VAN HONKS & THE DEVIL

OR

THE TABLE CLOTH

BY

ALBERT COATES
FIRST SCENE  The saloon of a great pirate ship,  Isahendrik.
As the curtain rises, Van Honks - between 40 and 50 years old -
in princely regalia, smoking a great pipe, is in conversation
he has captured
with a captain of an English frigate, a certain Captain Fitzroy,
and is regaling him with sumptuous foods and wines and finally
with a full pipe of 'baccy.  All V.H.'s subordinates are in full
attendance, also C.F.'s subordinates are being princely entertained
and regaled.  There is a convivial and altogether friendly atmos-
phere in the saloon, despite the fact that some of the officers
have arms in slings and some heads on bandages on both sides.

V.H.  And where, oh Captain, if I may make so bold, where are
you bound for?

C.F.  We were bound for the southern-most point of Africa

V.H.  Ha!  For the Cape?  A dangerous and perilous voyage,
but one that I have long intended taking myself.  You
just stay with me.  I will be proud to have you in
my company

C.F. (Laconically)  Thanks.  We might have managed by ourselves, if
you hadn't twisted our tail

V.H.  Ho Ho.  Twisted your tail.  Nothing farther from
my thoughts.  You started the scrap, and -- but
tell me, Captain, you mentioned you had a lady and a
lad on board, for whom you seemed over solititious.
What are they to you?

C.F.  A fine mess you have let me in for, Captain.  For,
know you, these two were given into my charge by no
less a person than ---- (His officers make hasty
movements to interrupt his next sentence) and C.F.
stops and becomes silent)

V.H.  By no less a person than who, Captain?

C.F.  Your forgiveness, Captain.  May I consult with my
officers before I answer that?

V.H.  Certainly.
Gentlemen. (His voice trails off) the officers reluctantly give their consent to speak freely.

C.F. Your pardon, Captain for this untoward proceeding, especially in view of our present plight, but my officers have consented to throw themselves, as well as myself, on your bounty and understanding.

V.H. (Very interested indeed) And so?

C.F. No less a person than His Britannic Majesty, the King of England and --

V.H. And?

C.F. The Court of Holland.

V.H. Oho! This sounds intriguing indeed. Who is the lady?

C.F. Her name is -- (He looks round, perceptible pause) Lady Isobella.

V.H. (Taken unawares) Isobella! (Pause) And the boy?

C.F. Is an officer in the Dutch Royal Navy. His name Hendrik Van Honks.

V.H. Van Honks! (Is agog with surprised astonishment)

C.F. Why yes, Van Honks, and a great name he has already carved out for himself in his profession.

V.H. Van Honks (A long pause. The Britishers are embarrassed)

V.H. Can I, could I, --- see this lady and her son? ---

C.F. There is nothing would give us greater pleasure, Captain. You can see for yourself why we all feel towards the lady and her son as we do, and trust you will respect our Sovereign's son and protege.

(Rising and putting away his pipe, motions the others to do so)

P.C.F. (Interrupts with) Pray continue to smoke. My Lady Isobella was brought up by her late husband to appreciate the aroma of tobacco, and would be distressed if you were to discontinue smoking on her account.
(Aside) Late husband! (Motions to them all to continue smoking. Calls for drinks)

V.H. Ho, wine there, and fill to the brim

C.F. Before my Lady appears, I would wish to relate to you some of her story. BLACK OUT

THE COURT OF HOLLAND

Isabella anxiously walking up and down the great hall, listening for footsteps. C.F.'s voice She dearly and deeply loved a boisterous, rollicking young nobleman, by name Van Honks, and was secretly married to him. The Prince of Holland also loved her and hoped to win her for himself, not knowing of her previous secret marriage (The two young men appear on the screen) Both radiant youths of early twenties — Isabella forgets herself for a moment and, not noticing the Prince, throws herself into V.H.'s arms. The Prince is stung to the quick but makes a dignified exit.

C.F.'s voice The Prince never forgave Van Honks and from great friendship he grew to hate his one-time friend and at last there was a duel.

