... at all.
Because I'd rather be dead than be a slave like that.
But before I died, I *could feel* the humongous anger and hatred I would have.
And it made me think maybe blacks don't want to spend a whole lot of time around me. And that makes me sad.

HOPE

It makes *me* sad, too.
But, out here in the ocean, it feels so far away, doesn't it?

CHRIS

Water does that.

HOPE

I *hope* so.... And that's my name. And I'm sticking to it.

CHRIS

It gives us a chance to see things differently.
Like the moon and stars. And you. And me.
And never to say or think even little things that disrespect the other....
[beat] And never, never, never and never use the word.

HOPE

What word?

Gives CHRIS a playful nudge.

What word, Chris?

CHRIS

You're not going to get me to say it.
No way.
I won't even say its first letter.

HOPE

[playfully] You mean the ... //

CHRIS

Don't you say it.
I don't even want to hear it.

HOPE

[playfully] The Whatchamacallit word?

CHRIS

Yes, the Whatchamacallit word.
[also playfully] And shut up about it, will ya?

HOPE

Voldemort? *It*, who shall not be named? That word?

CHRIS

Yeah, that word.

HOPE

Don't you know? Or didn't Dumbledore teach you a thing?
Fear of a word only increases fear of the thing itself.

CHRIS

I'm confused.
Is your Dad telling you these things?
'Cause Mom says never using that word, ever, is part of our responsibility.

HOPE

Dad says the word sucks.
But we hear it a lot. From blacks.

CHRIS

And blackface. Mom says never go blackface, no matter what.

HOPE

And I say: Don't you see?
If we're afraid to talk about it, even by a first letter,
how are we ever going to learn to be real brothers and sisters in this country?

CHRIS

You know, I thought one thing, at least, about this trip to Paris.

HOPE

What was that?

CHRIS

That we could leave all of our national problems behind.
At least for three weeks.

HOPE

Well, welcome to the world of Hope.

CHRIS

You'll just tick people off.
Who already have chips on their shoulders.

HOPE

Like we're all going around with chips on our shoulders?

CHRIS

I didn't say that.
I just don't want to knock any off, that's all. Or talk about it.

HOPE

And that's what's going to make things get better in America?

CHRIS

I don't know. But not on this trip.

HOPE

Well, I'll tell you something. *We are* talking about it.
And it's not stopping *us* from being friends.

CHRIS

We're young.... And you're special.

HOPE

And guess what.

CHRIS

What?

HOPE

That's what my going blackface idea is going to do.
It's going to get grownups talking.
Right here, on this ship.
And they're going to realize something....

CHRIS

[*beat*] What's that?

HOPE

That it's nothing. *Blackface is nothing.*

MARC, DEE and ALEX enter on that note, and come up to HOPE and CHRIS.

MARC

Blackface is nothing, did you say?

HOPE

Nothing, like a drop in the Atlantic, compared to equal education, and opportunity, and jobs, and voting rights, and segregation, and police.

MARC

What's brought this on?
We're supposed to be having a *fun trip*, Hope.

HOPE and CHRIS look at each other.

CHRIS

Hope wants to go blackface ... in your variety show.

MARC

[*angrily to HOPE*] The Hell you are.

DEE

You can't do blackface. Are you crazy. It's against the law.

HOPE

Prove it.

DEE

I don't have to. Megyn Kelly got fired for just *saying* it was okay.

HOPE

That's crazy.
Who's got the right to tell me how to fix my own face?
Or my own hair? for that matter.
Or what I wear? If it's not disgusting.

ALEX

That's the point, Hope. Blackface is disgusting. It's creepy.

HOPE

You're saying, black skin's creepy?

ALEX

Don't twist my words, Brat.
Black is beautiful.
We all know that.

DEE

Amen to that.

HOPE

Why is blackface ugly, then?
Or creepy?

DEE

Because it is, to some people.

HOPE

And “some people” have the right to dictate, over everybody else?

MARC

Watch your mouth, Girl.

HOPE

[to DEE] I’m sorry. I just got carried away, a bit.

CHRIS

But she’s right.

And I’d say the same thing too, except ...

DEE

[beat] Except?

CHRIS

Except, Hope said it first.

MARC

I don’t care who said it first, she’s not doing it.

Period.

End of sentence.

HOPE

Beginning of sentence, you mean. *My sentence.*

Being banished from being allowed to do what *I* want in this family.

ALEX

That’s not what he’s saying, at all.

HOPE

Then what *is* he saying?... Yes? Go ahead? Do it?

ALEX

You’re too young to understand.

HOPE

I’ll tell you what I’m *not* too young to understand.

In school, Alex, you always had the bigger backpack.

ALEX

What?... So what? I'm older, why not? I'm four years older than you.

HOPE

But I wanted a big one, too.
It was the worst thing about being your sister.
It made me so mad. And I hated it.
But I love you. I've always loved you. And I always will.
And it doesn't matter now, does it?
You've graduated, and I'm going to miss you so much.

ALEX

I don't think I get where this is going.

HOPE

I'm always the youngest, aren't I? Always on my own.

ALEX

You're not on your own. What do you mean?
We're family; and we all love you.
It's just that, you can't go blackface and get away with it.
No one will understand.
And they'll judge you. And they'll judge us, too.

HOPE

Not if I mean something good by it.

ALEX

What? What good can blackface possibly mean?

HOPE

Think about it.

ALEX

Think about what. There's nothing to think about.

HOPE

What if I could find a Lincoln hat? and recite the Gettysburg Address blackface?
That would mean something good.... Fourscore and seven years ago ... //

MARC

That's not going to cut it.
And you're not going to find no Lincoln hat on *this* ship, I promise you.

DEE

What *is* your point, Hope?

What *are* you trying to say, that you can't say with your own face?

HOPE

Attention.

That people are digging up old pictures of blackface in college yearbooks, and trying to use them to hurt our feelings, and destroy people's reputations.

And I don't like it. And we shouldn't be used like that.

Because, it's *them* that are the ones doing the insults.

It's *them* who are disrespecting us.

Not crazy college kids who weren't thinking about hurting anybody years ago.

MARC

Anybody who did blackface deserves to pay the price. Whenever.

Crazy college kids or not.

HOPE

And anyone who publishes pictures of it should pay the price twice. *Today*.

CHRIS

They should be made to stand up, in public, and apologize.

HOPE

You want me to stand up, too, and say, "I'm sorry"?

CHRIS

No, not you. You're not trying to insult or make fun of anybody.

DEE

[to CHRIS] So, you think blacks should stand up for using blackface?

HOPE

It's not *blackface* I want to defend.

And it's not crazy college kids, or the sick jokes they probably tell in college.

It's blackface, used by trolls for *their* purposes, to turn us against each other.

And publishing pictures of the First Lady, naked. That's the battle I want to pick.

