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ENGL 4505

6 May 2019

### Perhaps, Poor Richard

I decided to focus on *Persuasion* because it was the Austen work I had heard the absolute least about; even from the title I would not have guessed that it was one of her novels. I decided to write about Dick Musgrove because it seems especially weird to have a character so minor that he isn't even alive anymore, even more so since the entirety of most characters' impression of him is that he might as well have not even lived in the first place. It is a particularly inglorious way to treat a man we never get to meet, who never gets to speak for himself. My focus was on trying to give a voice to someone who ultimately does not matter one little bit, who died who-knows-how and who-knows-where. I am not sure that I successfully wrote a story about a "stupid" man, though I think I did get across "unmanageable," out of the two measly traits we get from *Persuasion*. In the end, I thought Dick Musgrove did not get to be a full human being in the novel, and I wanted to give him humanity. At the same time, he has been dragged away from his family, and sent off to die because he is "different," somehow. So, even here, he is not the same kind of human everyone else is.

I made most of this up, except Wentworth, the ship, and Gibraltar. I decided that he should have one connection with his family: Louisa, and made them share the love of feeling stone on their feet. I thought that this "missing scene" would be valuable, not for *Persuasion*, but on its own, as a reminder that everyone has a story.

Dick Musgrove always liked to have fun.

Perhaps that was why he had never made it past Second Lieutenant. Perhaps that was why he always seemed to have less money than he expected. Perhaps that was why his letters home had grown shorter, and less frequent. Perhaps that was why he had been left behind at the first sign of the slightest cough.

Perhaps that was why his father had ordered him into the navy at 20, paying for a cheap commission to get him out of the way. Perhaps that was why he had never been able to meet Charles' new wife, Mary, though he had read that their wedding was quite lovely, nor see their "delightful children, were they not just perfect?" Perhaps that was why he had seen Ellory lying on the deck, smelled the scorch of gunpowder in the air, and fought to keep from smiling.

Perhaps that was why—

He shook his head. The old building was stone and thatch, and filled with the damp scents of mildewed straw and resin. The wood floor was soft from the rot, and there was no other furniture save a half-smashed barrel, filled with nothing but rusted nails and a moth-tattered blanket. Fine motes of dust were playing with the last rays of a Spanish sunset as it filtered in through a low window. If he strained, he could almost hear the ocean, just a little ways away. It was a slow, quiet day in Gibraltar. It was also unbelievably boring.

—Perhaps that was why he had just taken several painstaking hours to carve dice out of an old wooden slat. He finished boring in the last pip just as the door opened, and a tall, serious man with a broad mustache stepped inside. He stood up, quickly hiding the dice as he saluted with a distinct flourish. The other man paused, and saluted stiffly.

"Alright, Musgrove, you've had enough. You're free to go." Dick followed him with a bright grin and a quick step.

Before he could hit the street, however, he found himself blocked by a pair of tough old hands, each one wearing a shirt that did not exactly suffice to cover a powerful barrel chested figure. He stopped short. They certainly looked... strong. He flashed them a grin and looked at the captain beside him.

“Turn out your pockets, Lieutenant.”

With a roll of his eyes and an amused smirk, Dick obliged, producing a few bits of string, an decidedly dull pen knife, and a handful coins. The captain picked up the coins and counted them methodically.

“Five shillings, sixpence. Where did you get this, Musgrove?”

“Investments?” The captain stared at him. He put the money in his own pockets as Dick shrugged. Next, he unfolded the knife and tested the edge.

“Can you not take care of anything, Musgrove? This blade would not even cut butter.”

“I cannot say it has caused me any trouble.”

“I would not take that bet. You can go. No more problems, understand?”

They swapped a last salute as Dick’s boots finally hit solid cobblestone for the first time in a week. He relished the sensation and stamped his feet with pleasure, setting off like a dart. Just as he turned towards an alley with an excited glint in his eye, he heard a few disjointed parts of some shout from the captain.

“And remember, Lieutenant! — is docked, and —! Tomorrow!”

