

EXCERPTS FROM 'CAPTAIN'S SURRENDER'
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A romantic bit:

Another breath - he could no longer taste the rum on the air, but there was a meager feeling of consolation nevertheless; enough to make the second part of the statement stronger. "I have no wish to repay your goodness to me by corrupting you, by ruining your reputation, or perhaps even - God forbid - being the cause of your death."

Silence once more. A long silence and a slow change - like the loom of unseen land after months of blue water, something he could sense but could not explain. A quick glance showed Peter with the puzzled, inward look of a man chasing a revelation, hardly daring to move for fear of frightening it away. Strangely, despite the anguish and the ever present desire, a stab of amusement pricked him - how absurd this whole situation was! Was it not the final proof of man's ascendancy over nature, that his unnatural desires could be canceled out by his unnatural scruples? *Would that I were not human then*, he thought, and met Kenyon's suddenly focused gaze with a resolute, mocking smile.

But Peter's thoughts had clearly gone in quite a different direction. He closed the gap between them, and after a moment of just looking, examining Josh's face and figure with an open admiration that made heat boil into Josh's face and every part of him tingle, he raised a hand and slid it through Josh's hair. It came to rest at the nape of his neck, thumb stroking the curve of his jaw.

Trying not to shake too much, trying not to believe the best, trying not to merely melt, he arched into the touch, unable to stop himself. "Oh!"

"Josh," the dark voice was smoky with intimacy, and he could almost have died happy, just hearing his name so caressed. Instead, he looked up to meet a green gaze equally private, laced with wonder and a certain amount of rueful amusement - the traces of an understanding that had changed everything. "It occurs to me that you and I are very alike."

There was unusual warmth in his face; a small, sweet smile that undermined every defense, and Josh could not help but smile back, the uneasy clamoring of his conscience temporarily forgotten.

"You're trying to protect me - and at the cost of your own happiness."

Reaching up, Kenyon took hold of the end of his cravat, pulled the bow and the whole, long length of it undone with a slow, steady pressure - a seemingly endless crisp slide of linen over his skin.

Long fingers at his neck, easing open each of the buttons on his waistcoat one by one, and he could neither move nor speak for joy and lust and disbelief. If he tilted his head just slightly he could feel Peter's breath, warm against his bared throat, he could set his mouth against the bent head and feel the cool softness of hair against his lips. He did this now, lest delay allow the chance to disappear, closed his eyes and breathed in the scent.

"So it seems to me that you already care for me, and your stipulations are intended entirely to prevent me from feeling affection for you in return. Is that right?"

Far too coolheaded, far too in control of the situation, while Josh was fast unraveling beneath his hands. Hands that were already lifting coat and loosened waistcoat off his shoulders, leaving him exposed - and so nervous that he wondered suddenly how much of his caution had been self defense, not nobly motivated at all. Since he was being systematically bared, it seemed appropriate to surrender this too. "Yes."

Kenyon folded the clothes and placed them carefully on the cleanest barrel. "Shall I tell you something?"

"Please."

"It's too late."

Josh needed a drink, something to steady his nerves, calm him down before he utterly committed himself to something he was persuaded was a very bad idea. What he got instead was Peter returning, having taken off his own jacket, in a shirt so worn and threadbare it was all but transparent. "W- What?"

"I already care about you, you fool. If I didn't," Peter frowned over the the too-stiff little buttons of the collar, undid them with practical briskness, and slid his hand under the material, watching it with curious, fascinated eyes. "If I didn't," he said, the hand closing hard, drawing Josh unresisting towards him, "would I be doing this?" He bent his head and kissed Josh's exposed throat, mouthing from shoulder to ear. And there was ..teeth, and - god - tongue, and there might be a logical flaw in his argument but Josh was too busy grabbing him by that worn shirt and shoving him hard into the wall to care. At the impact, Peter gave a little shudder of surprise, his breath caught and his eyes widened - Josh could feel the surrender under his hands, both of them a little taken aback by it, and delighted.

An Age of Sail bit:

"Sir, they're saying it's hopeless!" Lt. Howe cried, loud enough to be heard from heads to stern gallery. "Even if we take the *Aimable*, how will we ever stand against the three decker? They're saying it's being held in reserve to crush us when we've used our last strength here."

"Are they indeed?" he said, wishing that for once he could act like a common tar and punch the stupid man in the mouth. "Well you may tell 'them' that it's possible the *Indomitable* may take us, but it's *certain* that I shall shoot the first man who leaves his post myself."

A roar and a crash, and for a moment he had no idea what had happened, until Howe leaned forward and plucked the oak splinter – a foot and a half long – out of his side. A brief wave of dizziness went over him, but then, with a ponderous, grating slide, the *Asp* seemed to shake herself and glide gently forwards. When the *Aimable* tried to follow, her one standing mast bent under the strain of sail, and the backstays parted. The great, six tonne timber came crashing down upon her men, and upon the *Seahorse's* head, driving it under the waves. Seas began pouring

aboard, and as the *Trounin's* gunners kept up a relentless fire, the *Seahorse's* men abandoned their cannon to shift the dead weight before it sank the ship.

Thus tangled, Peter saw the *Asp* make sail, getting away. He wished Joslyn well, hoped he would escape with news of this unexpected fleet, this French occupation of what was, by treaty, British land. Only how would the *Asp* escape the *Indomitable*, which had been hanging back all this time, waiting to strike only if it proved necessary to do so?

The next few moments were taken up with the capstan, rigging ropes around the *Aimable's* mast and slowly winching it off the deck – the piper piping all the while, the men huffing shanties as they pushed at the long levers, and shot screaming aboard from both French ships.

There was a strange light in the smoke, like the rising of a sun, and at the same time a knocking on the sides of the ship as British seamen began to come aboard up the main chains. “Sir! Sir!”

They were the *Macedonian's* men, some of them still with the jaunty straw hats and the ship's name embroidered in glinting gold on the ribbon.

“Just you watch, sir. Just you watch!”

“The water is above the cable tier, sir,” said Howe quietly, catching something of their awe. “And still gaining. If we don't send men to the pumps now, we will sink within the next quarter of an hour.”

And sending men to the pumps would mean abandoning the guns. Would mean...

But he couldn't fail. He had never failed, it wasn't in his nature. Peter Kenyon did not...

The wind, blowing the *Trounin's* smoke back over it, briefly cleared a patch of brilliant sea, and he saw it all with minute clarity – the *Macedonian* in flames, driving into the *Indomitable's* bowsprit. Her sails were sheets of fire, and her decks blacker than pitch. The *Indomitable's* rested, eager crew were trying to fend her off with oars and poles but the wind drove her back each time. If he squinted his streaming eyes, Peter could imagine the figure at the helm, holding it steady, not letting them brush off this kiss of death. And then flame leaped the gap, the *Indomitable* was on fire too.

“Oh my God, please, no!” he said, and something cracked deep inside the *Macedonian's* hull. Her masts flew into the air like the stems of rockets and a white sphere of fire too intense to watch pushed out of her, bursting her into tumbling, jagged shards, blowing a hole in the *Indomitable* large enough to row a Captain's barge inside.

The *Indomitable* tilted, men flinging themselves off her into the sea, tilted again, filled with water and sank. There was nothing left of the *Macedonian* at all but strewed wreckage. Peter pressed his hand to his side, where the blood from his wound was making his shirt feel uncomfortably cold, and staggered, fighting for breath, for sense, for the right words.

“Strike our colors,” he said at last in a small, dead voice. Yes, dead – Josh was dead, so what did it matter? “Tell them we surrender.”