MARC

You want to go naked, *too*?!

HOPE

No. I don't want to go naked. I want to blackface *me*, as a Civil Rights protest.

DEE

What would Martin Luther King think?

HOPE

My skin's not nearly as black as his; but I can pretend to ask him.
And see what he says.

DEE

Ask whom?

CHRIS

Ask *me* ... because I'm putting the same charcoal on my face, too.

DEE

What??

ALEX

You've got to be kidding.

CHRIS

Hide, and watch. She's my friend.

HOPE

You'd take that chance for me?

CHRIS

When I think a friend is right, I stand up for her.

MARC

Neither one of you is doing anything of the sort. Period.
I've told you; and I mean it.
You just don't know what it means.

HOPE

It means, I'm black; and I'm not afraid to shout it out.
Maybe *you* don't know what it means. Or you've forgotten.
But, look again. I'm really black.
And I'm really not afraid to call it as it is.

DEE

[*beat*] She's got a point, Marc. There *is* some irony to it.
Not that you could build an act on it, or anything.
But, I mean, we're all people, black, blackface, white, brown.
What should the difference be?

MARC

History.
That you people don't seem to know a lot about.

HOPE

Blackface barrage is current events ... //

CHRIS

Not history.

DEE

[to CHRIS] But *you're* going to be history, when Mom finds out.

CHRIS

It's something I feel is right.
And Mom always tells us to follow what we feel is right.

DEE

Not when it's wrong.

CHRIS

It wouldn't be wrong, if Marc explains it first, for us.

MARC

Me??
How could I ever explain something so dense? That's so offensive to people?

HOPE

Does the "nee-no" word offend you?

DEE

Jesus Christ! Hope!

HOPE

Marc calls Cam that all the time.

DEE

But *you're* allowed.
You're black.
At home.

HOPE

And in our home you'd be whipped a good one for taking the Lord's name in vain.

ALEX

How can you talk to her like that? Your mouth should be washed out.

MARC

The point is, if you do something like blackface, that hurts people's feelings, you better have a smart, good reason for it.

HOPE

I do.

MARC

Because it's race-mismatching.

DEE

It's what?

MARC

Race-mismatching. And that's wrong. Making your face look like a different race.

HOPE

But I'm black.... Or, are you saying because I'm light skinned ... //

ALEX

It's wrong to change the color of your face. In any way.

HOPE

Tell that to L'Oréal. Tell that to Iman.

ALEX

That's color tone. Not changing your basic color.

HOPE

And black women aren't allowed to change their hair, either? to blonde? or red? Or white, even?

MARC

Hope. As usual, you're the star debater.

Let's just let it go at that:

Blacks can do and say some things whites can't. We all know that.

Period.

HOPE

Whites can't wear dreadlocks. Right?

MARC

Not in a wrestling match.

HOPE

And all I'm saying is, it's unfair. It's wrong. It's racist.
Period.

ALEX

Hope, this is supposed to be a fun show.
That's the idea.
Entertainment.
Light entertainment, for an evening.
Not the start of a political debate on board.

HOPE

What if I use a green marker. Can I go with a green face?

CHRIS

Any Grinches on board?

MARC

I'm getting real tired of this conversation.

HOPE

That's because you haven't made one decent argument against being blackface.

MARC

You don't get it; and you don't get it; and that's the only argument there is.

HOPE

Just think. And be fair for a second. Please, Marc.
Ma used to love to watch *The King and I*, didn't she?

ALEX

So?

HOPE

Yul Brenner wasn't Siamese.

MARC

So?

HOPE

And what about Zorba the Greek?

ALEX

What about Zorba the Greek?

HOPE

Anthony Quinn was Mexican.

ALEX

You're getting bizarre.

HOPE

And one of Dad's favorites is The Year of Living Dangerously.

ALEX

Oh, oh.

HOPE

Linda Hunt ... //

ALEX

We know. We know. He's always told us how great she was, playing a male, Asian dwarf.

DEE

Dwarf?
Do people still call people dwarfs?

CHRIS

We've called a truce on "politically correct" handcuffs today.

HOPE

And how can a man dress up to look like a woman, and not be offensive?

DEE

Some Like It Hot. Right?

HOPE

I was thinking more of Tootsie; and Mrs. Doubtfire; and Tyler Perry.

MARC

What are we saying, here?

HOPE

That dress-ups are not bad.
It's only what's in the mind of the audience.

MARC

And?

HOPE

And *you* can explain why it's okay.

MARC

If the Ku Klux Klan set a cross on fire in our front yard, you'd say it's okay if they didn't mean anything by it?

HOPE

That's my point, Marc. My face is *my* face. And if I don't set it on fire in somebody else's front yard, I have the right to wear it the way I want.

ALEX

Let me get this straight. You want to go blackface in our variety show. Right?

HOPE

Right.

CHRIS

And me, too.

ALEX

Why? exactly. Because you think you're young and can get away with it?

HOPE

No. Because some nasty people in Virginia are trying to get the elected governor to resign because he did a childish, blackface thing when he was in college.

MARC

And that's your dream of how to make the world a better place?

HOPE

Why not? What else is a black, fourteen-year-old girl supposed to do on this ship?

MARC

I've been trying to tell you, but you won't listen. Black is black; and not-black is not black. And no one who's not black can understand what it means to be black.

HOPE

If you're right, what hope is there?

CHRIS

There's you.... Hope.

DEE

I'm afraid she has a point, Marc.

MARC

Everybody on this ship would be mortified.

Dad, too.... And your mother. And that's not why I had my idea.

DEE

We can't all be black. Or refugees. Or Hispanic. Or Jewish.

But we can all be Americans. And in America we can all learn to empathize better.

HOPE

I agree.

ALEX

Baby, you're hopeless.

HOPE

That's my middle name, sort of.... Hope Hopeless Douglass.

MARC

Blackface is bad because it started out to be bad, and no little black girl ... //

HOPE

Or little white girl.

ALEX

You're no white, Baby ... //

HOPE

Says you.

MARC

Says your face, Smarty.

HOPE

Says my black face.

MARC

Yes, your *black* face ... //

DEE

But isn't that the point she's trying to make?

MARC

What point?

DEE

That blackface can't possibly be offensive if it's on a black face.
Voluntarily, of course.

HOPE

I have an idea.

ALEX

Another one?

HOPE

I'll just do wide lines of charcoal on my face.
Call it zebra-face.
Any zebras you've seen on the ship I'll be offending?

MARC

If that works, this is a ship of fools.

ALEX

You can't expect grownups to understand something like that.
How could they? We're just teenagers.

CHRIS

I don't care what you all say. If Hope believes in it, I'm on her side.

DEE

Hope? Is it you're hoping Marc will explain it? like an emcee?

