

"THE GOOD SHIP DUCHESS OF ELGIN"

By Rob Biesenbach

CAST

Captain - 50s, a man of the sea, romantic, formal, long-winded

First Mate Swenson - 30s, aide to the Captain, fiercely loyal

Ensign Davis - 22, a slacker crewman, insolent, sarcastic

Jimmy - 7, passenger

Barb - 40s, passenger/casino boat gambler, perky, dowdy, Midwestern

Betty - 40s, her sister, the same

(The CAPTAIN and FIRST MATE on the  
bridge of a ship. ENSIGN DAVIS stands  
in the background.)

FIRST MATE

Captain, here are the latest weather forecasts that you ordered.

CAPTAIN

Thank you, First Mate Swenson. Let's see ... barometer falling, winds  
turning to the Northeast ... I don't like this ... no, I don't like it one  
bit. The seas are going to be angry tonight, my friend!

FIRST MATE

We'll be ready for it, sir!

CAPTAIN

(With reassuring arm on Swenson's shoulder) Mr. Swenson, your bravado  
in the face of danger is admirable. I assure you there's no safer  
place to weather this storm than right here ... on board the Grand  
Duchess of Elgin Riverboat & Casino ... the pride of the Bally's fleet.

FIRST MATE

Yes, sir! Your orders, Captain?

CAPTAIN

Alert the crew! Batten down the hatches!

FIRST MATE

Ensign Davis, you heard the Captain!

ENSIGN DAVIS

Whatever, dude!

FIRST MATE

Watch your tongue, lad! Your impertinence will earn you the lash!

(Davis rolls eyes, crosses stage to  
put lid on wastebasket.)

ENSIGN DAVIS

(Mockingly, with salute) WASTEBASKET COVERED AND SECURED ... SIR!!

CAPTAIN

(Oblivious) Very good, Ensign. Now, Mr. Swenson, let's break out the life vests. Issue one to every passenger.

FIRST MATE

Actually, Captain ... may I remind you of the cable we received from the ship's owners? It seems life vests are not required for a ship that is permanently moored to its dock.

CAPTAIN

Damn those greedy scalawags! I remember a day when passenger safety was paramount ... (Pause) (Resigned) Oh, very well. Mr. Swenson ... dispatch the crew to the outdoor Tiki Lounge. Let's get those table umbrellas down!

FIRST MATE

Aye-aye, sir! And should I also stow the cocktail umbrellas? In a fierce gale, they could take out an eye.

CAPTAIN

Yes, Mr. Swenson, very good! It's that kind of clear-headed thinking that will someday earn you your captain's bars!

FIRST MATE

You flatter me, sir! (Salutes)

(As the Captain studies his charts,  
Ensign Davis joins the First Mate.)

ENSIGN DAVIS

Man, this is bullshit! I'm quitting this crappy job!

FIRST MATE

You're talking mutiny, Mister! Why, I could have you keel-hauled!

ENSIGN DAVIS

Yeah, hoist it up your mainsail, dude - I'm outta here!

(He exits. Swenson rejoins Captain.)

FIRST MATE

Sir, Ensign Davis -

CAPTAIN

Oh, don't you worry about the Ensign. (Fondly) He reminds me of a certain brash, young officer who stepped aboard this ship some ten years ago. But my gut tells me that he'll eventually take to the sea like an admiral to his cabin wench ...

(Jimmy wanders in.)

CAPTAIN

Ahoy there, young man! Did you come seeking shelter from the storm?

JIMMY

(Puzzled) What storm?

CAPTAIN

Oh, don't be fooled, son. Over the horizon, a killer tempest is brewing ... a savage maelstrom wreaking death and destruction ... if you listen closely you can hear the weeping of the sailors' widows ...

FIRST MATE

(Steps in to reassure a terrified Jimmy) What can we do for you, son?

JIMMY

I was just looking for the bathroom ...

CAPTAIN

(Chuckles, oblivious) Young man, on board a ship we call it "the head."

JIMMY

At our house, Daddy calls it "the shitter."

CAPTAIN

Such a precocious lad! What's your name, son?

JIMMY

Jimmy.

CAPTAIN

Welcome to the bridge, Jimmy. It's exciting, isn't it? (No response)  
Do you know what this is? This is the wheel that's used to steer!

JIMMY

Really! Can I turn it?

CAPTAIN

No, you can't, Jimmy, it's locked in place ... and I don't have the key.

JIMMY

(Disappointed) Oh ...

CAPTAIN

But don't be fooled, son. Captaining a ship that never sails is no easy task! For the Goddess of the Sea favors no vessel, be it mobile ... or impounded.

FIRST MATE

Jimmy, the facilities are right out this door and to the left.

(Swenson leads Jimmy out.)

CAPTAIN

Ah, tell me, Mr. Swenson, is there anything more inspiring than a child's unquenchable sense of wonder?

FIRST MATE

No, sir ...

(Barb and Betty stumble in.)

BETTY

Oops, sorry! Wrong door!

CAPTAIN

Ah, welcome, ladies! Come to take in the view, did you?

BARB

Actually, we were looking for a Mai-Tai!

CAPTAIN

Mai-Tai? (Chuckling) Ladies, we're a long way from the South China Sea! But if you'd like a peek through my spyglass, you can see all the way to DuPage County.

BETTY

(Looking through spyglass) Oh, look, Barb, I didn't realize our hotel was so close!

CAPTAIN

The waters are bewitchingly calm ... they belie the torment of the poor souls that perished in its briny depths.

BARB

Where? I don't see it.

CAPTAIN

They say the River Elgin doesn't give up its dead ...

BETTY

Over there ... next to the Fuddrucker's.

BARB

Come on, Betty, let's go hit the slots.

CAPTAIN

Won't you two join me tonight at the Captain's table? We'll ride out the storm together!

FIRST MATE

(Hopefully) It's a great honor to dine with the Captain!

BETTY

We were just gonna grab a calzone or something at the snack bar ...

CAPTAIN

Nonsense, you must join us! We'll see you at "seven bells!"

(Betty and Barb head to the exit.)

BARB

Yeah, well maybe ...

CAPTAIN

(Calls after them.) That's seven o'clock to you land lubbers! (To First Mate) So how many is that for dinner?

FIRST MATE

Let's see, there's you and me, plus the ladies ... that's uh ... four, sir.

CAPTAIN

At a table for twelve ... tell you what -

FIRST MATE

I'll have the steward set up the small table again tonight, sir.

CAPTAIN

Yes, good. (Pause) You know, Mr. Swenson, the life we've chosen ... being married to the sea ...

FIRST MATE

I wouldn't trade it for anything, Captain.

CAPTAIN

(Smiles) Nor would I. (Pause) Now then, back to our preparations. Let's get flashlights to all the blackjack tables ...

FIRST MATE

Capital idea, sir!

(Lights out.)