PERIL ON THE HIGH SEAS

OR... LET'S GET TOGETHER AND DO LAUNCH

BY BILLY ST. JOHN

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PERIL ON THE HIGH SEAS
Or... Let's Get Together and Do Launch

By BILLY ST. JOHN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ANNOUNCER (VOICE)
MITZI.................................a flapper, lively
RITZY ..............................another
DITZY ..............................a flapper, lively, but a little dingy
HEDDA HOOPER.....................a Hollywood gossip columnist
MARY PICKAXE......................a movie star trying to appear
                                      20 years younger
WANDA KETCHUM .................a gungho tourist
SGT. WILLY KETCHUM .............her husband, a cop
MERRY ANN SWEET ...............our heroine, pretty, innocent
BEA GOODE ........................her aunt and chaperone
ARACNIA WEBB ......................a villainess, slinky, exotic
CPT. BARNEY KUHL ...............British, the ship's captain
ANDREW (VOICE)
SKEET SUITER ......................the Entertainment Director
CARY DE MILLE .....................handsome, our hero, a waiter
SNIVELY SWINE/
SIR REGINALD ROTTENTOT ......a smarmy villain

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

TIME: The 1920s.
PLACE: Aboard the H.M.S. Majestic

ACT I

Scene 1  The New York docks.
Scene 2  The starboard deck.
Scene 3  A corridor.
Scene 4  The hold.
Scene 5  A corridor.
Scene 6  The starboard deck.
Scene 7  A corridor.
Scene 8  Aracnia's stateroom.

ACT II

Scene 1  A corridor.
Scene 2  The salon and the starboard deck.
ACT ONE
Scene One
AT RISE: The LIGHTS COME UP on the FORESTAGE. The main curtain is closed. Passengers are in a line in front of the curtain, moving LEFT as they board the gangplank of an ocean liner, the H.M.S. Majestic. [NOTE: To give this illusion, one end of a sturdy section of plywood can rest on the stage floor DOWN LEFT with the other end placed on a low platform off DOWN LEFT just out of sight. Poles with rope railings should be attached at the UPSTAGE and DOWNSTAGE edges of the gangplank. A couple of wooden crates covered with a fishnet DOWN RIGHT complete the scenery.] As they wait to board, the passengers talk excitedly among themselves. Their chatter provides background noise to the dialogue, as do certain SOUND EFFECTS: the sound of water lapping against the boat, buoy bells clanging, sea gulls crying, boat whistles, and even a lively band playing in the distance. It is a festive send-off. The passengers all wear light-weight coats, capes and/or wraps, and perhaps gloves and hats. The women carry purses. They include, from STAGE LEFT to STAGE RIGHT: MITZI, RITZY and DITZY. They are three young flappers who giggle as they apply more red lipstick to their bee-stung lips, and check the seams of their hose which are rolled down to just above the knee. Their hair is bobbed, and they wear cloche hats. They can be played with Brooklyn accents. Next, MARY PICKAXE and HEDDA HOOPER. MARY is a film star in her thirties who has built a career playing little girls. She dresses in childish outfits complete with shapeless dresses, long blonde corkscrew curls with a big bow on her head and white tights with Mary Jane shoes. HEDDA is a famous Hollywood gossip columnist. Her trademark is her hats. She always wears one, usually wide brimmed affairs and always with lots of artificial flowers on them. Next, SERGEANT WILLY KETCHUM and his wife, WANDA. WILLY is a New York cop, tough, burly. WANDA is a bit giddy with the excitement of getting to go on a trip. Her hands, coat pockets and large purse bulge with brochures, guide books and such. Finally, MERRY ANN SWEET and BEA GOODE. MERRY ANN is our heroine, pretty and innocent. She wears delicate pastel outfits. BEA, her aunt, is an overprotective, fussy mother hen of a woman. EXTRAS can be placed at each end of the line and interspersed among the principals.

ANNOUNCER: (A voice over a public address system.) Now
boarding at dock eleven -- all passengers bound for England aboard the H.M.S. Majestic... now boarding at dock eleven -- all passengers bound for England aboard the H.M.S. Majestic. (There is the SOUND of a blast from the ship’s whistle.)

MITZI: Can you believe it, chums? We’re finally on our way to Europe!

RITZY: London!

DITZY: It’s the cat’s pajamas!

RITZY: Buckingham Palace! The Tower of London! Westminster Abbey!

DITZY: It’s the bee’s knees!

MITZI: I can’t wait to see Big Ben!

DITZY: Really, Mitzi? You know some guy over there?

MITZI: No, Ditzy, Big Ben is the name of a clock.

DITZY: You’ve got to be kidding! What a dumb name for a clock. When I want to know what time it is, I don’t say, (Looking at her wrist watch.) “Gee! I think I’ll take a look at Little Bulova.”

RITZY: We might not know any British men now, but maybe we’ll meet some at Picadilly Circus.

DITZY: We’re going to a circus? Razz-ma-tazz! I hope they got tigers!

RITZY: It’s not a circus like Ring-a-ling Brothers, Ditzy, it’s an area. Like Times Square, here in New York.

DITZY: Well, geez, Ritzy, why didn’t you say so? That’s a dumb thing to call a place -- Picadilly Circus!

MITZI: Whatever they call it, it’s where all the rich, dashing men-about-town go.

DITZY: Then let’s head there first. I plan to catch me a Brit with a title -- you know, somebody royal -- and get engaged.

MITZI: A duke!

RITZY: An earl!

DITZY: A prince!

RITZY: (To MITZI.) You gotta give the girl credit, she aims high.

MITZI: Yeah, she’s a regular William Tell.

DITZY: Oh, look, it’s our turn to go on board! (She rushes up the gangplank.)

RITZY: Be careful, Ditzy! You don’t want to slip off the gangplank and fall into the water!

MITZI: Don’t worry about Ditzy, her head wouldn’t go under. Wood floats. (RITZY giggles as she and MITZI follow DITZY up the gangplank and OFF DOWN LEFT.)

