

The entire play takes place in the first-class smoking lounge of the R.M.S. *Titanic*, 350 miles southeast of Newfoundland, on the evening of April 14-15, 1912.

ACT I—11:30 p.m.

ACT II—1:00 a.m.

PILOTS OF THE PURPLE TWILIGHT

a play by

STEVE KLUGER

NOTE: The George M. Cohan songs performed in *Pilots of the Purple Twilight* are in the public domain and are thus free from any copyright restrictions. For access to some of the lesser-known titles, producers are referred to the Columbia original cast recording of *George M!*, which contains all of the songs used herein.

FOR LICENSING AND PRODUCTION INFORMATION:
SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.
(212) 206-8990
www.samuel french.com

Copyright ©1998 by Steve Kluger; ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Cast of Characters

JOHN JACOB ASTOR
ISIDOR STRAUS
J. BRUCE ISMAY
FIRST OFFICER WILLIAM MURDOCH
ALICE FORTUNE
CHARLEY FORTUNE
THOMAS KILGANNON
IDA STRAUS
MARY CANAVAN

ACT ONE

(The lights come up full on the first-class smoking lounge of the R.M.S. Titanic, on the last night of her very brief life. The room, as would be expected, is decorated elegantly. Oak-paneled walls are separated at intervals by carefully cut stained glass windows, which in turn are flanked by elaborate gold and brass candelabras mounted on the casings and lit electrically. The carpets are thick; the hanging chandeliers are crystal. Throughout the room, we see several antique tables surrounded by stuffed chairs and love seats. There is a bar stage right and a door further down, which leads out onto the first-class deck. Along the stage left wall we see portholes; upstage center is a grand piano, situated next to another door.)

At curtain rise, the room is empty. After a moment, the upstage door opens and JOHN JACOB ASTOR enters. He appears to be in his late forties and is dressed in black tie and tails. He crosses to the bar and pours himself a whisky; picking it up, he removes a gold watch from his pocket, checks the time, and glances expectantly at the door. With a slight head shake, he crosses to the center stage table and sits. After he has placed the drink beside him on the table, he withdraws from his jacket a deck of cards (which he also places on the table), and a pipe, which he proceeds to fill and light. While he is performing this chore, the upstage door opens again, and ISIDOR STRAUS enters stealthily. Appearing to be in his early sixties, he too is formally attired. ASTOR's back is to him so he is not aware that STRAUS has entered. Isidor moves quietly to the bar to mix himself a drink; ASTOR speaks without even looking up.)

ASTOR. You're late.

STRAUS. *(With slight Yiddish accent.)* Dammit, man—I am *not* late.

ASTOR. Eleven-thirty, Straus. We said eleven-thirty. That was eighteen seconds ago. Have you any idea how many shares can be traded in eighteen seconds?

STRAUS. That's the trouble with you industrialists. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick. It's all you ever talk about. One would think you had some unholy alliance with the Swiss.

ASTOR. All right—

STRAUS. It is *not* all right. The human body is a delicate enough mechanism as is. If God had wanted us to be pocket watches, we'd have been born with Roman numerals. Where is the port?

ASTOR. The British drank it all.

STRAUS. *Again?* Good God, it's no wonder they lost the Revolution. I consider it an achievement of the highest order that they managed to find Philadelphia.

ASTOR. Boston.

STRAUS. You see? *(Pointing to ASTOR's glass.)* What are you having?

ASTOR. Whisky and soda.

STRAUS. You're no better.

(STRAUS begins pouring himself a sherry.)

ASTOR. Colonel Gracie was looking for you.

STRAUS. No doubt he was. And should he enquire again, I'd be most appreciative if you told him I'd fallen overboard.

ASTOR. Curious. I thought he was one of the few people you respected.

STRAUS. He was. Until he asked me to read his book. "The Truth About Chickamauga". 462 pages. Never been so bored in my life.

ASTOR. I found it fascinating.

STRAUS. You exploit widows and children, too.

ASTOR. Mr. Straus, I consider that a highly inappropriate remark coming from a haberdasher.

STRAUS. My good man—one does not allude to Macy's with the same sort of innuendo he might employ when speaking of some

third-class necktie establishment. It reeks with envy. Do I make myself clear?

ASTOR. Perfectly. I'm sorry.

STRAUS. No, you're not. You're 47. You wear impertinence as though it were a two hundred dollar smoking jacket.

ASTOR. Yes. I know.

STRAUS. Well, you needn't be so smug about it.

ASTOR. I needn't? Arrogance is the cornerstone upon which every great empire is built. Without it, we should be destitute. *(Eyeing him.)* Evidently, some of us are. *(STRAUS crosses to the table and sits.)*

STRAUS. Colonel Astor—practical hobby though they may well be, convertible debentures do not buy the same sense of security as a good piece of furniture.

ASTOR. Indeed. And how did you pay for passage on this vessel—with a davenport?

STRAUS. With the fruits gathered from forty years of hard labor. *(Pause.)* But I don't suppose you'd know about that, would you? You probably inherited the orchard, too.

ASTOR. There is nothing dishonorable in being born to the manor. A mere question of convenience, that's all. I was a fortunate soul.

STRAUS. You were a rich baby.

(ASTOR picks up the deck of cards.)

ASTOR. Deuces wild?

STRAUS. As always.

ASTOR. What about the stakes?

STRAUS. Might I interest you in raising them?

ASTOR. Of course.

STRAUS. Excellent. Three cents, then.

(From offstage, we hear ragtime music as ASTOR deals the cards. STRAUS groans.)

STRAUS. Oh, my God. There they go again.

ASTOR. I beg your pardon?

STRAUS. That band. They've been following me about this ship ever since we left Queenstown. I feel like the Pied Piper leading the rats to the sea.

ASTOR. Some people would consider that an honor.

STRAUS. Some people voted for Taft.

ASTOR. Speaking of rats.

STRAUS. My good fellow—I take it you dined this evening?

ASTOR. Of course. I had the squab.

STRAUS. I had the lamb. Rather, I *nearly* had the lamb.

ASTOR. I'll raise you.

STRAUS. Unfortunately, it is difficult to make oneself heard when the resident viola is attempting to play "Tales of Hoffmann" over one's shoulder. *(Pause.)* They gave me oysters. *(Pause.)* Little oysters. *(Pause.)* I abominate that band.

ASTOR. Oh, for God's sake, Straus. What did you *expect* on a first crossing—a selection labelled "silence"?

STRAUS. I didn't expect oysters.

ASTOR. Then you should have sailed the Lusitania.

STRAUS. Mrs. Straus wouldn't hear of it. It was either the Titanic or three more weeks of driving on the wrong side of the road. Given the alternatives, there didn't seem to be much of a choice.

ASTOR. Do you always do what your wife tells you?

STRAUS. Why not? *She* got lamb. *(Pause.)* Not that I'm complaining, mind you. This was supposed to be another honeymoon. Our fifth, I think.

ASTOR. Fifth?!

STRAUS. Blame Mrs. Straus. Whenever White Star launches another liner, she employs it as an excuse to reassemble her trousseau. One would think she held stock.

ASTOR. What has that to do with lamb?

STRAUS. Outside of the dining saloon, I haven't seen her since Friday.

ASTOR. She's been avoiding you?

STRAUS. She's been *losing* me. Colonel Astor—have you attempted to wander from one end of this ship to the other? It's like walking across New Jersey.

ASTOR. How can you quibble with technology? The Titanic has *everything*.

STRAUS. Yes. Including Articles of Statehood. I doubt that the forces of nature are much amused by the taunt.

ASTOR pauses thoughtfully.

ASTOR. You know, I envy you.

STRAUS. You should. Two pair.

ASTOR. Your marriage, I mean. There's something to be said for older spouses. They're devoted. They're reliable. They're—

STRAUS. Sturdy?

ASTOR. Well, yes.

STRAUS. My friend—one of these days you must allow me to point out the differences between an aging woman and a dented automobile.

ASTOR. I'd like to hear them.

STRAUS. No, you wouldn't. Don't patronize an old man.

ASTOR. I—

STRAUS. No need to apologize. Were I in your place, I wouldn't listen to me, either. Damn you.

ASTOR. She is lovely, isn't she?

STRAUS. At the very least.

ASTOR. My precious Kitty. I don't know what I would have done without her.

STRAUS. I didn't notice her in the dining saloon this evening. Is she feeling well?

ASTOR. Quite well. However, they've requested that I keep her in the cabin. She tends to bark around other people.

STRAUS. Your *bride*?!

ASTOR. Don't be a fool. My Airedale.

STRAUS. I was speaking of the new Mrs. Astor!

ASTOR. Oh. *(Pause.)* She's all right. A little seasick perhaps.

STRAUS. Colonel—pardon me for appearing inquisitive, but you don't seem to be entirely—

ASTOR. What? Bewitched? That sort of thing went out with McKinley.

STRAUS. Well, dammit, man—you might at least *pretend*. It's only polite.