QUICK CHANGE TO DUELLING SCENE

One of the duellers is wearing a mask. Van Honks parries the erratic tactics of his adversary — While parrying the strokes, the masked man makes a slip and is caught on the tip of V.H.'s sword. V.H rips the mask away — it is the Prince himself, wounded badly but repentant.

Prince Away, away, before they seize you

V.H. (Throwing himself on his knees beside him) My Prince

Prince Hendrik! I've been a fool and am paying for it.

Quick, away. Save yourself. BLACK OUT

ISABELLA'S APARTMENTS

Isabella terse with apprehension. Van Honks rushes in and wildly clasps her to himself murmurs, 'I've killed him, I've killed him, My Prince, and he forgave me. What can I do? What shall I do?'

He ordered me to escape before they seized me

Isa Save yourself! I will get to the Cape somehow, Great heart — He is still your friend — some day. Meet me there. There we will both be safe. Fly. BLACK-OUT
But Hendrik, where can you escape to —

To the Cape of Good Hope — perhaps —

The Cape yes there we would both be safe

I will (fashion) some excuses follow you

Of Hendrik, how terrible for this to have

happened to our young lives.
(In reality, intensely agitated) But the Prince, the Prince —

The Prince did not die.

(A sigh of great relief but became Isabella's most devoted slave, and protector, and searched the earth for his one-time friend to bring him back to Holland but V.H. had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. Only last year, after 20 years, the Prince having Håhë died, Isabella remembered her old-time oath of coming to the Cape in the slender hope of finding her beloved husband once again. Behold us, here we are, all set and then — (He flings his arms out in great unfulfilled discomfort)

Captain Fitzroy, never fear. To the Cape we will go dangerous as the passage is. Permit me, gentlemen (He rises and exits)

(In the meantime, Isabella, elderly but beautiful and her son, dressed in the glowing colours of the R.D. Navy, enter, and are rather embarrassed in the presence of the wounded men. Isabella immediately starts looking after the wounded, forgetting where and who she is.

You poor boy, and you, and you

It was all my fault. I thought we would have an easy prey and lo it turned out contrariwise. The Captain is a most gallant leader of men and a curious one. He —

(Enter V.H., dressed as he was in the Court of Holland He looks younger, very handsome, and is immediately recognised by Isabella

Hendrik!

(Turning round) Yes Mother

No, no, this one here. I cannot be mistaken

Hendrik! (Makes as if to go to him)

V.H. Yes, Isabella. My hands are clean. I have kept them so in the hope of clasping you once again to my heart. Please trust me.
C.F. (Taken unawares) You're very good, indeed sir -
V.H. (Cutting in) As I feel we are entering a dangerous and storm-ridden zone. You will want all your available helpers round you
C.F. Indeed sir -
V.H. Only those who are still too ill to attend you will remain in my and the Lady Isabell's charge; the rest will follow you
(Voices off) "all aboard for the frigate"
V.H. Captain Fitzroy, follow me whatever happens, and now good luck and good sailing    BLACK OUT

THE STORM BEGINS  Shots of the storm on both Isahendrik and the frigate. Both in danger
V.H. in oilskins in the wheelhouse. One must notice his growing anxiety. He uses nautical terms and orders. The storm does not abate
V.H.  (To Officer) How are our friends in the frigate faring
1st O. (Using telescope) Not too well, I fear sir
V.H. (After pause, also using telescope) Yes you are right, Bradley. I would sell my soul to the Devil if I could get both ships with such precious cargoes into port safely.

(Stranger has entered unseen)

Stranger Would you indeed!
V.H. Hallo. Who are you? I haven't seen you before. Are you among the frigate's officers?
Str. I'm here to help
V.H. Oh, thanks, we can do with it I fear
Str. 'Tis only a slight matter of adjustment
V.H. A slight matter indeed.
(Str. in rage) Slight matter (Highly indignant)
Str. (After a pause) Well
V.H. (After a pause) (A tremendous movement of ship, creaks, etc., flapping and splitting sails)
All right, here goes. What do you want me to do

Strat. Oh, nothing at all. We can arrange all that to our complete satisfaction another time

V.H. Very well
(Instantly there is a change. The light appears and the sea calms down. Commotion on board.)

Voice Land, land

Officer (Rushes in) Wind abating, sir.