HEDDA: Come on, Mary, tell! Your film fans want to know. Are you slipping off to London to tie the knot with Douglas Fireblanks?
MARY: Really, Hedda! What would my fans think if their Heide got married? Their Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm? Their Little Princess? They'd never come to see another one of my movies. I'm much too young to be a bride.

HEDDA: Mary Pickaxe, you're thirty years old if you're a day.

MARY: Lower your voice! My public doesn't know that! I'm warning you, Hedda Hooper, if you put that in your newspaper column, I'll never give you another exclusive as long as I live!

HEDDA: Don't get your curls in a tangle, sweetie. Your secret is safe with me. I don't care if you play nine-year-olds till you're ninety. Hey, maybe then the studio will want to make a sequel: "Heide's Granddaughter." You can play the kid with the wig on and granny without it.

MARY: Very funny. You know how fickle movie fans can be, so as long as they want to see me play little girls, that's what I'll give them.

HEDDA: I gotcha. If I can't say that you're dating, can I report that you invite Duggie over to play in your sand pile?

MARY: Sure, as long as you add that our nannies were present.

(They EXIT DOWN LEFT.)

WANDA: (Looking at her brochures.) There are so many places to visit, Willy! We'll never be able to get to them all.

WILLY: Now, Wanda, I've already told you -- I'll be tied up most of the week at the International Crime Solvers Convention at Scotland Yard. You'll have to go sight-seeing on your own.

WANDA: Are you sure you can't miss one little meeting or two?

WILLY: Wanda! I, Sgt. Willy Ketchum, am not representing just Precinct Thirteen of the great city of New York, I'm representing the entire state!

WANDA: Oh. Well, I guess they might notice if an entire state was missing. Maybe I'll take some of these day tours. I want to see the changing of the guard.

WILLY: Uh-huh.

WANDA: I want to see the Crown Jewels.

WILLY: Uh-huh.

WANDA: I want to kiss the Blamey Stone.

WILLY: Then you'd better have mighty long lips -- that's in Ireland.

(ARACNIA WEBB ENTERS DOWN RIGHT and joins the line. ARACNIA is dressed entirely in black, wearing a coat with a bushy sable collar and cuffs. Her ebony hair resembles a shiny black bathing cap. Her eyes are shadowed in purple and her lipstick is bright red. Her appearance is very exotic. She opens her purse, takes out a compact, opens it and

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powders her nose, while actually watching MERRY and BEA in the mirror as she eavesdrops on their conversation.)

MERRY: (Noticing ARACNIA.) My goodness! Look at that exotic woman. I wonder who she is.

BEA: I'm sure I don't know, and don't care to. No nice woman would ever make herself appear that provocative -- especially at eight o'clock in the morning! It's obvious that she would be a bad influence on a sweet child like you.

MERRY: Oh, Aunt Bea...

BEA: Humph! On second thought, she would be a bad influence on Jezebel.

MERRY: But Aunt Bea, it's the 1920s. Women are becoming more sophisticated now, more worldly.

BEA: More's the pity. Your dear father has tried to protect you from the harsh realities of the world, Merry Ann. That's why he sent you to the finest, most exclusive boarding schools for young ladies where you wouldn't be exposed to hep-cats and flappers and... and... (With obvious disgust.) jazz babies!

MERRY: I know Daddy means well, but I'm all grown up now. I feel like a butterfly that has just come out of its cocoon. I have to test my wings and learn to fly.

BEA: (With a sigh.) I suppose so. That's why I agreed to chaperone you on this trip to Europe. You must be careful whom you befriend, my dear. Sad to say, there are a lot of people out there who would be quick to take advantage of an attractive, very wealthy young heiress like you. Especially men.

MERRY: Yes, Aunt Bea. (WILLY and WANDA EXIT DOWN LEFT.)

BEA: Come along now, it's time to board. (They EXIT up the gangplank DOWN LEFT. ARACNIA closes her compact and puts it back into her purse.)

ARACNIA: (To herself.) Snively will find the innocent Miss Sweet ripe for the picking, but I fear the old mother hen might present a bit of a problem. Oh, well, not to worry -- passengers fall off ocean liners and disappear every day. (With an evil laugh, she moves toward the gangplank as the lights dim out.)

Scene Two

The band MUSIC FADES UP and continues to play through the scene change as the gangplank and crates are struck, then FADES OUT as the CURTAIN OPENS and the LIGHTS COME UP. The setting is the starboard deck of the ship. A wall spans the width of the stage. It contains portholes and a doorway RIGHT and one
LEFT. A couple of life preservers are spaced between the portholes. A deck chair is placed with its back to the wall UP CENTER; a small table is set LEFT beside it, also against the wall. Entrances can be made from DOWN RIGHT and DOWN LEFT. A section of guard rail is in the DOWN RIGHT corner, another in the DOWN LEFT corner; the section that would normally link them is imaginary. CAPTAIN BARNEY KUHL stands behind the DOWN LEFT section of guard rail, looking down and OFF LEFT as he watches the passengers board on the deck below. BARNEY is a pleasant man in his fifties, and is dressed in his all-white captain's uniform. He speaks with a British accent. He seems pleased with the way things are going.

BARNEY: (Calling down to someone.) Very good, Andrew. If everyone is on board, prepare to raise the gangplank.

ANDREW'S VOICE: (OFFSTAGE LEFT) Aye, aye, Captain! (SKEET SUITER ENTERS from the RIGHT doorway. SKEET is a fun-loving, energetic young man. He wears pleated slacks, a white shirt, and a colorful ascot around his neck. He carries a pair of badminton rackets.)

SKEET: Oh, there you are, Captain Kuhl. (They cross and meet DOWN CENTER.)

BARNEY: Were you looking for me, Skeet?

SKEET: Yes, sir. I wanted to see if you'll be able to attend the fancy dress ball I'm planning to hold our last night at sea, just before we dock in Southampton.

BARNEY: I'll be glad to. I have to tell you, Skeet, you're the best Entertainment Director we've ever had aboard the H.M.S. Majestic. You make sure the passengers have a great time.