ASTOR. Oh, come now, Straus. The second time out, a man is bound to be more cautious. Haven't you ever purchased a stock solely because it was expected to split? And then it didn't?

STRAUS. Occasionally.

ASTOR. There you are. Only a jackass would dive in twice with his eyes closed.

STRAUS. I see. *(Pause.)* Tell me—have you at least introduced yourselves to one another yet?

ASTOR. I hope so. She's pregnant.

STRAUS. The Airedale?!

ASTOR. My wife!

STRAUS. A wise choice. Three tens....

(The upstage door opens and J. BRUCE ISMAY enters the lounge, looking quite a bit like the chairman of a steamship line. Probably because that's what he is.)

ISMAY. Astor. Straus.

ASTOR. Oh, hello, Ismay.

ISMAY. I trust you'll ignore the intrusion. I didn't expect to find anyone playing cards on Sunday.

(He begins surveying the room and taking notes on a small pad.)

STRAUS. Preposterous. Why *shouldn't* anyone be playing cards on Sunday?

ASTOR. Don't be a heathen, Straus. Some people have morals.

STRAUS. And other people have money. It's a long-standing fact that the two cannot co-habit peacefully. Don't argue. It's been attempted many times.

(*ASTOR sees ISMAY's note-taking.*)

ASTOR. Bruce, what in God's name are you doing?

ISMAY. Planning a series of executions.

ASTOR. Come again?

ISMAY. The imbeciles who profess to understand the appointments of elegance. It's disgraceful. (*Indicating the lounge.*) I mean, really—who outside of the working class could possibly tolerate maroon and mauve in concert without wanting to vomit? This entire room looks like Macy's basement.

STRAUS. MR. ISMAY—

ISMAY. Consider it a compliment. (*Pointing toward the "B" deck.*) Assuming you'd like an education in *all* that's cheap, tasteless and vulgar, you might visit the Cafe Parisien. Wicker furniture, indeed. It gives one the distinct impression he's either in Hell or in America. (*To ASTOR.*) Do you think an aubergine carpet would complement the upholstery?

STRAUS. (*Mumbling.*) This man belongs in a sanitarium...

ASTOR. I really can't say that I've given the matter much thought.

ISMAY. Evidently, neither has anyone else. Too busy, I presume, wondering whether this leviathan would float in the first place.

ASTOR. *I'd* call that a reasonable concern.

ISMAY. You would. It's a sad comment upon the state of the human race when a man places the sanctity of life above offenses to the eye.

STRAUS. If I were you, I'd be more concerned about what's offensive to the ear. That band, for instance.

ISMAY. Indeed. Have you a suggestion?

STRAUS. Personally, I'd recommend poison.

ISMAY. I beg your pardon?

ASTOR. Never mind him. He's under the weather.

STRAUS. You would be too if you hadn't eaten since noon. (*Mumbling.*) Oysters....

ISMAY. Well, should it make you feel any better, we expect to be in New York two hours ahead of schedule. Isn't that excellent news?

STRAUS. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick. (*Pause.*) Ecch.

ISMAY. I say—have I said something wrong?

ASTOR. Not at all. Have a drink.

ISMAY. I really can't—

ASTOR. I don't know why not. White Star is paying for it.

STRAUS. Oh, leave the poor man alone, Astor. Can't you see you've just cost him half a minute?

ASTOR. Straus—

STRAUS. *You* heard him. We've gained two hours already.

ASTOR. Really, that's quite enough—

STRAUS. Left to his own devices, he'll have us arriving in New York three days before we left England. (*To ISMAY.*) Why don't you retire to bed with a good book? I have one about Chickamauga I'd be happy to inflict upon you—

ISMAY. Dear God—that candelabra is crooked! If I find the idiot who did that—

ASTOR. Have a drink, Bruce.

ISMAY. Perhaps I will.

(*He crosses to the bar and begins mixing himself a drink.*)

STRAUS. Just don't go looking for the port. Your countrymen got there first.

ASTOR. Ismay, do you mind if I make a suggestion?

ISMAY. About the carpet?

ASTOR. Not about the carpet! (*Pause.*) You might consider going a bit more lightly on yourself. Anxiety doesn't befit a chairman of the board.

ISMAY. I suppose you presume mine is an enviable lot?

ASTOR. You could do a great deal worse.

ISMAY. I could do a great deal better, too. Would you like a reasonable example? Mr. Guggenheim's eggs were undercooked

and I forgot to apologize. What kind of a life is that? If I—
(*Looking down, then mumbling.*) Dammit, we're out of ice.

STRAUS. I wouldn't concern myself too much were I you. Mr. *Guggenheim* is undercooked.

ASTOR. He speaks quite highly of *you*.

STRAUS. That's because he's a born liar.

ASTOR. Aren't we all?

STRAUS. My point exactly. He's not very good at it yet. It often happens to those who still belong to the middle classes.

ASTOR. Really, Straus. A man who has a million dollars is as well off as if he were rich.

STRAUS. Well, there goes *Guggenheim's* last excuse.

(*ISMAY sits at the table with his drink. As he does, the chandelier begins to sway noticeably above them. They do not see it. After a moment, it stops.*)

ISMAY. Another headache I don't need. Have you seen our passenger manifest? It looks like the *Social Register*.

ASTOR. Not quite. J. P. Morgan isn't here.

STRAUS. Immaterial. J. P. Morgan's presence is of no commercial value to the *White Star Line*.

ASTOR. Why is that?

ISMAY AND STRAUS. He *owns* the *White Star Line*.

ASTOR. Odd. I thought *I* did.

STRAUS. Who balances your checkbook?

ASTOR. (*To ISMAY.*) You know, it's your own fault. You needn't have touted the launching of this ship as though it were the *Second Coming of Christ*. *Ismay*, it's only a boat.

ISMAY. If the *Titanic* is only a boat, then you, *Astor*, are only a banker.

STRAUS. Hear, hear.

ASTOR. Perhaps you ought to come work for me, *Bruce*. I like your style.

STRAUS. *I* don't. Personally, I find it unnatural crossing the sea on a vessel with its own coastline. Forgive me. I'm unusual that way. (*To ASTOR.*) I'll raise you.

ASTOR. I think you're bluffing.

STRAUS. Prove it.

(*They turn over their cards.*)

STRAUS. Damn!

ASTOR. You owe me a dime.

(*ASTOR looks up suddenly.*)

ASTOR. Are we slowing down?

STRAUS. (*Indicating ISMAY.*) For God's sake, *Astor*. Don't get him started.

ISMAY. I shouldn't be surprised if we were. *Captain Smith* pilots this ship as though it were a leaky tug. Evidently seventy revolutions is more than the old bird can handle.

STRAUS. Which old bird? The leaky tug or *Captain Smith*?

ISMAY. Is there a discernible difference? I should consider firing him if he weren't already retiring. He thinks it was his idea. (*Pause; looking about, worried.*) We *are* slowing down. (*A grumble.*) Dammit, I *told* him not to take those warnings seriously.

This is the *Titanic*, for God's sake.

ASTOR. What warnings?

ISMAY. Nothing we need worry about. Leave that to the poor wretches on the *Carpathia*. Damn *Cunarder*.

(*The down right door opens. FIRST OFFICER WILLIAM MURDOCH enters, slightly out of breath. He crosses to ISMAY.*)

MURDOCH. Mr. *Ismay*—

ISMAY. *Murdoch*! Why aren't you in the wheelhouse? Who's at the helm?

MURDOCH. Lightoller's taken over, sir. There's been a bit of trouble. Captain Smith would like to see you on the bridge.

ISMAY. Just what I need.

STRAUS. I doubt it's anything serious. While you're there, why don't you have the ship's railing repainted peach?

ISMAY. Astor, what time is it?

ASTOR. (*Checking his watch.*) Eleven-fifty.

ISMAY. Too late to go groveling before Mr. Guggenheim. (*A shrug.*) Oh, well. Something to look forward to tomorrow. The senile old buffoon.

ASTOR. Bruce, what do you say about us when *our* backs are turned?

ISMAY. Nothing you'd want to hear.

STRAUS. (*To ASTOR.*) At least he's honest.

(*ISMAY crosses to MURDOCH.*)

ISMAY. What seems to be the problem?

(*MURDOCH mumbles into ISMAY's ear.*)

ISMAY. *WHAT? YOU FOOL!*

MURDOCH. Begging your pardon, sir. I was only following orders—

(*ISMAY tears out of the room, with MURDOCH close behind. ASTOR turns to STRAUS.*)

ASTOR. You know, you were damned rude. Ismay looks like a decent fellow.

STRAUS. He looks like an undertaker.

ASTOR. What if he does? That's no excuse for uncivilized behavior.

STRAUS. It's not? We're entrusting our lives to a man with a mouth full of carpet tacks, and you're talking to me about uncivilized behavior?

ASTOR. Oh, for God's sake, Straus. Why do you bother to travel at all?