V.H.2 All bouncy and gay again! Good work, sir, good work

(Very distressed but contented) Good work eh, good work — I wonder! BLACK OUT

END OF FIRST SCENE

SECOND SCENE

Two or three years later. The Cape Colony. Beautiful shots of very ancient dwellings, also shots of dwellings with inmates preparing to leave for the wedding which is taking place at V.H.'s. The shots gradually concentrate on V.H.'s lovely dwelling house in which a marriage has just taken place and the guests including the padre are having high jinks at table, which is spread on the lawn in front of the house. V.H. in his Dutch garments, looking very handsome and happy, Isabella most contented and young Handrik and Johanna blissfully happy, as they have just been married. They are still in their marriage garments. A great ox is being roasted in one corner. Goodies of all descriptions are on the table—fruit, wine, and the inevitable pipes and tobacco. As the guests rise to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom, there is a commotion at the entrance and Captain Fitzroy and some of his officers in full regalia appear. V.H. and Isab. rise and run to greet them. There is an affectionate reunion.

V.H. Captain Fitzroy, and you gentlemen, welcome indeed to our humble home. (All the guests make audible sounds of welcome)

Isab. (To Fitzroy) You dear man, what a joy to see you again.
BEGINNING OF SECOND ACT

Isabella's Song.

A beauteous morning
Quietly filled by thoughts of those
We love so dearly
On this day of days our hearts are ever-grateful
For the blessings vouchsafed to our dear children
Through morning mists streams golden the sun so
Cerulean blue spreads out on high
God grant this day brings blessings from above
Golden radiance, glorious sky
To fill all hearts with thoughts of love
C.F. A joy indeed, and to see you both looking so bonny and happy. I smell something in the air. What! a marriage! Ho, and it's our young friend Hendrik Shiver me timbers. My heartiest congratulations, Hendrik and to you, Madam (Kisses her hand in gallant fashion) I wish you both long life, happiness and a calm sea.

Hend. Thank you, Captain, thank you

V.H. What has brought you here, and at such a joyous auspicious moment? You couldn't have timed it better Could he have, Isabella?

Isab. Your presence, Captain Fitzroy, enhances our happiness ten fold. I remember so many courtesies I received at your hands

C.F. Madam you embarrass me before this great-hearted man to whom we both owe so much

V.H. Ha! We had a wallop of a time getting here, and I always prophesied that it would either take a rise out of you, or put a rise into you.

C.F. (Laughing) More stripes to my sleeve, heh! But joking apart, it took me some courage to tell His Brittanic Majesty that it was you who led us, not I

V.H. That's not true! We sailed together

C.F. You forget the one never-to-be-forgotten miserable mistake I made in engaging you on the high seas

V.H. Let us remember only that it led to our friendship

C.F. Great heart. My heart has never changed towards you and if your son and newly acquired daughter wish to sail to Europe on their honeymoon trip, my ship is at their disposal

V.H. But without any ulterior engagements Ho ho ho! What do you say, Hendrik?

Hend. (Turning to his mother) If you, Mother are agreeable it would indeed be a pleasure

Isab. And Johanna, what does she say?
I follow where my husband leads
Well said, young lady. You won’t live to regret it I can promise you that
Well then, that’s settled, and now --
(Interrupting) And now, Captain and friends all, make room for our very honoured guest
Here you are, sir
There’s room here, sir
Glad to meet you again, sir etc. etc.
All the guest rise and drink the health of the bride and bridegroom
Then C.F. proposes V.H. and Isab.’s health. Cries of ‘speech speech’ are heard. V.H. rising and answering to the calls of speech
Friends, overflowing with happiness, my beloved Isabella and I respond to your kind words. On this day of our beloved son Hendrik’s marriage with his Johanna Veronique. We have watched their courtship with some anxiety, but mostly with great satisfaction
(Cuts to a short description of Hendrik and Johanna’s courtship during this speech
Idea of a love duet, sounds coming from film. V.H.’s speech sounding through it
How different from Isabella’s and mine. How we suffered in consequence of imposed secrecy.
(Cuts back to Holland) How we longed to share our joy with others who we loved, longed to shout it from the housetops (Cuts to the Prince). But ‘twas not to be, and fate chose to treat us sternly, callously sundering us apart from seemingly endless aeons of time. Doubly grateful are we now for this perfect reunion, come what may, and for the union of our beloved children, whom we have watched over and in whom we now have our happiness and joy. Raising my glass, I drink to the future, The Future, may all of you here and in our beloved Cape and in this country have the same blessings as have been vouchsafed to us and ours
V.H. at his work on the model.