SKEET: I try. I've got the shuffleboard gear set out, the clay pigeons are loaded for skeet shooting, and I'm about to get the badminton net strung up on the bow.

BARNEY: Very good. Keep up the good work, youngster.

SKEET: Aye, aye, Captain! (He playfully salutes, but ends up banging his forehead with one of the rackets.) Ouch.

BARNEY: Everything appears to be in ship-shape shape. I'll be greeting the passengers if anyone needs me.

SKEET: Yes, sir. (He starts to salute again, but stops before he bonks himself and nods instead. BARNEY EXITS DOWN RIGHT. SKEET mimes swatting a birdie with one of the rackets as he thinks out loud.) Let's see, have I forgotten anything? The playing cards, checkers, mah-jongg tiles and dominoes are set out in the salon...
(CARY DE MILLE ENTERS through the LEFT doorway. CARY is a handsome young man, very likable. He is our hero. CARY is dressed in black slacks and a white waiter's jacket. He crosses to SKEET.)

CARY: Hey, Skeet, I hate to tell you this, but I think you lost your birdie.

SKEET: (Stops swinging the racket.) Oh, hi, Cary. I was just practicing my swing. Well, pal, are you ready for your first ocean cruise?

CARY: I guess so. We won't be setting the tables for lunch for a couple of hours, so the chef said I could take a break and watch the boat pull out of the docks.

SKEET: The "ship." One of those little things you float in a bathtub is a "boat." The H.M.S. Majestic is a ship. If Captain Kuhl hears you call his pride and joy a boat, he'll make you walk the plank. (He puts his hands behind his back and takes a couple of steps LEFT past CARY as he mimics walking the plank.)

CARY: I got it. I won't do anything to embarrass you, Skeet. I really appreciate your getting me a job on the... (With careful emphasis.) "ship."

SKEET: Glad to help. What are friends for?

CARY: Thanks. I'm going to have to save up a lot of money if I hope to pay my way through Harvard.

SKEET: Waiters on the Majestic always get great tips. There are other bonuses to the job, too. (Crossing RIGHT past CARY.) Like the chance to meet a lot of pretty girls. (He puts a hand at one hip and thrusts it out a couple of times, miming a girl.)

CARY: I thought the staff wasn't supposed to fraternize with the passengers.

SKEET: We're not, but the captain only has two eyes, and he has to shut them once in a while.

CARY: I think I'll play by the rules. I'd hate to get fired my first time out.

SKEET: Suit yourself. I plan to have a good time. (ARACNIA ENTERS DOWN LEFT and strikes a seductive pose, hands on hips.)

ARACNIA: Pardon me. (SKEET and CARY are dumbstruck by her appearance. SKEET drops his rackets. To herself.) I just love the effect I have on men. (She kisses her shoulder in self-congratulation. SKEET hastily picks up his rackets. CARY crosses toward ARACNIA.)

CARY: Can I help you, Miss...?
ARACNIA: (Slinking to meet him.) Webb, Aracnina Webb. (Running a hand down his arm.) My, aren't you a handsome man? (CARY gulps, very embarrassed.)
CARY: (Stammering.) I... I...
ARACNIA: Aye, aye? That's how you sailors say "yes," isn't it?
CARY: No... no... I didn't mean...
ARACNIA: (With a throaty laugh.) I know what you mean. What's your name, big boy?
CARY: Cary, ma'am. Cary de Mille. I'm a waiter.
ARACNIA: I'll remember that. I have a very healthy appetite. (She turns to SKEET who has been watching with his mouth agape in amazement.) Young man, if you don't close your mouth, you're going to swallow a fly. (SKEET snaps his jaw shut.)
CARY: Uh... this is my friend, Skeet Suiter. Skeet is the ship's Entertainment Director.
ARACNIA: Really? (Touching CARY'S arm.) I think I've already found what I want to keep me entertained. (CARY gulps.)
CARY: (Uncomfortable.) Ma'am, I'm flattered, but I'll be pretty busy in the kitchen and dining room.
ARACNIA: Don't forget your job includes room service. I have a feeling I'm going to require a lot of room service. But first, I need to find the hold.
CARY: I beg your pardon?
ARACNIA: The hold. Isn't that what you call the storage compartment on a ship?
CARY: Uh... (He looks at SKEET who nods his head vigorously.) Yes, ma'am.
ARACNIA: Well, where is it? (CARY looks at SKEET who points downward.)
CARY: (Pointing down.) Down there.
ARACNIA: What I mean is, how do I get there? (CARY looks questioningly at SKEET. SKEET stammers, then regains his voice.)
SKEET: (Stepping to her.) Miss Webb...
ARACNIA: (Turning to him.) My, my, he can speak. Yes, Mr. Suiter?
SKEET: Miss Webb, the hold is down below. The stairs that lead to it are over there... (He indicates OFF RIGHT) beyond a door marked "Do Not Enter." Passengers aren't allowed below decks.
ARACNIA: I'm sure no one would mind if I popped down for a moment. I'm taking a very valuable piece of cargo to England, and I want to make sure it was placed on board.
SKEET: I can have one of the crew check it for you.
ARACNIA: How sweet. *(She touches his cheek. Befuddled, he drops the rackets again.)* But I must be certain my treasure is in good shape... personally. The door is over there? *(She indicates OFF RIGHT. SKEET nods vigorously.)* Well, then... *(She slinks toward RIGHT, then turns back.)* I'll see you later, Cary... when I get hungry. *(She slinks OFF.)*

CARY: *(Watching ARACNIA, worried.)* Oh, boy...

SKEET: *(Picking up his rackets and offering one to CARY.)* You'd better take this. I think you're going to need it... for protection. *(The LIGHTS FADE OUT and the CURTAIN CLOSES as CARY looks at SKEET, troubled.)*

Scene Three

The LIGHTS COME UP on the FORESTAGE which represents a corridor. The scene is played in front of the main curtain. Entrances are made from DOWN RIGHT and DOWN LEFT. MITZI and RITZY ENTER DOWN LEFT and begin a cross to DOWN RIGHT, followed by DITZY. They have removed their coats and hats, and are wearing brightly-colored, knee-length dresses of the period and beads or other accessories.