HOPE

It wouldn't take a whole lot.
Especially if you helped him.
Will you?

DEE

[to MARC] Let's discuss this. Okay? Alone.

MARC

These kids are pure-T naïve. They don't have a clue what they're getting us into.

DEE

Let's talk about it.

MARC

Not many a thing stays the same. Other than a sister's foolishness.

DEE

By ourselves. Okay? Come on.

ALEX

If you two are going to talk about it privately, I'm going to cast my vote now.

MARC

Which is?

ALEX

We're trying to be friends here.
And friends can disagree, and not stop being friends.
And I've heard enough.
I'm on their side. Let the kids do it.

MARC

Everybody's ganging up on me. For no reason.

DEE

No we're not. We're just talking.
And we need some time to digest things, calmly.

MARC

What are you saying? I'm calm right now. Already.

DEE

And I'm Princess Diana, on my way to Kensington Palace.
Come on, Marc. Okay? Please.

DEE holds her hand out to MARC, and somewhat reluctantly he takes it, and they exit together.

HOPE

How can *we* know what white is really like? When we stay mad at white people?

ALEX

Leave it. You've won. I just pray we don't all live to regret it.

CHRIS

Do you think so?

ALEX

Don't you see how my brother looks at your sister?

CHRIS

No.

ALEX

Trust me.

Times are changing.

People are changing.

Like Marc said, not many a thing stays the same anymore.

But where he is, with your sister, that's something that never changes.

Stupid man.

CHRIS

If you sister's right, let's get to work on what we're going to do.

HOPE

Okay.

**ALEX, HOPE and CHRIS exit – HOPE
and CHRIS together; ALEX separately.**

SAILOR 1

Kids nowadays don't think.

All they think about is what's in front of their face.

SAILOR 2

Their devices. And they can't plan. All they can plan is what to tweet or retweet.

SAILOR 1

And the sea's as flat as a pancake.

SAILOR 2

These kids. If they'd just think about it, they all have teeth.

SAILOR 1

At their age.

SAILOR 2

And they all can use their mouths to whistle.
Just whistle. Their teeth are mega present.

SAILOR 1

Whistle Dixie. With those pearly whites.

SAILOR 2

Just as good as blackface any old day.... Better.
Or selling lifeboats.

SAILOR 1

Life's nothing but a fantasy for pampered kids like them.
Time means nothing.

SAILOR 2

Never have to face real work. No idea what it's like.
Never have to face a clock.

SAILOR 1

Their generation could stop a clock.

SAILOR 2

So could your face.

SAILOR 1

What do they call their generation? Millennials?

SAILOR 2

Zeds.

SAILOR 1

Oh.

Sailors exit together.

SCENE 4 – WHAT SAY POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Half an hour or so later. Again on the afterdeck. Empty, except for the same two sailors, off to the side doing something relevant. MARC and DEE enter, in the midst of a heated conversation.

DEE

Then look at Green Book, will you? If you're going to make a statement like that.

MARC

The movie? What's it got to do with the kids making fools out of all of us?

DEE

An *Academy Award* winner; and all the snap that's being dumped on it.

MARC

Maybe it deserves it. Have you thought about that?

DEE

For what?

We went to see it. And we thought it was wonderful.

It feels good to see whites and blacks pulling together for each other, the way they did. And a movie that does that is a *positive*, not a negative.

And we need more of that.

MARC

You were just rooting for the underdog.

DEE

Okay. And why is that wrong? It's the American way.

MARC

Because life doesn't go that way. That's why.

DEE

Well, if it doesn't, by God! it should.

And why not root for it?

For that matter, why not work for it?

MARC

I'll tell you why.... Maybe I shouldn't. You won't agree anyway.

DEE

Because I'm white?

MARC

Because you haven't walked the walk.

DEE

Walked *what* walk?

MARC

Being actually black.
If you weren't born black, you can't possibly know the sounds in your head.
Voices telling you how to behave, or pay the price.
Voices telling you where you can go, and where you can't.
Voices always telling you limits.
And to show respect, even if you don't feel it, especially if a cop stops you.
Voices telling you that the one thing that stays the same is always being black.

DEE

Whose voices?

MARC

Dad's. And Ma's, too, before she died.
They knew it. They lived it.

DEE

[*beat*] I'm not saying your parents are wrong.
But, where's the hope? getting to know and like new people?

MARC

You can like us all you want. And be cool being with us, and rooting for us.
And don't get me wrong, I like you. I like you a lot, Dee.
And I'm very, very cool, you being here with us. I'm *very* glad you're here.
But I'm sorry: That movie's a joke. A fantasy. A lame reconciliation fantasy.

DEE

Because someone can grow up and recognize they were wrong? about blacks.
About how they were raised to feel about blacks?

MARC

You think *that's* what he did?

DEE

When Don Shirley stuck it to those white snobs in Birmingham,
for kicking him out of their hotel dining room for being black, I cheered.
And I took it to the bank, how he blew off his paid performance for them.
And Tony went with him. And Tony stayed with him.
In a black part of town. In a black bar. And loved it. And why not?

MARC

You think a road-trip relationship between a couple of men can heal centuries of racism?

DEE

I don't know if even God can heal centuries of slavery and racism.
And, no, I don't think a guy road-trip can do it, by itself.
But together with millions of people watching it,
and learning something from it ... //

MARC

Learning something about what? The Green Book? the real thing, Green Book?

DEE

Yes, if you want to know the truth, I didn't know a thing about the Green Book.
About how whites could drive everywhere, using their Triple A, staying in motels,
while blacks could only stay in *black* places,
and eat at *black* restaurants, and go to *black only* bathrooms,
and avoid sundown towns where they could get jailed for just being out at night.
That Book was their Bible. The Negro Travelers' Green Book.
And all that's what I learned because of the Green Book movie.

MARC

That's what I'm saying.
The movie didn't tell the audience one thing about those things.

DEE

But if it gets people interested enough to read about it.
It's all on the net.
You just have to let you browser do the walking for you.

MARC

It's pretentious. It's condescending.
To name a movie "Green Book,"
when it doesn't do the book the slightest bit of justice.
To name a feel-good movie about discrimination, and Jim Crow,
and the aroma, everywhere, of white superiority ... //

DEE

Look. They both had strong personalities.
They both thought they knew what they expected to get out of the trip.
And it wasn't each other, when the trip started.
But they changed.
Their prejudices changed. Both of theirs. Because of the other.
And if we're ever going to get to first base with racism, we have to start by
admitting that we're not perfect, and that we've done downright dumb things.

MARC

Hollywood just thinks it can make movies about racism in America, and show everything working out all right because a character or two grows up, and learns to be less racist. It's bullshit!!

DEE

No. It's sympathetic....

Listen, Marc. You have beautiful skin. Don't ever do anything to change that. But I admit, it pains me not to know the pain your skin hides from me.