STRAUS. Can't be helped. I just purchased land over there. The Missus insisted.

ASTOR. Really? I'm considering buying some European property myself. Just got through picking it out, as a matter of fact.

STRAUS. Good investment. Mine goes by the name of Tunbridge Wells. What's yours called?

ASTOR. Spain.

STRAUS. Deal the cards.

(*The downstage door opens suddenly, and ALICE FORTUNE enters looking severely agitated. She's just this side of 25 and a real pip, dressed in a pale blue evening gown and long white gloves. Without breaking stride, she begins circling the room and calling out as she does.*)

ALICE. Charles! I'm speaking to you, Charles! Are you in here? (*Pause.*) Answer me!

(*STRAUS looks up.*)

STRAUS. Young woman, should you find it necessary to bray further in this direction, kindly provide some sort of advance notice. One generally requires lead time to seek appropriate shelter.

ALICE. Have you seen my brother?

STRAUS. Happily, that is one hardship I have been spared. On the whole, I think I'd prefer a bullet wound.

ASTOR. Indeed. (*To ALICE.*) I must say, this intrusion of yours is typically inconsiderate. One would presume you'd learned by now that this is a male sanctuary. (*Pause.*) Or do you consider trespass another of your misplaced prerogatives?

ALICE. Sergeant Astor—

ASTOR. "Colonel."

ALICE. I assure you I have no interest in interrupting the exchange of rude post cards or whatever it is that you do in here. I am simply looking for my baby brother. My gentle, sensitive, defenseless baby brother. And if I find him, I'm going to break him in half.

ASTOR. Is that a promise or merely an idle threat?

ALICE. A blood oath.

(STRAUS and ASTOR glance at one other, then put down their cards and rise.)

ASTOR. I'll check the "A" deck.

STRAUS. I'll look in the cafe.

ALICE. Don't bother.

(She faces front and calls out again.)

ALICE. Charles, I'm going to give you one more chance. Do you hear me? *(Pause.)* I'm warning you, Charles.

ASTOR. Oh, for God's sake. Anyone can see that he isn't here.

STRAUS. *(To ASTOR.)* Don't antagonize her, Astor. Clearly the woman has gone mad.

ALICE. Have I? *(Singing.)* "H-A-double R-I, G-A-N spells Harrigan—"

(Suddenly, from behind the bar, we hear a strong young baritone voice responding helplessly on cue.)

VOICE. *(Singing.)* "Proud of all the Irish blood that's in me, Devil a man can say a word agin me—"

(ASTOR turns to STRAUS.)

ASTOR. Dammit. I was hoping he'd fallen over the railing.

VOICE. "H-A-double R-I, G-A-N, you see—"

(ALICE crosses upstage impatiently, folds her arms as she reaches the bar, and addresses herself to the area behind it.)

ALICE. Charles Alexander Fortune, you come out of there this instant.

(CHARLEY FORTUNE rises slowly. About 19 and blond, with a couple thousand real white teeth, he's dressed in a grey, three-piece suit with a red-and-white striped vest and a blue bow tie with white dots. He looks like Betsy Ross. He's also wearing a straw boater and carrying a song-and-dance man's cane.)

CHARLEY. "It's a name that a shame never has been connected with, Harrigan—that's me." *(To ALICE.)* Don't ever do that again.

ALICE. Oh, Charles—how *could* you?

CHARLEY. How could I what?

ALICE. Don't play games with me, Charles. You're not too old for—

STRAUS.—fratricide?

ASTOR. Indeed.

CHARLEY. *(To ALICE.)* It seemed like a funny idea. A cute little boyish prank. Don't you think I'm cute anymore, Alice? *(Pause; pointing.)* I still have a dimple. *(Acid silence.)* Alice? *(Pause.)* WELL, WHO KNEW HE'D SAY YES?!

ALICE. Where is it?

CHARLEY. Where is what?

ALICE. The Marconigram.

CHARLEY. Who said I got a Marconigram?

ALICE. Mother.

CHARLEY. *Whose* mother?

ALICE. Stand still, Charles. It's difficult to hit a moving target.

CHARLEY. I lost it. Okay?

ALICE. Then what are you hiding?

CHARLEY. Nothing. A dinner menu.

(She grabs it from behind his back and scans it.)

ALICE. From George M. Cohan?

(STRAUS turns to ASTOR.)

STRAUS. I wonder if *he* got oysters.

(ALICE looks up and indicates the telegram.)

ALICE. Oh, Charles, how *could* you? What am I going to tell them back home?

(CHARLEY races to the piano and begins accompanying himself.)

CHARLEY. *(Singing.)* “Say hello to dear old Coney Isle
if there you chance to be, When you’re at the Waldorf have a smile
and charge it up to me—”

ALICE. Why must you do that?

CHARLEY. Because I’m the original cranky Yankee popular
melody fool.

ALICE. If you’re looking for an argument, it’s going to be a long
wait.

CHARLEY. Alice—

ALICE. *(Waving the telegram.)* Go ahead! Say yes! I’d like to
see you live on twenty-five dollars a week.

CHARLEY. I can afford it. I have very simple tastes.

ALICE. Since when? *(Eyeing his clothes.)* That suit didn’t
exactly come from Macy’s, you know.

STRAUS. *(To ASTOR.)* Might I borrow a shotgun?

*(CHARLEY grabs a chair and sits at the table with ASTOR and
STRAUS.)*

CHARLEY. Guess what?

ASTOR. You’re having your larynx removed.

CHARLEY. No, no—I’m serious.

STRAUS. As though he weren’t? *(Handing him the deck.)* It’s
your deal.

ASTOR. *(To STRAUS.)* Must you?

STRAUS. Colonel Astor, preferential though your company may
be, the fact of the matter remains that you win. He doesn’t. *(To
CHARLEY.)* The cards please, Mr. Fortune.

CHARLEY. *(Dealing.)* It’s called “Broadway Jones”. We go into
rehearsal in September—

ALICE. We do *not* go into rehearsal in September—because the
season won’t be over yet—

CHARLEY. Aw, who cares about pitching?

ALICE. Don’t talk like that. And as to my appearing in public in
a bustle, I’d just as soon swim back to New York.

ASTOR. That’s an excellent idea—

ALICE. Who asked you? *(To CHARLEY; indicating the
telegram.)* Besides, this only says “audition”—

STRAUS. *(To ASTOR.)* I’ll raise you.

ASTOR. I’m out.

*(From outside, we hear a distant shouting. ASTOR rises,
disturbed, and begins crossing to the window. Halfway there, he
changes his mind and heads for the bar instead, where he proceeds
to mix himself a drink.)*

CHARLEY. *(To ALICE.)* Sis, I’m telling you—we’re as good as
in. Why else would he remember us? And after three whole
years?

ALICE. Why else, indeed. Charles, in case it hasn’t yet
penetrated your skull, which is a challenging dig at the *best* of
times, an amateur contest at Lake Tonawanda hardly puts one in
the same class as Fay Templeton and Eddie Foy. Unless this Mr.
Cohan thinks we’re just a couple of Canadian rubes who can be
had for a song—

CHARLEY. Song! We’ll do “Twentieth-Century Love”, and—

ALICE. We'll do nothing of the kind. If Harriet Blatch ever finds out about this, she'll have my corset revoked. *(To STRAUS.)* Excuse me.

STRAUS. It's much too late for that.

CHARLEY. Harriet Blatch is a fat old cow.

ALICE. How can you say that about a pioneer?!

CHARLEY. No! No! *Davy Crockett* was a pioneer.

ALICE. It's the same thing!

CHARLEY. EXCEPT DAVY CROCKETT WAS A LOT PRETTIER THAN HARRIET BLATCH IS!

STRAUS. *(Mumbling.)* I wish I were deaf. *(To CHARLEY.)* I'll raise you.

(ALICE peers over CHARLEY's shoulder at his poker hand.)

ALICE. Play the king, you idiot.

CHARLEY. Which one?

STRAUS. *(Throwing in his cards.)* Never mind, never mind.

(ASTOR, standing at the window, frowns.)

ASTOR. What the devil is going on out there?

ALICE. *(Looking up.)* I think we passed a berg of some sort. There's ice all over the forward deck.

STRAUS. An iceberg, did you say?

ASTOR. *(Peering out the window.)* Apparently.

STRAUS. Well, for God's sake, don't tell Ismay. He'll probably want to decorate it.

(ASTOR returns to his seat.)

CHARLEY. *(To ALICE.)* Would you please get your hands off my cards?

ALICE. Suit yourself. I'm not going to waste my time arguing with a child.

CHARLEY. Great Honk, Alice! I'm almost 20.

ALICE. Indeed? Well, they have this thing called adolescence. You might consider passing through it—

CHARLEY. Oh, yeah? Why don't you go burn a girdle or somethin'?

ALICE. Why don't you go outside and play with the anchor?

CHARLEY. How'd you like to make me?

ALICE. How'd you like a split lip?