MITZI: Hurry up, Ditzy. We don't want to miss waving to everyone on the docks when the ship pulls out.

DITZY: We don't know anybody to wave to.

MITZI: That doesn't matter. Everybody does it. It's a tradition.

DITZY: But I wanted to get unpacked.

RITZY: There's plenty of time for that later. First let's check out the guys on board.

DITZY: Guys? I thought we were going to look for wealthy bachelors when we get to London.

RITZY: We are, but that doesn't mean we can't practice flirting till we get there.

DITZY: That sounds like fun, Ritzy.

RITZY: It is, and it's a very useful skill to have. *(She stops and holds out her hands, stopping the others.)* Look, girls, our mothers grew up being meek and quiet and wearing dresses that came to their ankles. They never got to have any fun. Well, it's a whole new era. Anything goes now. We're going to laugh and dance and flirt and have a wonderful time. We owe it to our moms.

MITZI: Dam right!

DITZY: Golly, I never thought of it that way. Mom, this is for you! *(She charges toward DOWN RIGHT.)* Gang way, fellas. Here I...
MITZI: Uh, Ditzy, maybe you'd better start with one man at a time.
(They EXIT DOWN RIGHT as MERRY and BEA ENTER there, crossing toward DOWN LEFT. They have removed their outer garments. MERRY wears a pretty, drop-waist dress that has a short, pleated skirt. She also wears a string of pearls. BEA'S dress is matronly.)

BEA: I'm still not sure you ought to wear your good pearls in public.

MERRY: (Laughing.) Really, Aunt Bea. I'd feel foolish putting them on to wear around the cabin.

BEA: I suppose, but it just makes good sense to be careful. Expensive jewelry draws fortune hunters like a magnet.

MERRY: Then that's a chance I'll have to take. After all, what good is having money if you can't enjoy it?

BEA: I want you to enjoy yourself, dear, it's just that I have a funny feeling about this voyage.

MERRY: Feeling? What kind of feeling?

BEA: I don't know... it's something in the air. A sense of danger.

MERRY: Danger? (Laughing.) Oh, Aunt Bea, that's just your imagination. We're on a pleasure cruise. What possible danger could there be? (She laughs again as she EXITS DOWN LEFT. BEA follows, still feeling uneasy. The LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

Scene Four

Ominous MUSIC FADES UP and plays a few beats as the CURTAIN OPENS several feet in the darkness. A large, wooden packing crate is DOWN CENTER. The MUSIC FADES OUT as a DIM AREA OF LIGHT COMES UP on the crate.

ARACNIA: (From behind the crate, her voice kept low.) Snively?
Where are you?

SNIVELY: (From inside the crate, his voice kept low as well.) Aracnia? Is that you? (ARACNIA comes around the crate from behind it.)

ARACNIA: It is I. Unfasten the latch.

SNIVELY: I have. Open the crate. (ARACNIA swings the DOWNSTAGE side of the crate open. It is hinged on one side like a door, and has been held shut by a hook and eye latch inside. Revealed seated on a low bench inside the crate is our villain, SNIVELY SWINE. He is hunched over to keep from scraping his head on the top of the crate.)

ARACNIA: The coast is clear. You can come out now.

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SNIVELY: It's about time. I feel like a stupid jack-in-the-box.

(SNIVELY duck-walks out of the crate. SNIVELY SWINE is a sneaky, underhanded cad. He wears a double-breasted suit, a tie and pointy, black & white wingtip shoes. He has a pencil-thin moustache that has actually been drawn on his lip with an eyebrow pencil. His hair is slicked down close to his head. At the moment, his joints have locked, leaving him in a squatting position. He duck-walks a few steps from the crate.

Aside.) Snively Swine, here. I humbly apologize. I do not normally make an entrance imitating a duck with a hernia.

ARACNIA: What's the matter with you? Why don't you stand up? You look like an Olympic swimmer who's afraid to dive into the water.

SNIVELY: (Aside.) I thought my description was adequate. (To ARACNIA.) Yeah, well, you'd look funny, too, if you had been hunched over in a crate for twelve hours!

ARACNIA: Calm down, Snively. There's no need to get bent out of shape. (He gives the audience a look, then turns to ARACNIA.)

SNIVELY: You're a big help. My joints have locked into place. I thought those longshoremen would never get the crate loaded onto the ship.

ARACNIA: Don't blame me. Sneaking on board inside of it was your idea.

SNIVELY: There was no other way. You know I can't afford to use my passport -- not when there are warrants out for my arrest. Besides, we need the crate to hide the heiress in after we grab her and drug her. Have you seen the girl?

ARACNIA: Yes. She's on board, along with her over-protective aunt. The old lady has got to go.

SNIVELY: (Aside.) She's not the only one. Twelve hours is a loooong time! (To ARACNIA.) What does the niece, Little Miss Moneybags, look like?

ARACNIA: From your viewpoint, probably a giant.

SNIVELY: I've got to straighten up before I freeze in this position permanently. Help me. (ARACNIA goes behind him, bends down, wraps her arms around his chest from behind, then straightens up, pulling SNIVELY to his feet. [NOTE: For a comical effect, a stagehand behind the crate can grind a ratchet to make a creaking noise.] SNIVELY groans as well. ARACNIA releases him.)

ARACNIA: There. Do you feel better now? (SNIVELY takes a couple of steps, moving comically with his knees locked in
place.)

SNIVELY: Not really, but at least my bottom's not dragging the floor anymore. (As he moves around, his knees will relax and he’ll begin to walk more naturally.)

ARACNIA: You’ll be able to use my stateroom until we reach England.

SNIVELY: Yes, then it will be back into the box with Miss Sweet to keep me company.

ARACNIA: How cozy. You shouldn’t have any trouble with her. She looks like a timid little thing.

SNIVELY: Good. Just be sure you wire ahead and have Maurice waiting at the docks with his truck to take us to our hideout.