MARC

[*pause*] I do have pain. And the Green Book, the book, makes me remember it. It was a stand-up memorial to half a century of wrong done to blacks on the road. It's a monument to white American shame. And Black shame, putting up with it. My Dad told me how a black hitchhiker in the South in the 50s and 60s could be run over and killed, by an incensed driver ... How dare a Negro ask me for a ride?... And nothing ever done about it. Nobody even talks about it.

DEE

We're talking about it.

MARC

White men in the South lynched a black man for just looking up a woman's dress. Hanging on a clothesline. No person in it. No woman near it. What do you think of that?

DEE

Revolting. Repulsive. Nauseating. What do you want me to say? There aren't any words bad enough.

MARC

There are for blacks. Because part of what it's all about is *intimidation*. And blackface is just another way they use to give people the idea we're inferior. Don't you get it? We're always fair game for ridicule and mockery.

DEE

In the case of morons pasting their faces and grinning like idiots, only if you let it. I hate racism, to my very core. But I want to choose my battles. And blackface isn't one of them. Besides, the makers of Green Book never claimed it could cure racism.

MARC

Where racism has to begin to be cured is changing the voices in our heads.

DEE

Agreed. One hundred percent.

Holds up her hand for what becomes a delayed and awkward high five.

And just maybe your sister's idea might start doing something about that.
Black voices telling you that you have to be offended by blackface.
Black voices telling you where you belong, and where you don't.
Black voices telling you there's a glass ceiling over your head where you work.

MARC

Yes. Those voices. And they're **white**. Just as much.... Even more.

DEE

And you think girls, I mean women don't have voices in their heads, too?
Where we can go, and not get raped?
Or how much we dare drink when we're out?
Or how we can dress, and not be called whores?
What we can say, and not be called bitches.
Who we can hang with, and not be slut-shamed?
You're not the only ones.

MARC

[*pause*] It's just that when a white comes to the aid of a black like in Green Book, there's an unmistakable odor of contempt and superiority I can't stomach.

DEE

Okay. Let's say it was something special for a white man to stick up for a black in the old South. It's not unheard of. Remember *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

MARC

That's a white savior film, if there ever was one.

DEE

You mean any time a white man works to help a black, he's automatically pigeonholed as a condescending "white savior."

MARC

I mean that Hollywood uses white saviors to make the existence of racism palatable to white audiences, who want to be convinced that the problem's gone away and done with. We've had Martin Luther King, and nothing else needs to be done. Pretty much that, yes.... Unless ...

DEE

Unless what?

MARC

Unless there's a white man coming out to change segregation.

DEE

Segregation?

MARC

Yes, segregation.

DEE

Segregation?

MARC

Segregation. Have you ever heard of it?

DEE

Of course.

MARC

Well, we live in a country that's grossly screwed up because of segregation. Whites live their good life in "good" neighborhoods ... //

DEE

Meaning white neighborhoods.

MARC

Make America great again.

DEE

Can we leave politics out of this?

MARC

And non-whites are separated into their own neighborhoods.

DEE

It's their choice....

A lot of it.... Isn't it?

MARC

[*beat*] Want me to play back what you just said?

DEE

No need. I get it. Sorry. I admit

MARC

[*beat*] And, from my perspective, whites don't see any connection between their segregated life and racial prejudice.

DEE

We're just people, aren't we? All of us, whites, and blacks, and whatever color.

MARC

You don't see yourself as having race, do you?

DEE

[*pause*] I'm just a person. A woman.... No. I don't really see myself as having race. I was always taught to treat everybody the same.

MARC

That's a white person's answer ... and humanly impossible, by the way. You can't be treating everyone the same. No one can. And I'll guarantee you that a black wouldn't answer my question that way.

DEE

Except, one time....

MARC

[*beat*] What? When?

DEE

I was on a class trip to Jamaica, and all the little kids on the bus just kept staring at us. Turning around in their seats, and staring at us. I felt very *white* that day.

MARC

Try walking in a black neighborhood....
Think about it.

DEE

[*pause*] Am I supposed to be thinking, good? or bad?

MARC

You have black friends, don't you? Some?

DEE

Sure.

MARC

Do you go back to their homes with them?...
Are there any in your immediate neighborhood? As your next-door neighbors?

DEE

No.... So what do you suggest I do?

MARC

Maybe *visit* your black friends.... In *their* neighborhoods.
Park your car there. Walk around there. Eat there.
Maybe even, occasionally, spend a night there. Greet the neighbors.
Put up with the stares. And the comments. Smile at the children.

DEE

Well, isn't that what Tony does in Green Book?

MARC

To Hell with what they did in Green Book.
I'm talking about realistic racism in American.
I'm talking James Baldwin racism.
I'm talking about segregation without whites even realizing it.
I'm talking about the damage Hope and your brother are up to doing.

DEE

She's black, like you, and she's confronting the problem.

MARC

What problem?

DEE

Enabling.

MARC

Enabling? You mean, like drug addicts?

DEE

Enabling white scorpions to sting you with unimportant blackface pictures.
And if you let them this time, it's only going to get worse. Banjos next.

MARC

You're beginning to piss me off. Banjos?
Hope may be black, but that doesn't give her the right to speak for black people.
Not at her age.

DEE

She has her dream. Nothing wrong with that, is there?

MARC

[angrily] Not on my watch.

DEE

You're getting mad at me; and I haven't done a thing. Just chill, please.

MARC

I *am* angry.

DEE

And you can't really be black unless you're angry, right?

You watch Green Book; and all you see is racism.

Well, that's not where Don Shirley was. His mind was wrapped around music, which was the only way of living he cared to think about. He lived for music.

It was his rabbit hole; just like all of us fall into rabbit holes from time to time.

His fight was not the brothers' fight. Until he found it. And who was with him, then?... You're just carrying a chip on your shoulder. That's what.

MARC

That's it. *Good bye...*

Dad's right: Whites don't have even a pea-brained idea of what being black is.

DEE quickly puts her hands on Marc's face, and gently kisses him on the lips. He steps back in shock, looks at DEE, and then takes her into his arms for a long, full, physical kiss.

ALEX enters, headphones in her ears, listening to music. She sees MARC and DEE, pulls out the headphones, and –

ALEX

Marcus Douglass, what in the name of our Lord do you think you're doing?

You're black, Bro.

MARC and DEE pull apart.

DEE

It's not what you think.

ALEX

I saw what I saw. Don't tell me it's not what I think.
And he's my brother. And you're ... //

DEE

What? White?

ALEX

Yes! White! And what do you think *you're* doing?... He's got no right ... //

DEE

He's got more right to kiss me than anyone else on this ship. I kissed him first.

ALEX

Why? Because you love him? or his blackness fascinates you?