Good ship, what joy to mould you once again
With these, my hands
Which loved you so sincerely
We've sailed and roamed the seven seas together
And ne'er a fault to be found in thy bearing
(Solemn) Ship of remembrance
Memory benign
Wake to life again in my hands
Let us then sail the seven seas
Let us then roam just once again
And rally all that did play their part
In making you great
A credit to justice
Peace and goodwill
(Uproarious cheers and calls of 'Speech Hendrik'. He starts his speech and trails off) BLACK OUT

EVENING OF THE SAME DAY

V.H. sitting alone on the stoop of his home reminiscing, smoking placidly. Isabella and servants come in and out busy with the house, and cleaning up after the party. The Stranger enters, dressed like a cavalier.

Str. I have been here quite a long time, and have thoroughly enjoyed watching you all and thinking --

V.H. What? Without a pipe Impossible! May I help you to one? (Hands him a pipe) This is a reasonably good pipe and will enhance your thoughts. But what were you thinking about when I interrupted you so impolitely?

Str. I was thinking about the last time I had the pleasure of conversing with you (A momentary cut back to the storm) You gave me a great deal of trouble then to adjust things to our mutual satisfaction, and I have come to remind you --

V.H. (Interrupting) Please don't! No reminders, not necessary -- But why just to-day --

Str. Oh no, no, not to-day, please don't upset yourself Some time, somewhere, by the way, I couldn't help but hear overhear say that your son and daughter will be leaving for Europe shortly. What do you say to this day week? As the sun goes down that we meet on the top of Table Mountain, and as you seem so very attached to that pipe of yours, perhaps we can arrange to have a contest
V.H. A contest?
Str. Why, yes, a smoking contest
V.H. Ha ha ha. Splendid idea. On the top of Table Mountain, splendid idea. But how am I, just an ordinary human being going to win when you have all — (Interrupting) Please don't say it — that is my business — but I will see to it that we have fair play
V.H. You!
Str. Yes and WHICHSOEVER TO THE OTHER THEN SHALL YIELD THE VICTORY, AT THE VICTORS BEST MUST NEEDS ACCEPT HIS HOSPITALITY (BLACK OUT)

END OF SECOND SCENE

THIRD SCENE
To the top of Table Mountain. Many shots, first of V.H. collecting his pipes, tobacco and grog, and loading them on to a couple of servants. His telescope and his crystals, seeing that they are loaded, then taking leave of his family and friends, all silently.

MUSIC. During the climb many shots of the way up. Arriving at last at the top, and making himself comfortable, he starts to sing a breezy song —

Yo ho for the pipe with the 'baccy to boot
The pipe to which all good seafarers are prone
Pull heavy, let's beat the slick devil's own soot
And show imps of Satan how that makes him groan

Then pull on the pipes altogether my heartys
No slacking you lubbers for gentleman Nick
Aint going to be good if you bungle your parties
Look well to your honours and squelch him Hendrik

(He continues smoking placidly. The Stranger enters. They greet each other silently and rather suspiciously. He also has great heaps of tobacco, carried in by his own imps, and two great chairs of antique design and a table, which is placed between the chair meant for V.H. and himself. All silently. Only the music going on —)
(-- when all is set the Stranger turns to V.H. and invites him to take his seat on the chair opposite him. V.H. does so silently

Str. Right glad am I that you have kept our tryst

V.H. Surely I had no option! but to comply with your demand!

Str. Not so quick, not so quick, my friend! This contest must go on until I win according to the rules and regulations laid down by our Inscrutable One. This may take some time, it may take all eternity, who can tell -- I am not a great smoker, and as all our 'baccy has a most acrid taste, it is anything but certain how the contest will fall out.