ARACNIA: Don’t worry about a thing, Snively, darling. Just relax.

SNIVELY: (Bending and straightening a leg a couple of times to loosen the knee. Aside.) That’s easy for her to say. She doesn’t have lockjaw from the neck down.

ARACNIA: Shall I take you to my cabin?

SNIVELY: Later. First, let’s go up on deck. You need to point Miss Sweet out to me. The sooner I meet her and get to know her, the sooner you and I can plan her abduction.

ARACNIA: And the sooner we abduct her, the sooner we can demand a ransom. (They laugh together evilly.)

SNIVELY: (Offering her his arm.) My lovely? (She links her arm through his. They start to cross DOWN RIGHT. One of SNIVELY’S knees gives out, causing him to stumble.) Drat! I was hoping to make an impressive exit. (They cross into the darkness, his knees continuing to buckle, as the LIGHTS FADE OUT and the CURTAIN CLOSES on the crate. Ominous MUSIC FADES UP for a few beats, then FADES OUT as the LIGHTS COME BACK UP.)

Scene Five

The LIGHTS COME UP on a corridor which is played, as before, in front of the main curtain. MARY ENTERS DOWN RIGHT and starts across toward DOWN LEFT. She has removed her coat. A moment later, WANDA rushes in DOWN RIGHT after her. She has also removed her coat. She still carries her large purse which is overflowing with brochures.

WANDA: Excuse me! Miss Pickaxe! (MARY stops and turns.

WANDA continues to her.)

MARY: Yes?

WANDA: (Gushing.) You are Mary Pickaxe, aren’t you? The movie
star?
MARY: (Friendly.) Yes, I am. How nice of you to recognize me.
WANDA: You're kind of hard to miss. I mean, those beautiful curls!
It's a shame they can't make movies in color so everyone could see they're so... so... yellow!
MARY: I'm glad you like them. (She gives WANDA a big smile.)
WANDA: I've been a fan of yours for (Stressing the word each
time.) years and years (MARY'S smile becomes more of a
grimace,) and years! (WANDA does not intend for her
comments to be insulting, but MARY takes them that way.)
MARY: (Through clenched teeth.) Thank you.
WANDA: I was wondering, could I have your autograph?
MARY: (Relaxing a little.) Of course.
WANDA: (Looking into her purse.) I have a piece of paper here
somewhere.
MARY: You have a piece of paper there everywhere.
WANDA: (Pulling out a brochure.) I guess one of my brochures will
do. (She hands it to MARY, then digs in her purse for a
fountain pen.) I have a pen in here, too.
MARY: You could have a typewriter in there. (Looking at the
brochure.) The Globe Theater. Ah, William Shakespeare! The
most famous playwright of all time! He left the world a
priceless legacy.
WANDA: He was loaded, huh? Did you know him?
MARY: (Stung.) Not hardly! He's been dead for centuries.
WANDA: Oh, THAT William Shakespeare. How stupid of me.
MARY: (With a smile, but meaning it.) Yes. (Relaxing.) Someday I
hope to portray his most famous heroine on the screen. I'd be
perfect in the part.
WANDA: Oh, you mean what's-her-name in "The Taming of the
Shrew?"
MARY: (Frostily.) I was thinking of "Romeo and Juliet." Juliet was
only thirteen when she died.
WANDA: Then I hope you get to do it real soon. (Bringing out the
fountain pen.) Here's a pen. (MARY takes the pen and
removes the cap. As she does this, WANDA chatters away.)
I'm so glad you're not stuck up. I mean, we just met and
already I feel like you're an old, old friend. (For a moment
MARY looks as if she's considering using the pen as a
weapon, but then lowers it to write on the brochure.)
MARY: To...?
WANDA: One autograph will be plenty, Miss Pickaxe.
MARY: I meant, to whom do you want me to sign this?
WANDA: (Giggling.) Silly me! (MARY smiles in total agreement.) Make it to me, Wanda Ketchum.

MARY: (Writing.) "To Wanda Ketchum. I'll never forget you... (With underlying sarcasm.) If I live to be a thousand. Mary Pickaxe." (She hands WANDA the brochure and pen.)

WANDA: Thank you so much. I'm thrilled to death to have your autograph.

MARY: (Smiling.) I sincerely hope so. Now, if you'll excuse me?

WANDA: Sure. (MARY starts toward DOWN LEFT.) Maybe I'll see you on deck? I want to stand at the rail and gaze out at the ocean.

MARY: If you do, be sure to drop over. (She EXITS DOWN LEFT.)

WANDA: What a sweet girl. Wait till Willy sees this! (She rushes OFF DOWN RIGHT as the LIGHTS FADE OUT. Jazzy MUSIC FADES IN for a few beats, then FADES OUT as the LIGHTS COME UP.)

Scene Six

The LIGHTS COME UP on the deck. EXTRAS dressed as passengers can stroll across in the background throughout except for during CARY and MERRY’S scene. MERRY is seated on the deck chair UP CENTER, reading a book. WILLY stands behind the guard rail DOWN LEFT, facing out, as he looks through a handful of 8” X 10” black and white photos of wanted criminals. He has removed his overcoat and wears slacks and a colorful shirt. SKEET stands LEFT CENTER with MITZI, RITZY and DITZY in a semi-circle around him. He flirts with them as he tells them about the entertainment on board. They giggle and flirt back. MARY chats with BARNEY RIGHT CENTER. HEDDA and BEA stand DOWN RIGHT behind the guard rail there. HEDDA takes notes with a pad and pen. She has removed her coat but not her hat. Ad-libbed conversations will take place quietly behind the scripted dialogue.

HEDDA: Your young companion is Merry Ann Sweet, is she not? The fabulously wealthy heiress?

BEA: My niece, yes. Please don’t mention our trip in your column, Miss Hooper. We would like to avoid publicity, if possible.

HEDDA: I won’t tell a soul. Miss Sweet spells her first name M-e-r-r-y, doesn’t she? (HEDDA proceeds to write furiously on her note pad.)