DEE

We were arguing. About color. And he made a point that got me under the skin....
[*facetiously*] My pretty white skin.
And I said something I didn't mean to. Not the way it came out.
And the only thing I could do to say it the right way was to kiss him.... *There!*

ALEX

You've just been wanting to feel what it feels like, to kiss a black face.

DEE

It's *your sister* who got all this started.

ALEX

No it isn't. I saw it coming all the time.
The way my black brother looked at you, the very first time he saw you.

DEE

We were talking about white saviorism, in movies.
And I said it isn't always that way.
Like, is it white saviorism when Germans risked their lives to save Jews from the Nazis? Or in Rwanda? Or to put water out to save the lives of illegal aliens?
And he said your Dad said that whites don't have a pea-brained idea what being black is like.
And I said, does a black have to be angry, with a chip on his shoulder, and weird about it, to be really black? If you're not mad enough, you're not black enough?
Or did Green Book have to get madder to be a good movie?
And he got mad. And I kissed him.

ALEX

You're making *me* mad.... [beat] But, I forgive you.

DEE

[pause] Cool. I get it.

MARC

[beat] Let me try one more time....

This is too strange. I feel like I'm talking to aliens....

We've been born into a place that systematically discriminates against blacks.

And you're still not reading me?

It doesn't matter what your intentions are:

If you go blackface, you're insulting people.

And you're going to make people mad.

So, ask yourself: What's right about doing it?

DEE

Because it will get people to think.

And that's where healing begins, and hopefully discrimination starts to end.

MARC

You're all against me.

Don't any of you understand? It's breaking an unwritten law.

DEE

Martin Luther King advocated breaking the law.

Was he against you, too?

[pause] May I make a suggestion?

MARC

Yeah.... Okay.... Go ahead.

DEE

We'll let Hope do her blackface thing ... //

ALEX

And your brother do it with her?

DEE

Yes. Let's let both of them do it,

provided Marc explains first that they're not disrespecting anybody by it,

but only showing how hypocritical it is to tar and feather a person for doing it, before you understand why.

MARC

[*long pause*] I'll never win, will I? against you women.

ALEX

That means we're going to let them do it?

MARC

[*beat*] Yeah, I guess so.

ALEX

Good for you. Got to go.

ALEX puts her earphones back in her ears, and exits.

DEE

Let's get writing your speech.

MARC

I never thought, to my dying day

DEE takes his hand.

DEE

Hope has her dreams. I'm glad for her.

They exit.

SAILOR 1

Why do people talk, when they don't care what they think?

SAILOR 2

It's something they're born with.... Love....
They love to hear their voices and their own opinions.

SAILOR 1

But with so many voices out there everywhere, how can they hear themselves?

SAILOR 2

The machine's getting too big, isn't it?

SAILOR 1

And way too complicated.

SAILOR 2

Pretty soon we won't know or believe a thing.

SAILOR 1

Except what talking heads tell us to believe.

SAILOR 2

Times were once when songs of Jolson
Were gauged as being light and wholesome
No one denays.
Not many a thing stays.

SAILOR 1

Ten thousand fiddles in politics
Are played by cads and hypocrites
These cyber days.
Not many a thing stays.

They exit.

SCENE 5 – THE SHOW

A performance area in the ship's main dining hall. At a table for nine or ten (the Table), MAJOR DOUGLASS is sitting with CINDY WILSON. Across the stage from them is a similar table where the Captain and the two sailors are sitting. These represent the ship's audience for the kids' variety show, which, in essence, is performed on stage between those two tables. MARC enters, and emcees (standing off to the side when the others perform).

[The lines up to the time when MARC introduces HOPE and CHRIS are flexible. They may be rearranged, or even rewritten in the Director's discretion to fit the circumstances.]

MARC

We're not professionals at this at all. Mostly teenagers, actually. And so, I ask you to ... uhh ... understand, and have patience with what we've put together for your entertainment tonight. The acts are original; from our hearts, directly, to you. That I guarantee. And if, in doing, we might have offended, remember we're kids, and all will be mended....

MARC

[*beat*] Ladies and Gentlemen, Captain, crew, and guests, this is the onboard, unexplored Variety Show of 2019. And, aside from the Spice Girls, who, unfortunately had to make a last-minute cancelation ... just kidding ... every other talent has arrived. And it's a boatload, I assure you. Or maybe I should say, a shipload.

So ... let's get things started.... From Richmond, Virginia, let me introduce to you, Kathy Wilson, who will [*brief description of Kathy's talent*].

KATHY enters, acknowledges applause, and performs. When she finishes, she bows and takes a seat at the Table with her mother and MAJOR DOUGLASS.

MARC

Tell me if you've seen this before.

MARC performs a magic trick (or two).

MARC

Next, from my hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana, is my sister, Alex ... Alicia Douglass. She'll [*brief description of Alex's talent*].

ALEX enters, acknowledges applause, and performs. When she finishes, she bows and takes a seat at the Table with the others already sitting there.

MARC

See what I'm talking about? a boatload of talent....

[*beat*] Next we have *Dee* Wilson ... Diana, Kathy's sister. Born in Richmond, Dee now calls Charlottesville her home ... during the school year, at least, at U VA.

DEE enters, acknowledges applause, and performs. When she finishes, she bows and takes a seat at the Table with the others already sitting there.

MARC

Next ... direct from Herron Charter, Indianapolis, Indiana, where he has just completed an acclaimed four-month run of after-school detention, is my little brother, Cameron, the prodigal prodigy of Herron High.

CAM enters, gives MARC a hip-hop salute, acknowledges applause, and performs. When he finishes, he bows and takes a seat at the Table with the others already sitting there.

MARC

Last, and most certainly not least,
although they happen to be the babies of our families,
are the dynamic duo of Chris Wilson and my sister, Hope Douglass.

[hurriedly] Wait. Wait. Wait.... Wait. I have something important to tell you.

MARC holds up a palm as a wait signal.

MARC

This is a bit dodgy, as I think some British might say.
Or sketchy, as Hope might say.
But we have a situation back in the States that's stirring her up. Out of the water.
Like ... what is black, and white, and blue all over....
Thar she blows.
It's an obsession.
It's called, blackface.
And all I can say is,
Dad, you've stood tall through the loss of our mother.
And all of us, we wonder if we'll ever stop missing Ma so much.
And we thank you, for all the strength you've given us.
So, in my sister's name, Hope, we all hope you'll understand.
I did all *I* could do.
Believe me, we've talked this thing ragged.
And I'm the loser. To the girls ... and Chris.
So, for what it's worth.
For a world of insensitivity.
For all the insults and insinuations and jokes people say without thinking.
Ask not on whose conscience blackface rests. It rests on Moby Dick.
And I, therefore, present my sister, Hope, and our friend, Chris.
Whose faces are a work of art.