CHARLEY. *(Slamming down his cards.)* Full house.

ALICE. *(Ditto.)* Royal flush.

CHARLEY. I'm going back to my cabin.

ALICE. Have you considered the Bluejackets, Charley? They think they're going to win another pennant. What do you plan to tell them—that their righthanded ace decided to shuffle off to Buffalo instead?

CHARLEY. Why don't you ask Harriet Blatch?

ALICE. I don't have to. You know what she'd say?

CHARLEY. Yeah. "Moo."

ALICE. God, I hope you were adopted!

CHARLEY. Look who's talkin'. Know what your trouble is, Sis? Next to Pop, I'm supposed to be the man in this family. Not you. What happens if I get bigger than Cohan? Can you hear my curtain speech? "My mother thanks you, my father thanks you, my sister Ethel thanks you, my sister Mabel thanks you—and then there's my brother. Alice."

ALICE. I will *not* become a Floradora girl just so you can give your regards to Broadway!

CHARLEY. *(Rising.)* ARE YOU GONNA DO THE AUDITION WITH ME OR NOT?!

ALICE. *(Also rising.)* I'LL CONSIDER IT!

(They sit. ALICE picks up the deck and begins shuffling furiously. ASTOR turns to STRAUS and points to CHARLEY.)

ASTOR. I see no earthly use for that boy, do you?

(STRAUS indicates CHARLEY's vest and tie.)

STRAUS. Oh, I don't know. If he'd been born fifty years earlier, they could have flown him over Ft. Sumter.

(As ALICE begins to deal the cards, the upstage door opens slowly, and we see THOMAS KILGANNON peering cautiously into the room. His tousled hair and ruddy complexion clearly indicate that he is Irish—his worn trousers and faded blue jumper are just as much of a tipoff that he is a peasant. When he sees that ASTOR, STRAUS, CHARLEY and ALICE are seated downstage with their backs to him, he quickly reaches behind the partially opened door and pulls an obviously reluctant woman into the room with him. She too is dressed poorly; her skirt is somewhat tattered and a shawl is draped over her head, covering her face as well. We also notice that THOMAS' pants—from the knees down—are drenched with sea water. Apparently oblivious to this, he tightens his grip on the woman's arm, motions her to be silent, and propels her toward the down right door leading out to the boat deck, where they exit quickly. No one at the card table has been aware of their presence.)

ASTOR. *(To ALICE.)* Miss Fortune—

ALICE. Don't call me that. You make me sound like Calamity Jane.

ASTOR. Haven't you a riot you could be instigating elsewhere on this ship?

ALICE. Are you attempting to get rid of me?

ASTOR. Strenuously.

ALICE. I wouldn't hold my breath.

ASTOR. In that event, I think we'd all be most appreciative if you would permit someone else to deal those cards.

ALICE. Why is that? Do I threaten your manhood?

ASTOR. You cheat.

ALICE. Really, Lieutenant—

ASTOR. "Colonel."

ALICE. There is, after all, a major distinction between a victor and a thief—

ASTOR. I'm aware of that—

ALICE.—and I resent the innuendo that, simply because I don't happen to be male, I am incapable of succeeding honestly—

STRAUS. Young woman, I don't believe that's what he was implying.

ASTOR. It certainly was.

ALICE. Not that it's any of your business, but I can shuffle a deck and chalk a billiard cue at the same time—

ASTOR. Cunning achievement—

ALICE. So you'll forgive me if I find your attitude, at best, despicable.

CHARLEY. *(Under his breath.)* Alice, shut up.

STRAUS. *(To ASTOR.)* Really, Colonel Astor—I believe an apology is in order.

ALICE. *(To CHARLEY; under her breath.)* I won't shut up—

ASTOR. *(To STRAUS.)* Are you mad? A billiard cue? What kind of accomplishment is that?

CHARLEY. *(To ALICE; gritted teeth.)* Then change the subject—

STRAUS. *(To ASTOR.)* Can you do it?

ASTOR. That's immaterial.

ALICE. *(To CHARLEY.)* I won't change the subject. I'm making a point!

CHARLEY. *(Sotto voce.)* No, you're not! You just dealt me five aces!

(CHARLEY passes ALICE the fifth ace under the table. She slips him a new card, then sticks the ace in her shoe.)

ASTOR. Oh, all right! I apologize!

ALICE. I should hope you would.

ASTOR. *(To STRAUS; mumbling.)* Really, I have half a mind—

ALICE. You needn't brag about it.

ASTOR.—to lodge a formal protest.

STRAUS. (*Indicating ALICE.*) With whom? The steamship line or God?

ASTOR. If White Star persists in allowing persons such as these to upset the equilibrium of the caste system, there's no telling what might happen. Can you imagine the consequences? Public flesh displays in Herald Square! Intransigent dismissal of the law! If—

(*ALICE looks up suddenly.*)

ALICE. Why have we stopped?

CHARLEY. (*To ALICE.*) Sshhh! I want to hear the rest of this. (*To ASTOR.*) Go back to the part about public flesh displays.

ALICE. Charley, we're not moving!

STRAUS. Preposterous.

(*ASTOR cocks his head.*)

ASTOR. I do believe she's right.

STRAUS. *You believe she's right?*

ASTOR. This is the Twentieth Century. Anything is possible.

CHARLEY. But in the middle of the ocean?

STRAUS. It only looks that way. Perhaps the front end of the ship just docked in New York.

ASTOR. Listen. (*Pause.*) They've shut down the turbines.

(*They all strain.*)

ALICE. I don't hear anything.

(*From offstage, MRS. STRAUS. Like her husband, she speaks with a slight Yiddish accent.*)

MRS. STRAUS.' VOICE. ISIDOR!

STRAUS. I do. (*Rising hastily.*) Is there a back way out of here?

(*Before he can move, the side door opens and MRS. STRAUS enters. She is in her early sixties and formidable, and is presently followed by OFFICER MURDOCH, who is holding onto a rather cumbersome-looking lifejacket.*)

MURDOCH. Ma'am, it's for your own protection!

MRS. STRAUS. I won't hear of it! Surely you can find someone else to protect!

MURDOCH. You have my word they're quite comfortable.

MRS. STRAUS. Young man, those who wear burlap with pearls deserve whatever happens to them. Why, it's—it's *ludicrous!*

(*MURDOCH turns to Mr. STRAUS.*)

MURDOCH. Mr. Straus, sir—if you might attempt a word with your wife—

STRAUS. What do you think I've been doing for forty years?

MRS. STRAUS. Thirty-nine—

STRAUS. You see? She wasn't always like this. She gets it from my daughter.

MRS. STRAUS. *My daughter—*

STRAUS. *Ida, don't start. Not here.*

MRS. STRAUS. How can you call yourself a father—

STRAUS.—*the North Atlantic is no place for—*

MRS. STRAUS.—*letting her marry that—that thing!*

STRAUS. ALFRED HESS IS A GOOD MAN!

MRS. STRAUS. He's nothing of the kind. He's a rum-runner.

STRAUS.—*a diligent, hardworking soul—*

MRS. STRAUS.—*a pirate—*

STRAUS.—*who will some day leave an indelible mark on the world—*

MRS. STRAUS.—*by selling little children to the Chinese, no doubt.*

(*The downstage door leading toward the boat deck opens slowly; once again, we see THOMAS KILGANNON peering carefully into*

the lounge, apparently hoping to retrace his earlier steps and make it back across the room and out through the upstage door. When he sees the other six characters downstage with their backs to him, he realizes he's going to have to take this one by degrees; darting into the lounge silently, he ducks behind the bar before the others have a chance to turn and see him. As he does so, we notice that the Irish woman whom he accompanied earlier is no longer with him; we also observe that THOMAS is barechested and shivering. In the meantime, ASTOR has risen and approached MURDOCH.)

ASTOR. Officer, what is this all about?

(MRS. STRAUS interrupts.)

MRS. STRAUS. Haven't you heard? There's the nastiest rumor floating around this ship—

ASTOR. *(To himself.)* Disturbing choice of words—

MRS. STRAUS. Of course, I really shouldn't be repeating it, as the source was hardly reliable—

MURDOCH. Mrs. Straus—

MRS. STRAUS. All right, Mrs. J. J. Brown, if you must know. From Denver. Wherever *that* is—

STRAUS. Ida—

MRS. STRAUS. Oh, she's really quite common. All got up in green and gold, she looks like a Christmas tree. Wears emeralds, too, if you can believe that. In *April*—

MURDOCH. Ma'am, I have my orders to think about—

ALICE. *(Rising.)* Mrs. Straus—

MRS. STRAUS. Oh, hello, dear. What a lovely gown. Where did you get it—Gimbels?

STRAUS. IDA!

MRS. STRAUS. Yes, well it seems that Mrs. Brown was on her way to the cafe when she slipped and fell, of all things, on this piece of ice, and—

ALICE. Oh, my God. Where?