SKEET: Make sure you all sign up for the Charleston contest.

MITZI: A Charleston contest! I can’t wait! (She starts to do a Charleston step.)
RITZY: I don't know. I'm not a very good dancer. I've got two left feet.

DITZY: Really? Gee, you must have a terrible time buying shoes. (SKEET starts to show RITZY how to Charleston. She attempts to follow him and DITZY joins in. All four will dance OFF DOWN LEFT. Just as they clear the LEFT doorway, WANDA ENTERS LEFT and crosses to WILLY.)

WANDA: There you are. Let's go play a game of shuffleboard.

WILLY: In a minute, cupcake.

WANDA: Wait till you see whose autograph I got. It's Mary Pickaxe, and... (Her voice trails off.) What are you looking at?

WILLY: I want to familiarize myself with these photos of the FBI's most wanted criminals. You never know where you might run into a fugitive. (WILLY shuffles the top photo to the bottom of the stack. Before he can look at the next picture -- a photo of Snively -- WANDA'S comment gets his attention.)

WANDA: Willy Ketchum!

WILLY: (Looking up at WANDA and dropping his hand to his side so that the photo of Snively is exposed to the audience.) What?

WANDA: I wish you'd stop being a cop and relax a little.

WILLY: How can I stop being a cop, Wanda? It's in my blood.

WANDA: I'm warning you, Willy, unless you want to be investigating your own homicide, you'd better consider yourself off duty until you set your flat feet on dry land! (She grabs the photos.) I'll take those.

WILLY: What are you doing?

WANDA: (Cramming the pictures into her purse.) Filing these away until we check into our hotel in London.

WILLY: But, honeybun--

WANDA: Don't try to butter me up. You're going to have a good time on this cruise... even if it kills you! (WANDA starts toward RIGHT. WILLY follows her OUT, begging for his photos. Just as they clear past MARY and BARNEY, MARY says:)

MARY: An autograph party sounds like fun. I just happen to have brought along a few publicity photos with me.

BARNEY: Wonderful! I hope you have enough for everybody who wants one.

MARY: That depends. Do you have more than a thousand passengers?

BARNEY: (Surprised.) That will be quite sufficient. I'll tell our Entertainment Director to schedule it. There's Skeet over there, giving a dance lesson. If you'll excuse me. (He starts
DOWN LEFT, calling.) Skeet! I think the step goes this way...
(MARY watches as BARNEY goes into a comical dance step,
thrusting his hands in the air to the left, then the right, as he
dances OFF.)
MARY: (To herself.) Now there's a sight you don't see every day.
(She turns toward HEDDA and BEA and starts toward them.)
Hedda?
BEA: (To HEDDA.) Until later then... (BEA turns and starts toward
MERRY. She and MARY nod as they pass each other. MARY
takes HEDDA'S arm.)
MARY: I need you to help me unpack my trunk -- the big one.
HEDDA: But your clothes are already hung up.
MARY: Not my clothes. My publicity pictures. (MARY leads
HEDDA OFF DOWN RIGHT. BEA stops at MERRY'S right.)
BEA: Are you having a nice time, Merry Ann?
MERRY: It's heavenly, Aunt Bea -- the ocean, the cool breeze, and
a thrilling romantic novel to read. Why don't you join me?
BEA: I will, but first I'll check on our table assignment in the dining
room. Shall I have a waiter bring you a glass of iced tea?
MERRY: That would be lovely.
BEA: I'll send a boy with one right away. (She turns and crosses
past MERRY to the LEFT doorway. As she EXITS, SNIVELY
and ARACNIA ENTER the RIGHT doorway. SNIVELY'S knees
are functioning normally. MERRY, reading her book, will
remain unaware of them.)
ARACNIA: That's her over there, with the book.
SNIVELY: Egad! The girl is a beauty! (Aside.) Villains have been
saying "Egad!" since about 1673. Don't ask me why. It's
required. (He shrugs, then turns back to ARACNIA.) You
didn't tell me the young heiress was so attractive.
ARACNIA: I suppose she is... if you like the wholesome type. Are
you going to introduce yourself to her?
SNIVELY: Not until I assume another identity. When Miss Sweet
disappears, I don't want anyone to connect her to Snively
Swine. Did you have my trunk of disguises delivered to your
stateroom?
ARACNIA: Of course.
SNIVELY: Then lead the way, my treasure. There's dirty work to be
done!
ARACNIA: And we're just the ones who can do it! (They laugh,
then ARACNIA goes through the RIGHT doorway. SNIVELY
follows into the doorway, but stops to turn and gaze around
the door facing at MERRY.)
SNIVELY: (To himself.) Ah, my pretty one, I can't wait until... (We'll never know until what, because ARACNA grabs his off-stage arm and yanks him OFF. MERRY closes the book and hugs it to her chest.)

MERRY: (To herself, speaking of its heroine.) Yvette has met her true love. How thrilling! Would that that could happen to me. (She sighs, puts the book aside on the table beside the deck chair, rises and crosses to the DOWN RIGHT section of guard rail. She looks dreamily out over the ocean. CARY ENTERS at the LEFT doorway carrying a glass of tea on a small, round, silver tray. He notices the book on the deck chair, then looks up at MERRY.)

CARY: Excuse me, are you Miss Sweet? (MERRY turns to face him. Both are struck by love at first sight, stunned at the sensation. MUSIC BURSTS FORTH from nowhere, romantic and sweeping. MERRY brings a hand to her throat, overcome with emotion. The MUSIC PAUSES.)

MERRY: I am Merry Ann Sweet. (The MUSIC CRASHES BACK IN, even louder. CARY crosses to her slowly as if approaching a vision. When he reaches her, the MUSIC FADES as they gaze at each other a few beats. Their eyes remain locked for the next few lines.)

CARY: Cary... Cary de Mille. That's my name. I'm a waiter.

MERRY: What a nice name. It seems to suit you.

CARY: I'm glad you like it. Your name is perfect. (MERRY breaks their eye contact, turning forward, resting her hands on the rail and lowering her eyes demurely.)