HOPE and CHRIS enter in blackface or semi-blackface (Director's discretion), and stand there, motionless, for several seconds.

HOPE

I know I'm going to be a disappointment tonight.
If I don't start crying first.
I know I will, with Chris and me practicing so hard together.
But when I got dressed up like this, which was to tell something else important,
I realized, with my face this way, I have something more important to say, first.
[to CHRIS] I'm sorry Chris, but until now I could never ever get myself to do it....
[beat; looking up] Mama ... Mama ... I love you Mama.
And I miss you so much.
Why did you have to go? that way? so young, when you did?
Maybe you don't know how much it hurts us.
Even after eight years.
You always told me I could be anything I set my heart at.
Remember?
When we used to go to that special place we had together in the house?
And I asked you why?
And you said, because skin doesn't make the true color of a person.
You don't have to be white to be the best.
And I asked you if I could be white.
And you said, I could be anything I set my heart at.
Because I *was* already the best color for me.
Because it's me. Because it's for me. Not for anybody else.
You taught me that.
And what could I say? I believed you.
And then you died.
And I stopped believing it so much.
Until tonight. When I saw myself. And I knew you were here, with me.
In blackface I could see something in me I couldn't see before.
And I could understand something in me I couldn't understand before.
How it isn't a different colored skin that matters.
How it isn't how people look at you.
It's how you look to people, when they look inside you.
But it's so scary.
It's so scary to make yourself be someone else, for the first time.
And then ... you aren't afraid anymore.
The embarrassment goes away; and you can be the new you.
And it doesn't matter how afraid you used to be.
And that's what you tried to teach me.
Look into the mirror, you said, and see the beautiful girl you are.
And I looked, and saw *your* beautiful face. And knew you're with me. Right now.
Thank you, Mama, Mommy Brandy, I love you with all my heart.

MARC walks over and hugs HOPE. She starts to cry in his arms.

CHRIS

One hundred years later,
we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free.
One hundred years later,
the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation,
and discrimination.
One hundred years later Negroes live on a lonely island of poverty,
in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.

HOPE

[slowly and tentatively, at first] One hundred years later,
the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society,
and finds himself an exile in his own land.

CHRIS

We have come here to dramatize this condition.
And to rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

HOPE

[beat] I have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.
I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out its creed:
to hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

CHRIS

I have a dream that little children will one day live in a nation where they will not
be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

HOPE

Let freedom ring.
From the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire, let freedom ring.
From the mighty mountains of New York, let freedom ring.
From the Alleghenies of Pennsylvania, let freedom ring.
From the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. From the slopes of California.

CHRIS

But not only there. Let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain in Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill in Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

HOPE and CHRIS reasonably together

And when this happens,
when we allow freedom to ring from every village and hamlet,
from every state and every city,
we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children,
black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics,
will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:
Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we're free at last.

MARC and then everyone stands and starts clapping, MAJOR DOUGLASS included. Then MARC, HOPE, and CHRIS take a seat at the Table with the others already sitting there. Some general confusion in the room.

KATHY

[to HOPE] Your Ma died eight years ago? You said?

HOPE

[recovering] Yes. When I was six.

KATHY

Our Dad did, too. Eight years ago. *Too.*

CAM

[to KATHY] How?

KATHY

[to CAM] A plane crash.

CAM

Ours did, too.

KATHY

What?

CAM

Our Ma died, too. In a plane crash

CHRIS

No way.

KATHY

[to CAM] Where?

CAM

In Ireland.

KATHY

No! No! No way!

ALEX

What's wrong?

CHRIS

So did our Dad. In a plane crash. In Ireland.

ALEX

[to MAJOR DOUGLASS] *Dad?!*

SCENE 6 – THE TRUTH

The ship's main dining hall, empty by now. MAJOR DOUGLASS and CINDY WILSON enter, alone. He seats her at a table for four, and sits across from her. There are two champagne glasses on the table and an ice bucket on the side, with an opened bottle resting in it. He pours; and they drink throughout the scene (maybe a bit too much). No one else is present at first.

MAJOR

I took the liberty [*indicating the champagne*], considering

CINDY

I know.

I know.

We have to do this.

But, really, do we?

MAJOR

We can't dodge this any longer.

We've been suspecting something, for days now.

I know I have, at least.

And champagne always helped.

Brandy and me. A little.

CINDY

What are we going to do, Major?

MAJOR

Talk, I guess.... And drink.

They each take a drink.

CINDY

You start. I can't.

MAJOR

How many men face this? And I never dreamed I would.
I always said I married the perfect wife.
It's what I always said.

CINDY

I did too.
I still have all his clothes. In our closet. At home. Where they were.

MAJOR

Life's not fair.
People aren't fair.
Love isn't fair.
And cheating spouses are the worst....
When did it start?

CINDY

I can't believe I was fooled for so long.
He started traveling like that in 2004. The year Chris was born.
I didn't have a clue. Never.

MAJOR

Hope was born the next year, you know.

CINDY

I've been wondering about the same thing.

MAJOR

[*pause, drinking*] Why? Why did she do it? Why did she do it to me?

CINDY

Or was it me? Maybe I wasn't wife enough. Or happy enough. Or sexy enough.
Or black enough.... [*quickly adding*] O my God, I shouldn't have said that.

MAJOR

Let's avoid "political correctness" tonight. Okay?
Things are hard enough as it is. Okay?

CINDY

Okay.

MAJOR

I hate this. I absolutely hate this.
I wish I could beat the crap out of him. I really do. Touching my wife....
I hate it. I hate it. I hate it.

CINDY

Then let's stop.
Right now.
Before it goes too far.

MAJOR

But I have to know.

CINDY

I know. I know you do.
But what can we do? Even *if* we know?

MAJOR

DNA. Or blood tests, I suppose.

CINDY

And then she won't be your daughter anymore?
Just like that?

MAJOR

[*long, drinking pause*] Infidelity sucks....
I guess I should hate her. But I don't quite feel it yet.

CINDY

Bandy, you mean.

MAJOR

Brandy. Yes. Of course. Not Hope.

CINDY

We're trapped. It's a trap.
What happened eight years ago.

MAJOR

What can I do now?

CINDY

What do you feel like doing?

MAJOR

Doing to his wife what he did to mine.

CINDY

Revenge?

MAJOR

But, of course, I don't.

It's all different.

You're you. And I like you. I really like you. And I wouldn't do that to you.

But what can I do?

CINDY

[*beat*] Let's start with Hope.

MAJOR

What do *you think* I should do?

If it means Hope is not my blood, and has three siblings we never knew about?

CINDY

If that's true ... then ... in a way, Hope is a little bit mine, too.

MAJOR

I'm lost in this.

My head isn't thinking straight. My heart. The way it's feeling right now.

