

TOP GALLANT

A Musical in Two Acts

Act II

Book, music and lyrics  
by Paul Wolf

©2024 Paul Wolf  
All rights reserved

Scene 2  
 Jack Rose Tap  
 Later that night

Near-darkness. TOP GALLANT rests on the mantel. Its silhouette dominates the empty tavern. Lights slowly come up.

Muted accordion music sounds distantly in a back room. To the sound of laughter, the door at the top of the stairs opens. SUSANNA descends. CAPTAIN MARDOCKE, half-drunk, follows.

SUSANNA

Haven't I given you enough for one night!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE tries to kiss SUSANNA.

SUSANNA

Get . . . off! That . . . ship . . . !

*(gestures toward TOP GALLANT)*

A few coins . . .

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

We'll see each other again? Tonight . . . ? Tomorrow?

SUSANNA

Not without . . .

*(gestures for money)*

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Susanna, I've always taken care of you . . .

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE pays SUSANNA. She gestures for as much as she can get. CAPTAIN MARDOCKE grabs SUSANNA and tries to kiss her.

SUSANNA

Off!

*(descends stairs and exits)*

SWAIN DAWKINS lies asleep on a bench.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(descends stairs; faces TOP GALLANT)*

She sails, she sails. A biscuit toss away. Do you see her, Dawkins?

SWAIN DAWKINS

*(wakes, offers a drink)*

Have a tot.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Top Gallant is like the well-formed calf of a woman. She tapers so beautifully from her ends, the eye cannot find the center spot.

SWAIN DAWKINS

A little eggnog for the gollywopper bird.

*(drinks)*

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(forces SWAIN DAWKINS to kneel with him before TOP GALLANT)*

Kneel . . . must kneel. Behold the world's fastest ship. Large profits await, if I build to Top Gallant's design. I'll need a contract with teeth.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Teeth . . . who has any?

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE swats SWAIN DAWKINS. CAPTAIN MARDOCKE rises, using SWAIN DAWKINS for support. SWAIN DAWKINS rolls onto his back.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

That boy, Toby. Where did he get this wooden boat? I thought I saw the last of her. And my ship's carpenter? Mathias . . . Christopher Mathias. Master carpenter. Sailed from Boston. I thought I showed him a lesson . . . that's not in the history books of these parts.

*(faces TOP GALLANT)*

Time to make something of this ship. I'm going to take the lines off her.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE approaches TOP GALLANT over SWAIN DAWKINS' prone form.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Draw her . . . and quarter her.

*(makes the sign of the cross)*

Saw her thus . . . and saw her thus . . . amidships and amidbeam. We'll see her interior lines. I shall get the saw.

*(exits to basement)*

SWAIN DAWKINS raises his head. He watches CAPTAIN MARDOCKE depart.

SWAIN DAWKINS

I vum.

SWAIN DAWKINS remains inert. With a scrape, the tavern door opens. TOBY pokes his head in.

TOBY

Susanna . . . ? Susanna . . . !

SWAIN DAWKINS

*(rises, drinks)*

Let us sing the tune the old cow died of . . .

*(sings, improvises)*

I HAVE SEEN AN ELEPHANT IN THE MOON!

TOBY shrinks. He sees TOP GALLANT on the mantel. TOBY skirts SWAIN DAWKINS and scampers up the stairs. He looks over the mantel's balustrade and moves toward TOP GALLANT. He makes a sound.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Evil spirits. How about a drink? Been known to . . .

*(drinks, retrieves a pistol)*

TOBY comes closer. He makes a sound.

SWAIN DAWKINS

*Elephants!* I have already discussed this . . . with myself. Curse them, sink them, blast them, and confound them!

*(sinks to floor)*

So ends.

*(drinks, eyes TOP GALLANT)*

Why does Mardocke want that ship? She is a noble boat. I'll take the lines off her myself.

*(rises, prepares to sketch TOP GALLANT)*

TOBY reaches over the balustrade. TOP GALLANT wobbles.

SWAIN DAWKINS

*Flying spirits!*

*(cocks pistol; whispers)*

A monkey . . . in the mizzen rigging . . .

TOP GALLANT rises above the mantel.

SWAIN DAWKINS

*Blue . . . devil!*

*(points pistol as TOP GALLANT disappears)*

Ohhh! By Jupiter!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(offstage)*

Dawkins! Where did you put the saw? Dawkins!