MERRY: How kind of you to say so.

CARY: Not kind, just... truthful. You are truly sweet... and beautiful. (MERRY gasps softly. CARY turns forward. To himself.) I am too bold.

MERRY: (Looking up and out over the ocean. To herself.) Be still, my heart! What is this strange feeling that has come over me? My heart is fluttering like a hummingbird's wing. Can this be love... true love?

CARY: (To himself.) I don't understand... What is this strange feeling that has come over me? My knees are shaking, my stomach is queasy, and my head is spinning. Can this be love... true love... or am I seasick? (Turning to MERRY.) Miss Sweet? (She turns to face him.) I... (He stops and seems to hear something. [NOTE: The next few lines have been pre-recorded. What we hear is actually a tape of their previous conversation.)
CARY'S VOICE: (On tape.) I thought the staff wasn't supposed to 
fraternize with the passengers.

SKEET'S VOICE: (On tape.) We're not, but the captain only has 
two eyes, and he has to shut them once in a while.

CARY'S VOICE: (On tape.) I think I'll play by the rules. I'd hate to 
get fired my first time out.

MERRY: Is anything the matter?
CARY: (Awkwardly) I just remembered something. I... uh... I'll set 
your tea by your deck chair. (He turns and hurries UP 
CENTER to the deck chair. He knows he must obey his 
conscience, but he’s not happy about it. MERRY is confused 
by his abrupt change in behavior.)

MERRY: But...
CARY: (Taking the glass from the tray and setting it on the table 
by the deck chair.) Duty calls, Miss Sweet. If you'll excuse 
me. (He EXITS quickly through the LEFT doorway. MERRY 
takes a couple of steps UPSTAGE, but he's gone.)

MERRY: (To herself.) Did I say something wrong? (DITZY dances 
in DOWN LEFT singing "da-da," etc., to a jazzy tune. She 
stops LEFT CENTER.)

DITZY: Hi, there.
MERRY: Hello.

DITZY: (Crossing to MERRY.) I saw you talking to the waiter. Cute 
fella.

MERRY: Cary is very attractive.

DITZY: He's just my type... (With a shimmy.) male! Hot-cha-chal 
But you saw him first. (Offering her hand.) I'm Ditzy.
MERRY: (Shaking DITZY's hand.) Merry Ann.

DITZY: Pleased to make your acquaintance, I'm sure. Say, Skeet 
Suiter, the Entertainment Director, has been teaching me and 
my friends some jazzy new dance steps. Why don't you join 
us?

MERRY: (Crossing LEFT past DITZY) Maybe some other time...

DITZY: Honey, something's wrong. What is it?
MERRY: It's just that... I don't know. At first Cary seemed to like 
me -- a lot -- and then he turned away and hurried off.

DITZY: Men! They can act so dumb sometimes. You've simply got 
to know how to handle 'em.

MERRY: (Turning back to her.) You do?
DITZY: 'Yes-sir-rootie! You got to know when to be all shy and 
helpless... (She ducks her head shyly.) and when to flirt like 
crazy. (She puts a hand on one hip and pumps it while twirling 
her beads with her other hand.)
MERRY: That's how you flirt?
DITZY: It's one way. Knowing how to flirt is a must! Try it. *(MERRY
imitates her action, but the result is more comical than
flirtatious.)* Look, Mitzi, Ritzy and I are going to practice flirting
all the way from here to Picadilly Circus. We'll teach you how,
too.
MERRY: I don't know if I could or not. I mean, I've never tried--
DITZY: *(Cutting in.)* Sweetie, if you really like this Cary fella, you
got to know how to land him. You got to know when to be
cool... *(She hugs herself and shivers.)* and when to be... *(She
licks a thumb, puts it on her hip, and makes a "SSSSS"
sizzling sound.)* hot! *(Putting an arm around MERRY and
leading her toward DOWN LEFT.)* When Mitzi, Ritzy and I get
through with you, you'll know all a girl needs to know about
how to get her man. *(They EXIT DOWN LEFT, MERRY
looking uncertain. WILLY ENTERS DOWN RIGHT. He has
WANDA'S purse. He stops RIGHT, digs his photos out of the
purse and hangs it by the strap on his forearm. He shuffles
through the photos, studying them. SKEET ENTERS DOWN
LEFT, dancing toward DOWN RIGHT. When he is almost at
WILLY, he notices the purse on WILLY'S arm and stops.
WILLY looks up and sees SKEET staring at it.)*
WILLY: *(Challenging him to doubt it.)* It's my wife's!
SKEET: *(Jokingly.)* Well, it goes great with your shoes. *(SKEET
grins. WILLY'S response is to stare daggers at him. SKEET'S
grin fades away. Nervously indicating OFF DOWN RIGHT, an
excuse to leave.)* Oh, look -- I think I see a flying fish. *(He
crosses past WILLY and hurriedly EXITS DOWN RIGHT.)*
WILLY: *(Muttering under his breath.)* Go take a flying leap. *(He
goes back to studying the photos. He stops and stares at
SNIVELY'S picture.)* Now there's a suspicious looking mug if I
ever saw one. *(He flips it over to read info printed on the
back. The audience sees the shot of SNIVELY.)* "Snively
Swine... petty theft, grand theft, blackmail, extortion,
jaywalking..." Boy, I'd love to get my hands on this character.
WANDA'S VOICE: *(OFF DOWN RIGHT.)* Willy Ketchum! *(WILLY
jumps guiltily and jams the pictures back into the purse. He
turns toward her as WANDA rushes ON DOWN RIGHT.)*
WILLY: I was looking everywhere for you. *(Offering her the purse.)*
You left this on a deck chair.
WANDA: *(Snatching it from him.)* Uh-huh. Those pictures of yours
had better be inside it, that's all I've got to say.
WILLY: *(Muttering under his breath.)* I wish. *(Aloud.)* Now, sweetie
pie, they're right there where you put them. *(He takes her elbow and leads her to the RIGHT doorway.)* Come on.