MRS. STRAUS. On her rear end, I'm afraid. Made the most dreadful noises and then—

MURDOCH. Mrs. Straus! SHUT UP!

(A shocked silence. MRS. STRAUS turns to her husband.)

MRS. STRAUS. Isidor! Are you going to let him talk to me that way?

STRAUS. Yes.

(Upstage, THOMAS darts out silently from behind the bar, and races across twelve feet of carpet before sliding headfirst into a hidden corner behind the piano.)

MURDOCH. *(To MRS. STRAUS.)* Forgive me, Ma'am. *(Indicating the lifejacket.)* But if you know what's good for you, you'll put this on. *(To the others.)* And it wouldn't be entirely unwise if the rest of you did the same. *(ALICE reaches out for her brother.)*

ALICE. Charley?

CHARLEY. *(Rising.)* Officer, I think you'd better tell us what's happened to the ship.

MURDOCH. *I'll* tell you what's happened. There's a great big bloody—*(Flustered over the profanity.)* Uh—that is—

(ISMAY appears in the doorway.)

ISMAY. Murdoch! What are you doing in here?!

MURDOCH. I'm attempting to do my job, sir. That which His Majesty's Navy and the International Mercantile Marine employs me to—

ISMAY. Indeed? And I presume that includes your impeccable navigational skills?

MURDOCH. If I may say so, sir—

ISMAY. You may *not* say so, you incompetent halfwit.

ASTOR. Really, Bruce—if something's gone wrong, I do believe we're entitled to hear it. At least with enough notice to sell any stock we have in this damned line.

ISMAY. What makes you think anything's gone wrong?

ASTOR. Oh, I don't know. Just a hunch. Half the ship appears to be buried under a ton of ice, all the engines are off, and if I'm not mistaken, we're listing five degrees to port!

ISMAY. *Besides* that—

ASTOR. Now, see here, Ismay—

ISMAY. A slight scrape, that's all. Why, if it weren't for the photographers waiting in New York harbor, we shouldn't even have stopped to investigate.

MURDOCH. Sir—

ISMAY. (*Picking up the lifejacket.*) And I can assure you there'll be no need for these. God himself could not sink this ship.

STRAUS. Yes, well, have any of your people *checked* with God lately? He may have given you an old itinerary.

(*MURDOCH points toward the boat deck as ASTOR slips out the side door.*)

MURDOCH. He's right, Mr. Ismay. They've already uncovered the—

(*ISMAY grinds a heel into MURDOCH's foot and turns to CHARLEY.*)

ISMAY. You'll forgive the poor fellow, Mr. Cohan. He's clearly not cut out for this line of work.

MURDOCH. I'm a British seaman, sir.

ISMAY. "Were" a British seaman, Murdoch. I'll see to the change in tenses once we reach port.

MURDOCH. "If", sir.

ISMAY. Get out.

MRS. STRAUS. Just a moment.

(*She steps forward and puts a hand on MURDOCH's arm.*)

MRS. STRAUS. This charming young man was kind enough to offer his assistance when a dear, dear friend sustained an injury to her—to her—Well, at any rate, I'm afraid I was the one behaving frightfully. (*To Mr. STRAUS.*) Wasn't I?

STRAUS. Always.

(*MRS. STRAUS picks up the lifejacket and addresses MURDOCH.*)

MRS. STRAUS. It really looks like quite a clever device after all. What is it?

MURDOCH. A lifejacket, Ma'am.

MRS. STRAUS. How—how useful. Tell me, Mr. Murdoch. Do you suppose you could find one in a pale blue? With perhaps a thin silver trim?

MURDOCH. (*Quietly.*) Thank you, Mrs. Straus.

(*He heads for the upstage door.*)

ISMAY. Murdoch?

MURDOCH. Sir?

ISMAY. You're an imbecile.

MURDOCH. Of course, sir.

(*He leaves. At the same time, THOMAS peers out from behind the piano, sees that the others are turned toward MURDOCH by the down right door, and so quickly rises and makes his break through the upstage exit. Then he, too, is gone. After a moment, MRS. STRAUS gingerly picks up the lifejacket with distaste and drops it unceremoniously behind the bar, as her husband turns to ISMAY and indicates MURDOCH's exit.*)

STRAUS. Have a high turnover rate, do you?

ISMAY. Strangely, yes. I've often wondered why. Perhaps it's because their crania are smaller than ours. They don't have much of an attention span, you know.

STRAUS. Tell me—have you ever considered treating them fairly?

ISMAY. No. But I despise them equally. Propriety demands it.

STRAUS. I see. Sorry if I misjudged you.

ISMAY. Not at all. Good evening.

(He exits. There's a reflective silence.)

MRS. STRAUS. That man is a pain in the—

STRAUS. Ida, please.

MRS. STRAUS.—neck.

(She sits and begins helping her husband lay down a solitaire hand. CHARLEY rises hastily and fakes a yawn.)

CHARLEY. Gosh, it's late. I think I'll go back to my cabin and see about gettin' some—

(—except ALICE is blocking the upstage door.)

CHARLEY. *(Mumbling.)* Uh-oh.

ALICE. Charley?

CHARLEY. What?

(She begins backing him to the wall.)

ALICE. Come here.

CHARLEY. No.

ALICE. Charles—

CHARLEY. I don't wanna. Stay where you are.

ALICE. Why did he call you "Mr. Cohan"?

CHARLEY. Slip of the tongue?

ALICE. You'll have to do better than that.

CHARLEY. Uh—maybe he recognized a Broadway Kid when he saw one. *(Fast time step.)* You know—my famous walk, my fancy talk, my happy grin, my—ALICE, IF YOU SOCK ME IN FRONT OF OTHER PEOPLE, I SWEAR I'M GONNA—

ALICE. What did you tell him?

CHARLEY. Nothing! Honest! I didn't say a word! He heard it from Lady Duff Gordon.

ALICE. And where did *she* get it?

CHARLEY. From the Countess of Rothes. She heard it from Guggenheim who musta got it from Major Butt, who, let's see, I guess heard it from Captain Smith. OKAY?

ALICE. Why does Captain Smith think you're George M. Cohan?

CHARLEY. Him I told.

ALICE. And he believed you?

CHARLEY. He had to. I gave him passes to opening night. "Broadway Jones"? We go into rehearsal in September—

ALICE. That's disgraceful.

CHARLEY. Yeah, well, you haven't heard the half of it yet. I told him they were from you, too—

ALICE. From me?!?

CHARLEY. Well, not you exactly. From George's sister. Josie. *(Pause.)* My co-star? *(Pause.)* Whom I love? *(Pause.)* Dearly?

ALICE. Do you have any last requests?

CHARLEY. Yeah. Don't bust anything higher than the chin. My face is my future....

(They continue their argument in pantomime as the lights dim slightly on them. At the downstage table, STRAUS looks up from his solitaire game and indicates CHARLEY.)

STRAUS. And you complain about Alfred Hess. Your daughter could be married to *that*.

MRS. STRAUS. It's no worse than being married to Long John Silver. *(Kibitzing.)* Red eight under black nine.

STRAUS. Come now, Ida. You make him sound as though he wore a gold earring, went about visibly unshaven, and had rotting teeth.

(*A beat.*)

MRS. STRAUS. I never said he wore a gold earring.

STRAUS. He's a decent provider.

MRS. STRAUS. Granted.

STRAUS. He seems to love her a great deal.

MRS. STRAUS. I'm not denying that.

STRAUS. What, then?

MRS. STRAUS. Isidor, every young woman has the right to be treated, however briefly, as though she were a princess. (*Pause.*)

It's a practice that's been going on for years.

STRAUS. So I recall.

MRS. STRAUS. Of course, some are luckier than others. They never learn of the deception. (*Pause.*) Alfred Hess, on the other hand, behaves as if he married a—a—

STRAUS. Wife?

MRS. STRAUS. In so many words.

STRAUS. Perhaps that's what she wants.

MRS. STRAUS. Oh, she's much too young to know what she wants. Common sense is a late-blooming fruit—and regrettably, by the time it's ripe enough to pick, most people have already died. Take that poor child who married your Colonel Astor. For her sake, I do hope she's never kidnapped for ransom.

STRAUS. I beg your pardon?

MRS. STRAUS. Can you see what would happen if he were asked to provide a description? He'd have to refer the authorities to someone who actually *knew* her. (*Pause.*) I can't quite imagine them in nightclothes, can you? He probably makes her salute.

STRAUS. I don't see where Alfred Hess—

MRS. STRAUS. Alfred Hess took our child to France on something they called a honeymoon. And what does she still talk about to this day?

STRAUS. Paris.

MRS. STRAUS. Exactly. Nothing more.

STRAUS. Maybe she enjoyed herself. She certainly spent enough.

MRS. STRAUS. Rubbish. I've enjoyed myself as well. And I don't believe I've *ever* seen Paris.

STRAUS. Don't be a fool. I've taken you there at least six times.

