

# SKULDUGGERY SAILS the ATLANTIC

-or-

She Made Her Maiden Voyage  
But Didn't Come Across

*by Nelson Shreve*

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 m, 6 w)*

**VANCE TRUEBLUE:** Heroic 7th Officer of the *SS Gigantic*.

**CAPTAIN MIZZEN:** The very epitome of the ocean liner master.

**ANISE:** Escaped career criminal from Wormwood Women's Prison.

**ABBIE:** Her henchwoman.

**ANNA:** And yet another.

**DIMITY DARLING:** The Doily Dolly, whom no man can resist.

**ERMINTRUDE DARLING:** Dimity's mother, who seeks a rich son-in-law.

**NEMATODE FESTER:** International art thief and ne'er do well.

**JASMINE:** The mysterious mute salon stewardess.

**SAILOR SAM:** An old salt.

## **SETTING**

The entire action takes place in the grand salon on the SS Gigantic, world's biggest and second fastest luxury liner en route from New York to Southampton. The time is the early 1890s, when ships had electricity but as yet no wireless.

CS is a doorway to the promenade deck. Passenger staterooms are off SL while navigation and ship personnel rooms are off SR. A copy of the "Mona Lisa" hangs prominently on the upstage wall. Off to one side is a small safe while on the opposite side is a bar. Several comfortable chairs, which line the upstage wall, can be brought forward for Ermintrude and Dimity's conversation in Scene 3. Decorations should be added for the party scene.

## **COSTUMES**

Ship personnel wear uniforms appropriate to their rank. Jasmine enters wearing a trench coat, trousers, hat and dark glasses. Nematode wears dark, villain-like clothing and has slicked back hair. In Scene 4, Dimity wears a simple wedding gown.

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**PROPS**

**SCENE 1**

3 Signs - PROMENADE DECK (*Over CS doorway*), STATEROOMS (*pointing SL*), SHIP'S COMPANY (*pointing SR*), Picture of the "Mona Lisa", Vance's clipboard/pen; detective badge, Assorted luggage, Sailor Sam's boatswain's pipe; smoking pipe, Rolled up canvas, Dime/other coins, 2 lace doilies, 3 tickets, Match for Jasmine

**SCENE 2**

Balloons/decorations; Captain's wedding ring

**SCENE 3**

Crocheting supplies, Sam's daily run paper, Vance's spittoon, Anise's roll of bills, Nematode's watch, Ship's life ring for Sailor Sam, Gift-wrapped box

**SCENE 4**

Pins for dress, Captain's Bible, Crochet hooks, Paper/pen for Vance, Package of jewelry, 5 slips of paper, Captain's red garter

**SCENE 1**

*(AT RISE: It is sailing day in New York, with passengers boarding for Southampton. In the grand salon CAPTAIN MIZZEN and Seventh Officer, VANCE TRUEBLUE, are in the process of welcoming people aboard at the promenade deck entrance CS.)*

CAPTAIN: Thank heavens it's almost sailing time, Seventh Officer Trueblue. I hate standing here like a ship's bellboy and saying, "Welcome aboard," to 700 socialites and tycoons ... people who call a ship a "boat" and ask stupid question like, "When do we cross the equator between New York and Southampton?" How many have we got left to board?

*(VANCE counts from the list on his clipboard.)*

VANCE: Only about half a dozen, Captain Mizzen. Including the ship owner and fleet commodore himself, JP Morganfeller. The richest man in the world.

CAPTAIN: *And* the world's most eccentric rich man. He thinks he's being generous by handing out dimes.

VANCE: That's what they say. And he always wears a mask to protect himself against germs and foul air. Nobody in years has actually seen his face.

CAPTAIN: Or even heard his voice. He always speaks through one of his underlings. Like he was too good to talk to you. This trip he's bringing along some art expert to keep an eye on his priceless painting.

VANCE: What painting is that, Captain?

CAPTAIN: It's a study of an Italian lady by Leonardo da Vinci.

VANCE: The famous "Mona Lisa"? *(HE points to painting of "Mona Lisa" on the wall.)*

CAPTAIN: No, that one is just a cheap reproduction. It's another painting altogether, done later when da Vinci was on real good terms with her. It's called "Mona Lisa Unbuttoned."

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VANCE: You means she's ...

CAPTAIN: Mona Lisa is wearing nothing but her smile. There's a suspicion some notorious art thief is about to make his move on the painting, so Morganfeller is transferring it to his castle in England. He's had that safe moved into the grand salon to hold it while it's aboard the S.S. *Gigantic*. I'm designating you responsible for its protection, Seventh Officer Trueblue.

VANCE: Aye, aye sir! Who would dare attempt a robbery in the grand salon of the world's largest and second fastest luxury liner? Especially when it's under the surveillance of a trained private detective.

CAPTAIN: You?

VANCE: Yes, sir. I just completed my correspondence course and received my badge. (*HE takes badge from his pocket, polishes it reverently.*) A man needs a second career to fall back on when he retires from the sea.

CAPTAIN: You're lucky. I've sailed the seven seas, man and boy, for 35 years. But I took a solemn oath not to "swallow the anchor" and settle down ashore, with a wife and a dog and a house, till I take the transatlantic speed pennant away from those blasted limeys.

VANCE: You'd have made it last voyage except for the headwinds. Maybe this crossing will be the charm.

CAPTAIN: Well, just make sure nothing happens to "Mona Lisa Unbuttoned" or your retirement could be sooner than you think. New York is crawling with criminals. Did you read those "wanted" posters all over town?

VANCE: About the three convicted jewel thieves who just escaped from Wormwood Women's Prison? I've already warned the gangway watch to keep a sharp lookout for female stowaways.

CAPTAIN: That's good. Because if any of those women manage to set one foot aboard the *Gigantic*, Seventh Officer Trueblue becomes Eighth Officer Trueblue. Savvy?

VANCE: Aye, aye sir.

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*(SAILOR SAM, carrying baggage, appears in prom deck entry, comes to attention with bosun's pipe at the ready.)*

SAILOR SAM: All hands look lively and man your stations for the Commodore himself.

*(SAILOR SAM blows the pipe. Enter NEMATODE FESTER, carrying rolled up canvas. HE comes DS while a masked figure in trench coat, pulled down hat, smoked glasses is framed in the entry.)*

CAPTAIN: That's enough, Sailor Sam.

SAILOR SAM: Aye, aye, sir. Just clearin' a passageway for the Commodore.

NEMATODE: At ease, people. This is Commodore J. P. Morganfeller, your employer. I am his executive art custodian, and spokesman, William Smith. *(HE gestures toward his boss. MORGANFELLER bows curtly.)*

CAPTAIN: Welcome aboard, sir.

VANCE: We are delighted to see you, sir.

NEMATODE: Of course you are. Commodore Morganfeller will not answer you because he is masked and otherwise protected from the germ laden atmosphere.

CAPTAIN: This ship is clean as a whistle, sir. You can take off your mask here.

SAILOR SAM: Ye kin eat off the decks, Commodore. I holystoned 'em meself.

VANCE: Stow it, Sailor Sam.

SAILOR SAM: Aye, aye, sir.

NEMATODE: Commodore Morganfeller declines. He will be spending the entire voyage sequestered in his stateroom and will dine on his own stock of germ-free health food. He is not to be disturbed for any reason.

VANCE: Commodore and Mr. Smith, may I have your signatures on this passenger manifest?

*(MORGANFELLER curtly takes the manifest, signs with his left hand, as does NEMATODE with his right, then returns it to VANCE.)*

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