WANDA: Sweetie pie... cupcake... honeybun... You make me sound like a walking, talking pastry shop.

WILLY: *(As they EXIT through the doorway.* That's just your imagination... muffin. *(As they EXIT, BEA ENTERS through the LEFT doorway.)*

BEA: We'll be seated at the captain's table, and... *(She realizes MERRY isn't there.)* Oh. Where could she have gone? Dear, dear, she left her book. *(She picks up the book, opens the cover and reads the title.)* "Yvette in Love." Merry Ann and her romances. Tsk-tsk. I hope this one doesn't give her any wild ideas. *(She turns the pages and starts reading. She immediately becomes involved in it and doesn't notice BARNEY as he ENTERS DOWN LEFT and crosses to her.)*

BARNEY: Good morning.

BEA: Oh! *(BEA jumps, startled, slamming the book shut. She thrusts it behind her, guiltily.)* Captain Kuhl...

BARNEY: I startled you. I do apologize.

BEA: *(Flustered, mispronouncing the word.)* Starkled? Me? *(A nervous laugh.)* Ha-ha-ha. Not at all.

BARNEY: My mistake, I'm sure. You seemed to be very engrossed in your novel. May I know the title of such an entertaining book?


BARNEY: *(Taking the book, opening it and reading the title.)* "Yvette in Love." Ah, a love story. *(He hands it back to her.)*

BEA: *(All innocence.)* Oh, is it?

BARNEY: Many people find ocean cruises to be terribly romantic. Some passengers even become smitten with members of my staff. I discourage my men from becoming... shall we say... "emotionally involved" with our guests, of course.

BEA: Of course.

BARNEY: Although, as the captain, I not only make the rules, I can break them, too. *(Taking her arm, linking it through his and starting DOWN RIGHT.)* Won't you join me for a stroll, Miss...?


BARNEY: *(Chuckling.)* Is that your name, or are you warning me not to be naughty?

BEA: It's my name... *(She realizes BARNEY is flirting with her.)* Oh, Captain Kuhl! *(She giggles girlishly.)*
BARNEY: Please, call me Barney. How would you like to take a peep at my poop deck? (They EXIT DOWN RIGHT, BEAG giddy at this sudden courtship. ARACNIA ENTERS at the RIGHT doorway and looks around.)

ARACNIA: She's gone. (SNIVELY ENTERS at the RIGHT doorway. He has changed into his disguise which consists of a curly wig, a handlebar moustache glued to his upper lip, a monocle, a tweed coat, white shirt, baggy golfling pants gathered just below the knee with elastic, argyle knee socks and oxford shoes. He has assumed the guise of an English gentleman, complete with British accent.)

SNIVELY: Pip-pip, cheerio, and all that rot! Ripping disguise, eh, what, what?!?

ARACNIA: It's excellent, Snively. You look exactly like an English country gentleman, and your accent is perfect!

SNIVELY: (Striding about, trying out his accent.) Tea, anyone? High tea, low tea, we all scream for mo' tea! Have a crumpet! Take two, they're small! (Aside in his regular voice.) Not bad, huh? (He raises and lowers his eyebrows rapidly a couple of times, jokingly. [NOTE: He will speak in his regular voice when talking to the audience or ARACNIA, and use the British accent when around others.] We hear the SOUND of MITZI and RITZY giggling OFF DOWN LEFT.)

ARACNIA: Here's your chance to test it on some passengers.
(MITZI and RITZY ENTER DOWN LEFT, crossing toward DOWN RIGHT.)

MITZI: ...and then he said, "I swear you're cuter than Clara Bow."

RITZY: Clara Bow? Jeepers!

MITZI: So I said, "Call me when you think I look like Theda Bara," and I slinked out. (She imitates the silent movie vamp by sucking in her cheeks, extending her arms in an Egyptian pose and slinking several steps RIGHT.)

RITZY: That's the cat's meow! (She giggles as MITZI continues her vamp step, looking out toward the audience, and bumps into SNIVELY.)

MITZI: Golly! I'm sorry.

SNIVELY: (Very British.) No harm done. That was a smashing imitation of one of your American film stars, wasn't it?

MITZI: Uh, yeah -- Theda Bara.

ARACNIA: (To herself.) My idol!

MITZI: You're British, aren't you?

SNIVELY: (To her, after giving the audience a wink.) How could you tell?

End of Script Sample
PRODUCTION NOTES

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene One: Purses, hand luggage (PASSENGERS); purse with brochures, guide books, pen and papers (WANDA); pad and pen (HEDDA); purse with compact (ARACNIA).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Two: Two badminton rackets (SKEET).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Three: Pearls (MERRY).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Five: Purse with pen, papers, books (WANDA).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Six: Book (MERRY); photos (WILLY); tray with glass of iced tea (CARY); monocle (SNIVELY).

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE, Scene Eight: Tray with toast bowl of caviar, spoon, bottle of champagne, ice bucket, glass (CARY).

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene One: Sling (MARY); crime magazine, hankie (WILLY).

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO, Scene Two: Plaster cast and scarf (MARY); trays with ice buckets, napkins, glasses, champagne (CARY/OPTIONAL EXTRA WAITERS); diamond jewelry (MERRY); vial of water (drops), handkerchief (SNIVELY); rifle, telegram (SKEET); gun, pair of women’s underwear, handcuffs (WILLY).

MISCELLANEOUS

Specifics for COSTUMES, SET and MUSIC are all indicated in the script. Use your imagination for any additional details you wish to add.

Blackberry jam is a good substitution for the caviar.

Ginger ale is a good substitution for the champagne. Just make sure the bottle looks like a champagne bottle.
"PERIL ON THE HIGH SEAS"

BASIC FLOOR PLAN

US WALL OR CURTAIN

OFF SR

MASKING

DOORWAY

MOVABLE WALL

TABLE

DECK CHAIR

OFF SL

MASKING

DOORWAY

SR DOORWAY

SL DOORWAY

RAIL

DECK
(CURTAIN LINE)

FORESTAGE
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