MRS. STRAUS. Seven. And all I remember is that enchanting little cafe on the Rue Cambon—

STRAUS. Yes, well, that's quite enough.

MRS. STRAUS. I'm sure it isn't. Really, Mr. Straus. If you didn't understand the language, there was no shame in admitting it.

STRAUS. Madam, I speak French as well as any native!

MRS. STRAUS. Don't raise your voice, Isidor.

STRAUS. Then don't accuse me.

MRS. STRAUS. One would hardly call it an accusation.

STRAUS. I don't wish to discuss this.

MRS. STRAUS. Did you or did you not order veal?

STRAUS. That I did.

MRS. STRAUS. And did they or did they not bring us monkey?

STRAUS. The waiter was deaf.

MRS. STRAUS. He most certainly was not. He heard me scream.

STRAUS. And your sensibilities are that much more indigenous to the Continent than mine? I seem to recall the Louvre—

MRS. STRAUS. Robbery. Pure and simple. At best, I consider it highly questionable that the French require the use of that ridiculous-looking currency in the first place—much less to view damaged works of art.

STRAUS. That statue was not damaged.

MRS. STRAUS. How can you say that? Her arms had fallen off.

STRAUS. She wasn't *supposed* to have arms.

MRS. STRAUS. That was *their* story.

STRAUS. You're missing the point! (*A pause.*) I think in the future you might be a bit more solicitous of Alfred Hess. Don't you?

MRS. STRAUS. I'll consider it.

STRAUS. I'm quite serious, Ida.

MRS. STRAUS. So am I. And if it should make you happy, I'll send him a gift. A *small* one. Will that be sufficient?

STRAUS. That's extremely generous of you, my dear. What sort of gift did you have in mind?

MRS. STRAUS. Fifteen men on a dead man's chest. (*Pause.*) Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of—

STRAUS. You exasperate me.

MRS. STRAUS. I practice.

(*STRAUS puts down his cards and speaks carefully.*)

STRAUS. Ida—depending upon whether one subscribes to Mr. Ismay or Mrs. Brown, it is conceivable that we may not be returning to Paris again.

MRS. STRAUS. Yes. I know.

STRAUS. Then I feel it only fair to warn you. Whatever the verdict, I shall not tolerate any heroics.

MRS. STRAUS. And neither shall I. (*Looking down.*) Black two under red three.

STRAUS. Really, Madam. They call it “solitaire”.

MRS. STRAUS. They do? How foolish....

(*The lights come up full again on CHARLEY and ALICE.*)

CHARLEY. Okay—what was I supposed to tell them?

ALICE. The truth might have been a cleansing novelty.

CHARLEY. The truth about what? Pitching for the Winnipeg Bluejackets? Oh, boy, Alice. That would have gone over real big in the first-class dining saloon. They'd have had me finishing my creamed carrots in steerage.

ALICE. Don't be silly. Father would never let that happen.

CHARLEY. Father would have been holding the door open! Sis, are your ears broken? I *hate* it! I hate the uniforms and I hate the crowds and most of all I hate—

ALICE. Charley, we decided—

CHARLEY. No! No! *You* decided. I lost my right to free speech the day you gave it to Harriet Blatch.

ALICE. What has she got to do with it?

CHARLEY. Alice, you used to *want* to dance with me. I mean, wasn't that the whole idea? I didn't know it was exploitation—I thought it was a time step. (*Pause.*) You just—well, you—you picked her over your own brother, didn't you?

ALICE. Oh, Charley! Do you really believe that?

CHARLEY. Well, that's the way it looks. What the heck do you think I'm trying to get us to 42nd Street for? To keep Congress from giving you the vote? For Pete's sake, Alice—I don't care about equal rights. I don't even care about all that Yankee Doodle stuff. Much. (*Looking down.*) I—I just want my sister back.

(*There's a pause. ALICE puts a hand to his cheek.*)

ALICE. Charles, sometimes you can be such a—such a boy.

CHARLEY. I'm allowed.

ALICE. You don't have to pretend you're George M. Cohan or anybody else. Not for me. Not ever.

CHARLEY. Then would you—would you do the audition with me? Please? Even if it means breaking a couple dumb rules?

ALICE. What about the Bluejackets?

CHARLEY. Yeah. What about them?

ALICE. I thought it was a good idea, Charley. But if you dislike it that much, just say so.

CHARLEY. You mean it? You'll really listen?

ALICE. I didn't know it would make you this unhappy.

CHARLEY. And you won't get angry?

ALICE. I promise.

CHARLEY. Alice?

ALICE. What?

CHARLEY. I don't want you to pitch anymore.

ALICE. That's too bad.

CHARLEY. I thought you said you would listen!

ALICE. I *did* listen. Now you listen to me. What am I going to tell the Countess of Rhodes—

CHARLEY.—Roths—

ALICE.—when she asks me what “Broadway Jones” is about? That I’ve got amnesia?

CHARLEY. *I’ll* tell you what it’s about—

ALICE.—point that finger at me again and it comes off—

(Lights up full.)

CHARLEY. It’s about this brother and sister dance team from Manitoba—

MRS. STRAUS. *(To her husband.)* Not terribly original.

STRAUS. *(Indicating CHARLEY.)* Consider the source.

CHARLEY. He wants to be a hooper, except *she’s* gone and joined the American Political Woman’s Union—

STRAUS. In Canada?

CHARLEY. *(To STRAUS.)* That’s what *I* said. But don’t worry. There’s a happy ending after all. *(Glaring at ALICE.)* Because he saves her in the nick of time—just before they have her smoking cigars and shaving—

ALICE. When did you ever see me smoke a cigar?

CHARLEY. Well, you might as well! What’s next, Alice? Wrestling matches? Building railroads? Shootouts?

ALICE. If you think I’d audition *anywhere* with a pig-headed, Nineteenth-Century clod like you—

CHARLEY. Then don’t!

(ALICE stops dead.)#

What?

CHARLEY. I’ve already made emergency plans. *(Pause.)* It’s okay, Alice. If you don’t want to do it, I understand.

ALICE. Charley, you’ve never sung without me before! You couldn’t carry a melody line by yourself if you got three laborers to lift it for you first.

CHARLEY. Oh, no? We’ll just see about that.

(He sits at the piano and plays an opening riff.)

CHARLEY. *(Singing.)* “Out west I have found,
That’s where hayseeds abound, And Missouri’s the state that
designed ‘em. And though this may be you can take it from me,
You don’t have to go out west to find ‘em. If you want to find the
real hick delegation, The place where the real reubens dwell, Just
hop on a train at the Grand Central Station, Get off when they
shout ‘New Rochelle!’—”

(He plays a long lead-in. ALICE crosses her arms.)

ALICE. I’m waiting.

(Downstage, MRS. STRAUS looks up from her cards.)

MRS. STRAUS. *(Singing.)* “Only forty-five minutes from
Broadway, Think of the changes it brings—”

STRAUS. Ida! Wait! Come back!

(She rises and crosses up to CHARLEY.)

MRS. STRAUS. “For the short time it takes, What a difference it
makes, In the way of the people and things.”

CHARLEY. “Oh, what a swell bunch of reubens—”

MRS. STRAUS. “Oh, what a jay atmosphere—”

CHARLEY. “They have whiskers like hay—”

MRS. STRAUS. “And imagine Broadway—”

CHARLEY AND MRS. STRAUS. “Only forty-five minutes from
here.”

(MRS. STRAUS turns to ALICE.)

MRS. STRAUS. Don’t press your luck, dear.

ALICE. Charley, if this is your idea of a gag—

CHARLEY. Gee, that was jake, Mrs. S. You wanna try the soft shoe?

STRAUS. (*Rising.*) She most certainly does not!

MRS. STRAUS. Isidor, sit! (*To CHARLEY.*) Charley, dear, I've been thinking, and though I appreciate the offer, I believe the dance would work far better as a solo.

CHARLEY. Aw, come on, Mrs. S. You can't drop out now.

(*A pause.*)

MRS. STRAUS. That's not what I had in mind.

STRAUS. Oh, my God.

CHARLEY. (*To MRS. STRAUS.*) Well, if you think you can handle it—

ALICE. Charley, she's an old woman!

MRS. STRAUS. Choose those next words carefully, dear.

STRAUS. Ida, do be reasonable. Suppose someone should come in? Can you imagine what they'd say?

(*Suddenly the downstage door is flung open, and ASTOR re-enters hurriedly, holding onto a slip of paper.*)

ASTOR. Fortune, let me see that Marconigram from Cohan.

CHARLEY. Well, okay, but—I think they're casting younger. No offense.

ASTOR. (*To CHARLEY.*) Oh, don't be an idiot.

STRAUS. Has the whole *world* gone mad?

(*He grabs the telegram from CHARLEY and crosses to the down center table, comparing the two slips of paper and deciphering as he does.*)

ASTOR. Yes, it's as I thought. They're using those damned new international signals. How anyone is expected to eavesdrop successfully is quite beyond me.