I need your help. Please.

**They sip their champagne for a while.
He refills her glass.**

CINDY

Eight years.

MAJOR

Alone.

CINDY

With the kids, of course. And they all seem to like each other.

MAJOR

Eight years.....
Shit!! Sorry.
It's a long time.

CINDY

Me, too.

MAJOR

Brandy was the love of my life.
And now it's shit.
I simply wasn't the love of her life.

CINDY

Oh....

A long drinking pause.

MAJOR

Love isn't something to take for granted, is it?

CINDY

I don't know if we can help it.
When two people fall in love.
It's out of our hands.

MAJOR

And honor?
Is that out of our hands, too?

CINDY

Love seems more powerful than honor.
At its peak....
It wasn't like they were screwing everything in sight, was it?

MAJOR

Well, that's makes me feel a Hell of a lot better.

CINDY

I mean

MAJOR

You mean what?

CINDY

I mean ... our personal feelings
What happened
They aren't helping us now.

MAJOR

You mean, I guess: Where do we go from here?

CINDY

[*another long, drinking pause*] Do you believe in Fate, Major?

MAJOR

No. Why?

CINDY

Because this is the weirdest streak of Fate I've ever heard of.

MAJOR

What is?

CINDY

A plane crash, that day, eight years ago in Ireland.
That turned both our lives upside down.

MAJOR

I don't call that fate.

CINDY

And I don't call it justice.
But then, the same ship, together, now, because neither of us will fly. Right?

MAJOR

Right.

CINDY

The same dates. The same cruise.
A perfect match of kids. The only kids onboard.

MAJOR

What are you getting at?

CINDY

And, then, a far-fetched case of blackface....
Don't you see? All these things coming together like this?

MAJOR

No. I don't.
For whom?

CINDY

For Hope, for one.

MAJOR

What are you saying?

CINDY

This is a moment of identity for her, like she's never experienced.
And she doesn't realize it yet.

MAJOR

And she brought it on herself? Is that what you think?

CINDY

I'm thinking champagne.
I'm thinking here.
Here and now.
And you.

MAJOR

Are you suggesting what you're making me think you're suggesting?

CINDY

I'm thinking the time has come for me to take off the glasses.
I had the best husband in the world, I thought.
And never to think of another man.
And, now, where is all that?...
In a bucket. An ice bucket....
[beat] She must have been a Hell of a woman.

MAJOR

No better than you, Cindy.

CINDY

So? Is all this just chance? Just coincidence?

MAJOR

No, I don't believe there's a hand out there pulling our strings.
If that's what you think.

CINDY

But, what if ...?

MAJOR

[*drinking pause*] What if what?

CINDY

If you'll tell me "No" to one simple question, I'll chalk all this up to chance.

MAJOR

Yes?...

CINDY

Did the idea for this trip come to you in a dream?...

Tell me.

It did me.

And Richard was in it....

Yes? or No?

MAJOR

A daughter pleading with me for a special graduation present?

Another daughter who left her charcoals behind, begging me for new ones?...

[*drinking pause*] Yes. Damn it. Yes.

It *was* a dream.

And Brandy was in it.

But why?

CINDY

They couldn't rest. For what they did.

Their souls couldn't rest until they pulled the nail out of the coffin.

And made amends....

This.... This was the only way they could be forgiven ... and sleep.

MAJOR

[*pause*] If, indeed, it's Fate brought us together, it's still us, what we do with it.

The CAPTAIN enters, walks over to their table, asks (by hand motion) to sit down, which MAJOR okays (by hand motion). The CAPTAIN sits....

CAPTAIN

I'm afraid I have some bad news for you.

CINDY jumps to her feet. MAJOR stands.

CINDY

O my God! Not the kids?

CAPTAIN

Calm down. Your kids are fine. And sit down.

They sit.

CAPTAIN

Except, there's a problem.
Two of our passengers have filed formal complaints ...
for false impersonation, and maritime racial insult.

MAJOR

What??

CAPTAIN

The blackface thing.
You know. In their show.

CINDY

You must be joking.

CAPTAIN

Sorry. But I'm not.
There will have to be an inquisition.
They are demanding that your two young ones be booted from the ship.
Permanently. At La Harve.

MAJOR

You must be kidding.

CINDY

Where's the First Amendment?

CAPTAIN

It sailed with the Statue of Liberty.
I'm afraid you'll have to come with me.

They stand, and exit together.

SCENE 7 – A BRIEF FOR THE DEFENSE

All nine of the Douglass/Wilson family members enter, and seat themselves around a table in the ship's main dining hall, which is otherwise empty. MAJOR sits next to CINDY. MARC sits next to DEE. CAM sits next to KATHY. CHRIS sits next to HOPE. And ALEX? Well, she takes one of the last seats open.

MAJOR

I've called this meeting to help us prepare a defense for Hope and Chris.

MARC

I told them, right from the beginning, they were walking into trouble.

CAM

Deep trouble. They don't have a prayer.

DEE

Don't you believe in prayer?

CAM

For my sister? Not much.

HOPE

It's like Dirty Dancing, except, no music.

CHRIS

And no dancing.

ALEX

And no Patrick Swayze.

HOPE

Only trouble. Blackface trouble.

KATHY

Tell me:

Is there really something wrong with blackface?

The way they did it.

CHRIS

It *said* something. And that was *good*, not bad.

KATHY

Mom, you always say that if something's good to say,
you can't trash it because *some people* don't like it.
The Bible says there will always be people thinking bad about *something*.

MARC

So, just tell me what's so *good*, about what you two did.

CHRIS

It got people talking.

MARC

And that's *good*, you think?

HOPE

Yes.

CAM

Not if you get kicked off the ship it isn't. We'll all have to leave.

DEE

Part of the trouble in the world is that we can't talk like we used to.

MARC

What's the problem with that? There's a lot of things better left unsaid.

HOPE

It's not the most brilliant way for kids to learn.

MARC

[*to HOPE*] We've been all through that. Let's concentrate on you two's defense.

MAJOR

For you kids to learn and understand the absurdity of what living black means,
we have to talk, We have to be able to talk about it without always being offended.
Every time some white does something or says something stupid.
And every time some black kid does something stupid.
Because we're human.
And being human isn't about picking out every speck in everybody's eye.
It's being able to laugh while you cry because of what's in your own eye.
There's too much talk about disrespect and past things;
and too little about fixing problems now.
Forget kneeling football players, and focus on unwiring prejudice.

DEE

There's a crisis of free speech in our country.

CHRIS

And didn't our blackface look at that?

MAJOR

That's for the Captain to decide.

At sea, Captain's law is the next thing to God's law.

That's where we have to concentrate.

HOPE

So? What's our defense?

KATHY

Live and let live.

All people have the right to keep to their own space,
and do what they want in it.