Spooked by CAPTAIN MARDOCKE, SWAIN DAWKINS fires toward the basement. Toby heads down the stairs with TOP GALLANT. SWAIN DAWKINS blocks his way.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Ooph! Why, you --

SWAIN DAWKINS grabs for TOP GALLANT. TOBY and SWAIN DAWKINS struggle.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Come off!

TOBY knocks SWAIN DAWKINS down the stairs.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Oh!

TOBY in terror clammers up the stairs. CAPTAIN MARDOCKE enters from the basement. SWAIN DAWKINS turns and fires another shot, narrowly missing CAPTAIN MARDOCKE.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*Ahhh! Ahhh!*

TOBY scrambles, unseen with TOP GALLANT, toward a high window behind the mantel. SWAIN DAWKINS fires.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*Ahhh!*

*(ducks)*

SWAIN DAWKINS falls into a stupor. CAPTAIN MARDOCKE stares dumbfoundedly at SWAIN DAWKINS, then at the vacant mantel.

Scene 3  
Back of the Jack Rose Tap  
Very late that night

The set turns, revealing the back of the JACK ROSE TAP, covered by a leafy trellis and surrounded by thick bushes. TOBY, carrying TOP GALLANT, begins to climb down the trellis. He freezes as SPARROW becomes visible. SUSANNA enters fearfully, as though being followed.

SPARROW

*(half-hidden in shadows; soft)*

Susanna . . .

SUSANNA

Oh!

TOBY climbs back and hides.

SUSANNA

Sparrow! Is that you? Show your face!

SPARROW

*(moves closer)*

Your friend, Nick . . . where is he?

SUSANNA

What! No . . . no. Show yourself! Coward!

*(exits)*

TOBY pokes his head out. He climbs part way down the trellis.

SPARROW

Captain Mardocke . . . over here!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE enters, half-drunk.  
TOBY freezes.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Give a sign . . . where you are . . .

SPARROW

Here!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE stumbles into the bushes. TOBY climbs back.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Sparrow . . . Sparrow . . .

SPARROW

*(distant)*

Susanna! Captain, I've found Susanna. I believe she has something to tell us. Over here . . . over here!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Susanna?

SPARROW

Susanna . . . Susanna . . .

*(exits)*

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE stumbles after SPARROW. When it appears safe, TOBY, carrying TOP GALLANT, climbs halfway down. NICK, empty gunnysack over his shoulder, enters. TOBY hides midway in the trellis.

NICK

*(appreciatively of trellis)*

Sweet berries! A mighty nice trellis. High and mighty.

*(calls out)*

I can see you. No trellis I ever seen has a clump like that.

TOBY pokes his head out.

NICK

What's this? Let me help . . .

TOBY half-lowers TOP GALLANT to NICK. Thinking better of it, TOBY climbs to the ground carrying TOP GALLANT.

TOBY

Oh, thanks. I gotta get out.

NICK

Out? You already *are* out . . . pretty far . . . up in the trellis and all. Howdy, I'm Nick.

TOBY

I'm Toby.

NICK

Toby. Now . . . don't *you* look familiar.

TOBY

Aunt Cecilia's . . .

NICK

. . . *hmm hmm* . . .

TOBY

. . . she doesn't like me.

NICK

*(studies TOBY)*

Are you on a voyage?

TOBY

It's too hard to explain . . . yeah . . . I gotta find somebody.

NICK

Up there? Where you come from? --

TOBY

No, my father. I'm lookin' to find him . . . down here . . . somewhere.

NICK

*(sits on ground; a beat)*

Yeah. I'm lookin' for somebody, too . . . somewhere. By the name of Susanna.

TOBY

Susanna . . . ! You know Susanna?

NICK

I do . . . and I don't.

TOBY

You know where she is? I'd like to talk to her.

NICK

*(musing)*

Like to talk to her, too. But sometimes you gotta wait. Wait and see. Whoever you're lookin' for will come back to you. You'll see.

TOBY

*(a few beats)*

Look, it's been good talking to you and all, but I gotta go.



NICK

Important business -- this time of night? Up there, somewhere?

TOBY

Yeah . . . down here . . . !

*(clutches TOP GALLANT)*

I'm afraid they're gonna steal Top Gallant . . . can't rightly say . . . where . . .

NICK

*(studies TOP GALLANT)*

What a *beauuuuuutiful* ship.

*(rises)*

Toby! I've got an idea. Take this . . . hide 'er in this . . . right now I've got no use for it.