MRS. STRAUS. How decidedly lower class. (*Eager.*) Eavesdrop on whom?

ASTOR. Young Phillips. Wireless operator. They're burning the air between here and Cape Race. Quite confidential, it seems.

ALICE. Then why did he let you in the cabin?

ASTOR. He's evidently been laboring under the delusion that I'm a personage of some rank with the steamship line. (*Frowning.*) Perhaps it's the way I dress.

STRAUS. Impressive, isn't it? The chain of command aboard this boat? The way one hand doesn't know who the other is, much less what he's doing, I'm surprised we haven't docked in Geneva.

CHARLEY. Switzerland is landlocked.

STRAUS. I'm aware of that.

(*ASTOR looks up from his decoding.*)

ASTOR. Well, here it is. As near as I can make out, we're taking in water at the bow.

CHARLEY. Are we *supposed* to be doin' that?

STRAUS. (*Mimicking.*) "No, we're not supposed to be doing that."

ALICE. He was only asking a question, Mr. Straus. (*To ASTOR.*) Captain Astor—

ASTOR. "Colonel."

ALICE. Is it serious?

ASTOR. Serious enough to be wiring other vessels, I'm afraid. Oh, don't be alarmed—we're in no danger. This is the Titanic, for God's sake.

STRAUS. Of course you would know. You were doubtless given three just like her for your eleventh birthday.

ALICE. What about the lifeboats?

CHARLEY. *What* lifeboats?

ALICE. Those white things hanging from the davits out there.

CHARLEY. Those are *lifeboats*?

ALICE. Of course they're lifeboats. What did you *think* they were?

CHARLEY. I thought they were planters.

MRS. STRAUS. Pardon me, but what does one *wear* in a lifeboat?

ASTOR. Please! All of you! Now, there doesn't appear to be any genuine distress. I'm convinced of it. After all, I didn't hear him sending out a "C.Q.D."

ALICE. I thought they stopped using that.

ASTOR. Even so. In the event of a real emergency, I'm sure they'd revert to the more familiar signals.

(MRS. STRAUS peers over his shoulder and points to the paper.)#

What does "S.O.S." mean?

ASTOR. Frankly, I haven't a clue.

STRAUS. Preposterous, Astor! If we're in no distress, why the devil are they sending for help?

ASTOR. Don't be primitive, Straus. To tow the ship to Halifax, obviously. It's the nearest port.

STRAUS. With a rip in her side?

ASTOR. What of it? The Titanic cannot go under!

STRAUS. I wish you'd all stop saying that! Don't you people read? The Titans—a mythical race of giants who ruled the earth for centuries. They didn't believe that anything could pierce them, either. Unfortunately, someone forgot to mention as much to Zeus.

CHARLEY. What happened?

STRAUS. You don't want to know. But I'd be most happy to tell you when—and if—we are ever privileged enough to behold the Brooklyn Bridge again.

MRS. STRAUS. Isidor—

STRAUS. Forgive me. I just wish I knew what nincompoop *named* this boat.

(The downstage door opens, and Bruce ISMAY enters hesitantly. He stops short when he sees the group staring at him expectantly, then closes the door gently behind him, leans against it, and attempts to appear affable and unconcerned. There is a moment of silence; then, realizing that he's obviously going to have to say something, he speaks.)

ISMAY. Uh—guess what?

ASTOR. Bruce, for God's sake—

ISMAY. Now, it isn't as bad as it looks! A little hole, that's all! Why, it's barely three hundred feet long! And any feeble-minded fool knows the Titanic can float with every one of her first four compartments completely flooded. All right?

ASTOR. Just as a point of idle curiosity, Bruce—exactly how many of them *are* completely flooded?

ISMAY. No more than five! I swear it on my life!

STRAUS. Mr. Ismay, at present, that's not a very bankable guarantee.

ISMAY. It's quite the best I can do on short notice. Now, listen to me—

STRAUS. *(To MRS. STRAUS.)* Here comes the advertisement.

ISMAY. She's entirely able to remain above water indefinitely. Days, perhaps.

ASTOR. Really, Bruce. Wasn't she supposed to be indestructible?

ISMAY. *(Hesitating.)* More or less. So go to bed. Every one of you. As long as her bulkheads hold, there's no cause for alarm. Besides, the Carpathia is only 58 miles away, and—

ALICE. The Carpathia? If there's no cause for alarm, why did you call *them*?

ISMAY. I didn't! She just happens to be steaming in this direction.

ASTOR. "Happens to be"? In the middle of the night with no moon through an ice field? What's her destination, Bruce—Hell?

ALICE. Just a minute. *(Crossing to ISMAY.)* You don't mean to imply that we're *sinking*, do you?

ASTOR. Inconceivable.

ISMAY. Even if that were true, Miss, which I assure you it is not, a forty-six thousand ton steamship that cost ten million dollars and took three years to build does not sink. It founders.

MRS. STRAUS. Not with me on it, it doesn't.

STRAUS. Why? Who do *you* know?

(MRS. STRAUS takes ISMAY's arm and pulls him aside, as ASTOR crosses to the portholes and begins peering outside anxiously.)

MRS. STRAUS. Mr. Ismay. Dear. I have this nasty little niece who plays the flute quite badly, and she's giving a recital next Friday evening at 8:00 sharp. It's the only way she can get anyone to listen to her. Generally, we manage to be ill, but if we miss it again this year and she finds out it's because our ship has sunk, she's liable to think we did it on purpose. Now, I'm sure you could find some way of fixing that leak, couldn't you? Perhaps if you were to stuff it with torn bedding or unwashed table linens or third-class baggage? We'll pay for any incidental expenses, of course.

ISMAY. That won't be necessary. Thomas Andrews is on board. Of Harland and Wolff? And I feel quite confident that he's doing whatever can be done.

ASTOR. Who the devil is Thomas Andrews?

ISMAY. The man who built this ship.

CHARLEY. Oh, swell.

STRAUS. Listen to the young man, Ismay. Swell, indeed.

ISMAY. Mr. Straus, the day I am wretched enough to solicit advice from an actor, you shall find me instead retiring to Wales with a pint of brandy and a sheepdog!

ASTOR. Good God! Kitty! She must be beside herself!

MRS. STRAUS. How fortunate that she has that option. And your wife. Whom is *she* beside?

ASTOR. I beg your pardon?

MRS. STRAUS. Madeleine. (Pause.) You know—that striking brunette with the opal earrings and the barest trace of a smile. Surely, you've seen her aboard. If not, I shall point her out to you—

ALICE. (To ISMAY.) Don't ever talk to my brother that way again—

ISMAY. Really, Miss Cohan—

(ASTOR turns to STRAUS, puzzled.)

ASTOR. (Indicating ALICE.) Miss who?

STRAUS. It's not worth the explanation.

ISMAY. (To ALICE.) I see no need for hostility—

ALICE. Forgive me. I've been inclined toward bad manners ever since I discovered “drowning” on today's schedule of activities.

ISMAY. Please, Miss. Now that the Carpathia is on her way, there's a very simple solution to all of this—

CHARLEY. Yeah. “Sail Cunard.”

ISMAY. (To CHARLEY.) Mr. Cohan, were I you, I'd hardly feel entitled to throw stones at the mistakes of others. (Pause.) I saw “Popularity”—and my only criticism was that you chose to call it a play. “Bilge” would not have been an inappropriate term.

(CHARLEY's mouth drops open.)

CHARLEY. I- I- I- I—

(He turns to ALICE, frantically telegraphing for help. There's a pause.)#

Go on. Let's see you get out of *this* one.

(CHARLEY turns back to ISMAY.)

CHARLEY. H-H-H-How—how can you say that?!

ISMAY. Having been forced to sit through it, I've purchased the right to say whatever I damned well please—

CHARLEY. I- I- I- I—

(ALICE pushes him aside.)

ALICE. That's enough, George. (To ISMAY.) Mr. Ismay, perhaps it's true that “Popularity” was not up to my brother's usually impeccable standards. He has, after all, had two theatres, four boulevards and a trolley depot named after him—

CHARLEY. (Under his breath.) I have?

(She kicks him.)

ALICE. So I need not tire you with his credentials. But in his defense, I should point out that when my brother strikes an iceberg, at least he's back in six months with a new show. "Broadway Jones"? You may have heard of it. We go into rehearsal in September. Why, just ask the Colossus of Rothes—

CHARLEY. *(Hissing.)* "Countess." OW!

ALICE. Tell me, Mr. Ismay. What does White Star have planned for the fall? A chance encounter with a glacier?

ISMAY. Miss Cohan—

ALICE. If not, I'm sure you can find a convenient barrier reef somewhere between Southampton and—

ISMAY. Really, I don't think you're being altogether fair—

ALICE. Fair?! Oh, heavens, is *that* the object of this voyage? Then surely you won't mind a simple question. WHAT IF THE CARPATHIA DOESN'T GET HERE IN TIME?!?

(ASTOR turns around suddenly.)

ASTOR. She already has.