“What?” He called back. The captain turned his back and walked away.

Dick shrugged again and ducked back down the alley. He fumbled for a moment with his collar, and pulled out the very rough looking pair of dice. With a triumphant smile, he dashed off, knowing exactly where he wanted to go.

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When Captain Wentworth stepped in through the door of a bar called “The White Ship,” he expected to find his missing second lieutenant. He did not expect his boots to stick to the floor of a poorly lit, foul-smelling tavern littered with still sleeping bodies. With an increasingly wrathful glare, he looked around the room, spying the only slumped figure in the room wearing a semblance of a naval uniform. He stalked across floor heavily, startling awake an old swarthy barman who looked up with an angry glare, then shrank down again as he caught Wentworth’s eye.

It was unacceptable to find an officer of the navy in what was, quite obviously, a gambling house. He shook the snoring man roughly, scattering stained playing cards to the floor. Second Lieutenant Richard Musgrove jerked awake with a start, blearily recognized a uniform, and shot up, clattering glasses and dice as his chair slammed down to the floor with a bang.

“Perhaps you could explain what you are doing here, Lieutenant?”

Dick swayed slightly and burped, trying to think.

“I was... Enjoying my leave, sir?” The other man stared at him, hard. Dick tried to think of any excuse that did not involve cards, dice, money, or an unusual amount of alcohol.

“What leave, Lieutenant?”

“Illness, sir. I was on the *Belle Poule* when it was last docked here. Had to be left behind.”

“Not anymore, Lieutenant. You were supposed to be on the *Laconia* this morning.”

Dick looked blank. He tried to remember last night. He failed.

“With me, Lieutenant. Your new captain.”

Dick bolted upright, whipping out a misjudged salute that slammed into his forehead, leaving him rocking in place. For a moment, Captain Wentworth looked at him, disdain filling his features.

He snorted.

“Well, Lieutenant Musgrove, you certainly do like to have fun.”

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Captain Wentworth looked pale. The other ship stared back at them across an increasingly short number of miles. It was easily twice their size, and even at this distance, they could tell it was gaining too quickly to be a merchant vessel. Dick had to bite his lip to keep from grinning.

The captain had not been this scared even during the storm that had nearly scuttled the ship just as they were leaving port, months back. As Dick looked around, he realized the rest of the crew were equally wide-eyed and silent. It was always curious, to see how no one else shared his enthusiasm.

He knew what was coming next. He was sure that everyone on the ship knew, except for perhaps the boy who had “seemed 18” to the recruiter and was probably no more than 15. Yet no one else seemed to relish it the same way he did. It was one of the only parts of being in the navy that was genuinely exciting.

Dick could already smell the gunpowder, hear the thud of cannonfire. He knew in just a few moments, the whistles would blow, orders would be shouted, and everything would come alive.

Dick had never found any thrill that was quite the same, on land or sea. In moments like this, everything almost felt worth it. He looked around one last time, and saw the sailors, desperately pulling at already taut ropes, hauling barrels of powder. He saw the marines, tensing for an order. He saw the captain, struggling to steady his shaking hands on the rail. For a moment, Dick just stared. Something like pity was in his heart.

“Good luck, everyone.”

The whistles blew.

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Perhaps there was someone, somewhere, who had read all those letters. Perhaps there was someone, somewhere, who would cry. Perhaps there was someone, somewhere, who would care.

He looked up at a blue sky streaked with gray smoke. He smelled that same, sharp, burning scent. He remembered Ellory, remembered the twisted grin, the empty eyes, the shards in his hands. Remembered feeling as he ground his teeth, trying not to smile, not to laugh.

Poor Richard. He had always hated that name. He knew who he was. Poor Charles, poor Henrietta, more likely. Poor Louisa. Perhaps she had understood. The sensations on your fingers, that pushed through your skin, that made you *feel*. That made you... different. “Stupid, unmanageable.” He wondered. He had been searching for so long. He felt numb. Perhaps...

Dick Musgrove had always liked to have fun.