V.H. You make me happy, sir, I had thought never to see wife and son again - my thanks, my grateful thanks

Str. Not so fast, my friend! Each contest will begin at midnight and will end with the early dawn. Win I must, or I shall be banned to that Peak yonder (Pointing to Devil's Peak) Every time I lose-a dismal outlook

V.H. Then you are not ---

Str. No, I am only ---

(A short clap of thunder interrupts him)

-- the Stranger (After a pause) And now, shall we begin?

V.H. With pleasure

(They fill their pipes, lean back a moment and then light up. V.H. lights his own pipe, an imp lights the Stranger's) (Music begins and the wind gradually increases. V.H. sits placidly, lighting pipe after pipe and occasionally having a pull at his grog. The Stranger begins to falter. Shots of Table Mountain covered with the Table Cloth. Pantomime.

OUT OF THE WHIRLING MISTS WILD BEASTS APPEAR and try to distract Van Honks from his smoking. He glances in their direction, but takes very little notice of them.)
(Another picture the Stranger conjures up. A ship is seen struggling in the mighty waves, and in a close-up, V.H. recognises his own son in danger. He grasps his telescope and focuses it on to the place but there is nothing there. He sits down again to his pipe. More wild beasts, more savage and threatening. V.H. calmly takes out one of his silver pistols and is about to fire when they all disappear and in their place a bevy of beautiful women appear. V.H. for the first time begins to take an interest in all these phenomena. He puts down his pipe and again grasps his telescope to have a nearer view of the beauties. The Stranger is elated - close-up of Stranger's face - but V.H. glancing in his direction, catches the Stranger beaming his satisfaction, and at once proceeds to put down his telescope and take up his pipe. The Stranger collapses, first streak of the dawn, a cock crows, the first round is over. V.H. rises and is about to help the Stranger to his feet, when a voice interrupts -

V of the M.

Touch him not. Let him lie. He deserves his discomfort for having tried to distract you from your victory. He will be ill for weeks, but remember there are more contests coming soon. I will be here to see fair play, fair play -- fair play -- (His voice trails off)

(When V.H. looks round again the two antique chairs table and Stranger have all disappeared, and dawn has begun, a beautiful scene. Shots of early morning. Voices off)

Voices
" Hendrik!
" Master!
" Father!
" Hendrik!
V.H. (Answers them in nautical language) Hendrik ahoy! Master ahoy - Son ahoy.
(The first to arrive at the top, coughing and very frightened, are the two servants with lanterns still burning. They run to Hendrik and caress him as only Darkies do to those they love. Then Hendrik Jnr. leading in Isab. a great reunion.

Isab. Hendrik! Thank heaven you're safe. What happened? You have never been out so long. We were frightened to death you had lost your way in this dreadful and stifling fog and frightful wind, and were lying wounded somewhere on the mountain

V.H. No. I will tell you all some time. Let us get home now -- home (With quite an extraordinary intonation)

C.F. and Officers (All with lanterns. Again a great reunion)

C.F. Hendrik you rascal! What have you been up to? Just see what he looks like

V.H. Hush! Home -- home -- home. What a beautiful word!!

C.F. (Understanding instantly, turns to his officers) Gentlemen, lead the way! Back to the Isahendrik (To himself) What memories that word brings back (The servants in the mean time have gathered up what there was left of the tobacco, all the pipes, the telescope and start on their downward journey, laughing and gay. Hendrik Jnr. and Johanna and C.F. All together, chatting gaily, start the descent. Isab. clings to V.H. C.F. waits for Isabella to lead her down the first step on the way. V.H. steps back for a moment and finds himself alone on the top of Table Mountain. He glances round and sees a glow on Devil's Peak. His gaze is rivetted to the spot and he hears a voice from the distance saying

Str. When the new moon shows itself in the evening sky our next contest will begin. Be prepared -- be prepared
Voice of the Mountain  Fear nothing.  I will be here to see fair play -- fair play

V.H.  (Smiles gaily and waves his hand towards the Peak as if in acknowledge of his readiness to comply with the Stranger's command.  He begins his descent)

Music crescendo; dawn of a beautiful day

END OF OPERA