ALEX

But ... Devil's advocate ... they say when you put your face, your blackface,
in somebody else's, you've invaded somebody else's space.

CHRIS

Ours didn't do anything like that.

HOPE

Ours was the face of Martin Luther King's people.

And there's nothing wrong with that face.

The real question is, what would Martin Luther King do?

How would he decide?

MARC

The struggle's too important to be bled out over trivial stuff.

That's what I would tell them.

And these people are doing just that. Bleeding us out over trivial stuff.

CINDY

You can find snap everywhere if you look hard enough.

And good everywhere, too, when you look.

I've learned that.

And nearsighted lookers ought not be making the laws for the rest of us.

That's how I see it. Not on land or at sea. Not for *our* children.

MAJOR

[*aside*] Brandy used to say “snap.” Once in a while.

DEE

When you go out, every day, feeling disrespected,
well, you get to thinking, I suppose, that things are always meant in a bad way,
even if they're not.
Mom and I've talked about it, and the one thing we absolutely agree upon:
If you're around someone you love, it calms you and makes you a better person.

MAJOR

Hope.... Chris.... This is the defense I'm going to make for you:
Blackface stands on its own.
It's not stereotyping. It's no firearm. It's no threatening mask.
It's no dope. And no violence. And no insult.
And anyone who says otherwise has the eyes of a follower.
And not the eyes of a leader.
And certainly not the eyes of a Martin Luther King.
That's what I'm going to tell them.

CHRIS

Thank you, Dad.

KATHY

Did you just call him, Dad?

CHRIS

I was thinking of something else.
How Dad used to be.
It just slipped out.
Unnecessarily.

CINDY

Good for you, Chris.
I love you.

HOPE

That's it!
We're going in and win this thing.
So, let's go!
For truth, dignity, and country.
Dancing, or no dancing.

DEE

What?

HOPE

Well, you know what I mean.

ALEX

I sure hope you're right. I don't want to be put off this ship.

MAJOR

Not till the trip is done.

They all stand and exit.

SCENE 8 – THE CAPTAIN'S VERDICT

The entire cast has gathered in the ship's main dining hall. The Captain is seated at a table in the center. The two Sailors are on either side of him. CHRIS and HOPE enter last, and approach the Captain's table.

HOPE

Sir. I talk a lot. But I think now is the time to let the others talk, on our behalf.

CAPTAIN

They already have. And have done quite well, I might say.

HOPE

But I think a lot, too.

And one of the things I think about is, what if I didn't have someone to talk to? Because people I try to talk to don't hear me right. Or want to.

I'm only fourteen. Chris is fifteen. And we didn't do what we did for laughs.

We did it to say something, and show that blackface is not the meanness today.

It's what some people in America say, about it, to hurt others.

And my life would suck without an opinion. And I respect the opinion of others.

And I don't try to shut them up....

Well, sometimes I do, when my brothers and sister hog the conversation.

But what I'm trying to say is that unless you make a criminal mistake ...

that's what Dad calls it, you should be allowed to express your opinion,

without being kicked off the boat. And I hope I haven't done anything like that.

Like calling people, "people of color," which is so condescending to me, like there are only two kinds of people: People of color, and people ... //

CAPTAIN

Young lady. Sit down. Before you undo all their good work.

HOPE

But ... //

CAPTAIN

Sit down, now, you two. And I mean it.

They sit with their families.

CAPTAIN

It's my turn to say a few words.
The Captain of a ship is the law of the ship.
The Captain can marry. The Captain can divorce.
In fact, a few trips ago, when I caught a couple cheating on their spouses,
I confiscated their wedding bands. Divorced them on the spot.
And booted them off. Both of them. At the next port of call.
Now, on this trip, I've been informed that I should boot off a pair of teenagers.
For wearing blackface. At their show for us the other night.
They tell me that kids, pretending to be young Martin Luther Kings,
is tantamount to shouting out the forbidden word.
That Americans can never shout out. Even at sea.
And do you want to know my take on this?
That claim is nearly as braindead as arguing that no one with black skin can play
the role of Hamlet in a Shakespeare play.
It's rank racism in the guise of "political correctness."
And when "political correctness" sunsets into political ignorance,
it's time to say "Good Night." And so I shall.
I declare that blackface is hereby legal on the high seas.
For God's sake, it's common knowledge how many people in America blacken
their faces every night. Before going to bed. And that's wrong?
And what about those who blacken their foreheads at church?
On Ash Wednesday?
Should they be expected to wash their faces before going out in public?
Or going back to work? Or back to school?
It's like proclaiming that a photograph in a private pub of miners,
their faces black with coal soot, should be ripped down and banned.
I'm sorry. On this ocean we don't rip and ban like that.

MARC

[*to his Father*] I'm transferring to U VA. In the Fall. Where Dee is.

ALEX

[to CINDY] And I'm going to the University of Cincinnati.
And write a play all about this, and what's happening.

**CINDY and MAJOR look at each other,
laugh, and then kiss.**

CAPTAIN

Oh, quiet, please.
Sometimes black hides things. Sometimes it reveals things.
Two nights ago was one of those revealing things.
[to HOPE and CHRIS] Would you two please stand.

HOPE and CHRIS stand.

CAPTAIN

I hereby find you ... innocent of all blackface charges.

**The rest of the families stand, cheer,
hug, and kiss.**

CAPTAIN

Hold on.... Quiet down.... I've not finished.
But you two are *guilty* ... of doing only one show.
And therefore, I sentence you, together with the rest of us,
to witness an encore, on our last night at sea....
Okay?

HOPE

But Sir ... Your Honor ... Captain ...
I'm afraid not many a thing stays the same.

CAPTAIN

No problem, young lady.
Do it any way you want.
Anything goes.
And oh! One last item.... Sorry, I almost forgot....
Quiet, please.
Compliments of the Great Seagull in the Sky Bakery,
we have two shaving cream pies [*showing*],
for the two complainants in this matter.
You may pick them up whenever you want.

Everyone to their feet. Music. Dancing about. Clapping. General joy. CHRIS steps to the front of the stage, addressing the audience.

CHRIS

If we shadows have offended,
think but this, and all is mended,
that you have but slumbered here
while these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
no more yielding but a dream.

HOPE joins CHRIS, and takes his hand. The Sailors step forward, in front of the two of them.

SAILOR 2

If it's white, and flies like a seagull,
and cries like a seagull,
and looks like a seagull,
and drops doo-doo like a seagull,
you can bet it's no cow.

SAILOR 1

It's been forever, at least a while,
Since Washington has cracked a smile
These sober days.
Not many a thing stays.

SAILOR 2

With God in heaven, and Peace on Earth
The last hurrah our play is worth
Is friendly praise.
Not many a thing stays.

The entire cast gather around the Sailors and wave goodbye.

END