*(hands gunnysack to TOBY)*

TOBY

. . . what?

NICK

I use it to carry wood. That ship's more valuable than any piece of wood.

TOBY

*(takes gunnysack)*

. . . thanks!

NICK

*(a beat)*

Top Gallant. I bet she's about to take you on a fair passage.

*(paints a soft, yet vivid picture)*

The moon is high . . . she makes the sails *allll* aglow . . . I can just picture it out.

TOBY puts TOP GALLANT in gunnysack and exits. He gives a wave. NICK pauses before moving off. The moon shines on the sky as though it were a ghostly sail.

*[MUSIC: THE MOON IS HIGH (WOMEN and MEN offstage)]*

NICK

*(sings)*

THE MOON IS HIGH  
AND ALL IS WELL DOWN BELOW.  
SHE FILLS THE SKY  
AND MAKES THE SAILS ALL AGLOW.

NICK

*(cont.)*

WHEN ALL IS STILL  
THERE'S NOTHIN' MORE WE SHOULD KNOW,  
SHOULD KNOW . . .

The moon silvers the landscape. NICK starts to  
move off.

NICK

THE MOON IS HIGH,  
SHE FILLS THE SKY!

*(exits)*

*[MUSIC continues as UNDERSCORE. The set  
revolves to CAPTAIN MARDOCKE's quarters in  
the JACK ROSE TAP]*

*[MUSIC segues]*

Scene 4  
 Captain Mardocke's Jack Rose Tap quarters  
 Early next morning

*[UNDERSCORE: SUSANNA'S ENTRANCE  
 (WOMEN and MEN offstage) segues from THE  
 MOON IS HIGH]*

*[Lights blaze]*

WOMEN and MEN

*(sing; offstage)*

AH!

SUSANNA enters, pushed by SPARROW. She  
 faces a half-sober CAPTAIN MARDOCKE.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Susanna. Hurrah, hurrah, hur-bloody-rah. Top Gallant . . . where is she?

SUSANNA does not reply.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Sing me a ditty . . . where is Toby?

SUSANNA does not reply.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Black Bess, behind the island, is ready to sail. Where are my young men?

SUSANNA does not reply.

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(to SPARROW)*

The constables. Get them!

SPARROW exits.

SUSANNA

Captain . . .

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Kitten . . .

SUSANNA

I'm not your kitten --

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

-- an easy touch. No one can play the temptress the way you can. Young men from town . . . fresh sailors --

SUSANNA

-- you're knocked into a cocked hat.

VOICE OF SWAIN DAWKINS

*(hidden in bunk; moans)*

*Oghoghogh . . .*

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(scowls)*

What's the matter with him!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE crosses to the bunk and pulls back the curtain. SWAIN DAWKINS lies with a bandaged head and arm.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Let us sing the tune the old cow died of . . .

*(sings, improvises)*

I HAVE SEEN AN ELEPHANT IN THE MOON!

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(pulls SWAIN DAWKINS up by his collar)*

That scoundrel, Toby. He did this.

SWAIN DAWKINS

*(reaches for bottle)*

Some lightning. To lighten me --

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

*(shoves SWAIN DAWKINS into bunk)*

-- play possum.

SWAIN DAWKINS

Ohhh . . .

CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Sparrow!

*(to SUSANNA)*

Where is Top Gallant! Did Toby steal it? Or did you?

SUSANNA

You're still possessed with a toy boat?

## CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Not a toy. Not at'all. Made by a master carpenter. Christopher Mathias. Toby's father. A puzzle . . . which bears more on the soul of a ship? Her form? Or her captain? *I* taught him how to sail. *I* taught him every bit of wisdom, what's locked in the nuts of that ship. And now . . . what's *lost* on that ship!

## SUSANNA

. . . what? . . .

## CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Mathias sailed . . . where there ain't no master chart. Master carpenter -- *he*. But no captain -- *he*. I pursued Top Gallant . . . he *forced* me to pursue her . . . to where Top Gallant's name . . . is writ . . . in water . . .

## SUSANNA

. . . dear God . . .

## CAPTAIN MARDOCKE

Ah! Don't look at *me!* One more question like that . . . !

*(gathers rope)*

We'll take a little walk . . .

*(draws rope over SUSANNA's shoulder)*

up ladder lane . . .

*(curls rope around SUSANNA's neck)*

down hawser street . . .

*(tightens rope)*

we'll go . . .

## SUSANNA

Captain . . . !