(The others look up.)

STRAUS. What?

(ASTOR points out of the porthole.)

ASTOR. Look for yourself.

ISMAY. Wait—

(With the exception of ISMAY, they all rush to the windows.)

STRAUS. I don't see anything.

ISMAY. That's because—

ASTOR. Right over there. About five miles off the stern. If that isn't a Royal Mail Steamer, then I'm a Vanderbilt.

ISMAY. I wouldn't—

ALICE. Thank God!

MRS. STRAUS. Oh, Isidor—

CHARLEY. *(To ALICE.)* A trolley depot?!?

ALICE. Don't be a snob.

STRAUS. Astor, are you sure that's the Carpathia?

ISMAY. No—

ASTOR. For God's sake, Straus, what do you *think* it is—a sea urchin with a starboard lamp? Of course it's the Carpathia. Who else could it be?

ISMAY. Uh—we think she's a freighter.

ASTOR. Really, Bruce. What difference does pedigree make at a time like this? She's *here*, isn't she?

ISMAY. In a sense—

(ALICE turns to CHARLEY.)

ALICE. I'm sorry if I called you a Nineteenth-Century clod.

CHARLEY. Sorry enough to do the song with me?

ALICE. No.

CHARLEY. *(Calling out.)* Mrs. S!

ALICE. All right, you little twit!

CHARLEY. Hot dog!

(He grabs her arm and begins pulling her toward the piano, as MRS. STRAUS turns to her husband and indicates the distant ship.)

MRS. STRAUS. And you were alarmed.

STRAUS. I wouldn't take me to court yet. Like a cabbage soup, it still smells.

(CHARLEY plops ALICE down on the piano bench and plays a lead-in.)

ALICE. Oh, Charley—*now?*

CHARLEY. Come on. We've only got a week to get great.

ISMAY. Please! All of you—

CHARLEY. (*Singing.*) "No time to pitch woo now, The century's new now, I'm singin' my love songs in that new ragtime—"

ALICE. (*Singing.*) "The minute I meet'cha, I send for the preacher, And order those wedding bells to chime—"

CHARLEY. "I'm a Yankee with know-how, Don't want to go slow now—"

ALICE. "Can't wait for that moon above—"

CHARLEY AND ALICE. "Or even a dove—"

(*ASTOR turns around suddenly, in time to catch ISMAY sneaking out the door.*)

ASTOR. Just a moment!

(*They all freeze. ISMAY straightens up.*)

ASTOR. Bruce, much as I dislike casting doubt upon an obvious gift from the Almighty, that ship doesn't seem to be drawing any closer.

STRAUS. (*To his wife.*) You see?

ISMAY. Yes, well, there's a reason for that.

ALICE. Then perhaps we'd better hear it.

(*CHARLEY turns to her.*)

CHARLEY. Says who?

ISMAY. You understand of course that this is not yet official—

ASTOR. It never is.

ISMAY.—but it appears as if they've all gone to sleep.

CHARLEY. THEY'VE WHAT?!

ISMAY. Don't worry—we're attempting to rouse them now. If our signals don't work, we'll try rockets. They've *got* to wake up sooner or later.

STRAUS. Have you contemplated torpedoes?

ISMAY. If you don't mind, Straus—

ASTOR. Of course he minds, Ismay! Wouldn't you? I should think that the imbecilic flair with which this boat seems to attract catastrophe is grounds enough for—

ISMAY. DAMMIT! DO YOU SUPPOSE I PLANNED IT THIS WAY? FIRST I FIND A FRAYED DRAPE IN THE DINING SALOON AND NOW THIS! I DETEST SUNDAYS!

ASTOR. Now, see here, Bruce—

ISMAY. Oh, don't condescend to me, you obsequious ass. I'd prefer a hundred obdurate stonemasons to one ingrate such as yourself!

ASTOR. *Ingrate?!*

ISMAY. Ingrate indeed! (*Indicating the ship.*) Whom exactly do you think all of this was for? Me? Precisely whose excesses do you presume the Titanic was commissioned to indulge? Mine? Do you seriously believe that I conceived the epigenesis of the largest moving object in the world solely because it made me feel important?

ALL OF THEM. Yes.

ISMAY. What of it! It's about time *somebody* put an end to this ridiculous practice of colloquy between the classes. I find it demeaning enough that we must share the hearth with them in the first place—I see no need for practicing tolerance on the high seas as well.

STRAUS. Rubbish. You carry steerage on board the same as everyone else.

ISMAY. Yes—but barricaded below and used primarily for weight distribution. And in the event of a punctured hull, we needn't worry about a costly alarm system, for when enough of them have drowned, we know it's time to wire for help.

(*The door opens. MURDOCH enters.*)

MURDOCH. Mr. Ismay, they're preparing to send off—

ISMAY. (*Indicating MURDOCH.*) Case in point. Murdoch.

MURDOCH. Sir.

ISMAY. What is the correct room temperature of an 1888 Chateau Larose served with filet de boeuf?

MURDOCH. Fifty-eight degrees, sir. Provided it's been allowed to breathe for—

ISMAY. Murdoch!

MURDOCH. *(By rote.)* I don't know, sir.

ISMAY. And how does one properly address a belted earl?

MURDOCH. I'm sure I don't know, sir.

ISMAY. Excellent. Tell me—who wrote “La Gioconda”?

MURDOCH. Gilbert and Sullivan, sir. Will that be all?

ISMAY. Murdoch?

MURDOCH. Sir?

ISMAY. Get out.

MURDOCH. Indeed, sir.

(He exits. ISMAY turns to the others.)

ISMAY. Three ships, Colonel Astor. The Olympic, the Gigantic, and the Titanic. *(Indicating MURDOCH's exit.)* Each designed as a sanctuary from *that*, and one of them—one in particular—calculated to make God blush for not having thought of her first.

MRS. STRAUS. Come now, Mr. Ismay. Don't be modest.

ISMAY. Madam, I can assure you that modesty is the only requisite this vessel does not own. I doubt that the Garden of Eden contained a jeweled copy of Khayyam's “Rubaiyat”, don't you? I find it just as unlikely that the walls of Jericho were forged with double-plated steel. And to my knowledge, the Bible doesn't once mention hand-cut crystal or stained glass when speaking of the Promised Land. The Philistines never could have paid the price.

STRAUS. I don't believe—

ISMAY. Then you're a fool! The Titanic has been inscribed with every successive conquest of man's intellect, and dammit, I should know! I saw to it myself!

(From outside, we hear a muffled explosion.)

ISMAY. Good God!

(He races out the door; CHARLEY turns to ALICE.)

CHARLEY. How can they do this to us? We have an audition!

ALICE. *(Mimicking ISMAY's accent.)* “Oh, don't be alarmed. Thomas Andrews is on board. He's the man who *built* this ship.”

STRAUS. Thomas Andrews, indeed. Leave it to Ismay to pour oil on the flame.

MRS. STRAUS. What on earth am I going to tell my niece? She's chosen “Claire de Lune”. In E-flat. No doubt the others will be playing in B.

(CHARLEY turns to ALICE.)

CHARLEY. Sis, I'm gonna wake up Father. Mother and the girls ought to be ready in case—

ALICE. In case what? Charley, this isn't a dime novel hidden in the corncrib. I'm sure it's just—

(CHARLEY yanks open the downstage right door. From outside, we hear the rumble of several hundred passengers surging onto the boat deck. CHARLEY points.)

CHARLEY. What, Alice? A convention? Come on. I'm not gonna lose you, too.

(He grabs her arm and drags her out the door. Moments later, we hear MURDOCH's voice—)

MURDOCH *(O.S.)*. Stand back! All of you! First class only! *(—and a gunshot. In seconds, CHARLEY and ALICE are back inside, slamming the door shut behind them and looking at one another, white-faced.)*

CHARLEY. All right. We'll wait 'til the Carpathia gets here, and then—

ALICE. Charley, we won't have to. I mean, any minute now they'll turn on the engines, and—

(From off to the side, ASTOR turns around suddenly.)

ASTOR. How does it go, exactly?

STRAUS. How does what go?

ASTOR. *(Reciting.)* “For I dipped into the future, Far as human eye could see, Saw the Vision of the world, And all the wonders that would be. Saw the heavens fill with commerce, Argosies of magic sails, Pilots of the purple twilight, Dropping down with costly bales.”

STRAUS. Intriguing you should choose Tennyson at a time like this. I'd have quoted Poe.

ASTOR. I can't quite remember the way it ends.

STRAUS. You can indeed. Perhaps it's simply that you'd rather not.

(Suddenly, they all reach out for support as the chandelier begins to sway. ASTOR, paling, regains his balance and stares front.)

ASTOR. “Not in vain the distance beacons, Forward, forward, let us range. Let the people spin forever, Down the ringing grooves of change.”

(Instinctively, all but ASTOR stare down toward the ocean through the smoking room floor, then look back up at one another slowly.)

ACT ONE CURTAIN