

DANIEL PELICAN

by Chris Van Strander

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CHARACTERS

DANIEL PELICAN, a radio engineer and weekend yachtsman.

MOLLY PELICAN, his wife.

VOICES

a CROONER

a CBS RADIO ANNOUNCER

WILLIAM DEARBIDGE, an editor at the *Boston Globe*.

a CASTINE RADIO OPERATOR

a RADIO BRAZIL OPERATOR

SETTING

June 1927-June 1928.

A house in Maine, and a boat on the open ocean.

(DANIEL PELICAN's house in Maine, June 1927. As the audience files in, nothing has been prepared for their arrival—no chairs, no ushers, no organization whatsoever. The ticket-taker guides them absently towards the bar. Once there, they're greeted by MOLLY PELICAN, a stalwart young Irishwoman, trying her best to play hostess while stalling for her conspicuously absent husband.)

MOLLY

Welcome. Good evening. We have a bar, please have a drink. Feel free to make yourselves at home. I must apologize for the master of the house. He's disappeared as usual.

Let's have some music. What shall it be? Tango? Foxtrot?

(MOLLY disappears into a back corner of the boat for a moment. Big Band music suddenly begins to murmur through the house, and she returns. After a few minutes of this, a grand entrance is made by DANIEL PELICAN, hand-shaking and beaming, decked out in smoking jacket and pomaded hair. In spite of the confusion he attempts to create a party atmosphere. MOLLY plays hostess next to him, when he isn't sending her off to perform some task or other. The couple mills about, PELICAN in all his personal glory, mingling, getting behind the bar to mix drinks, spiriting people off to drink free martinis, enthroning himself on a bar stool, basically holding court. He's obviously been drinking too much—perhaps it's the only way he can go on with the evening ahead.)

PELICAN

Evening, folks! Bar's fully stocked; please drink. Daniel Pelican—of the Blue Hill Bay Pelicans...? Good to meet you, looking lovely tonight. My wife Molly.

MOLLY

A pleasure to make your acquaintance.

Daniel. Do you mind telling me where you've been?

PELICAN

Tinkering!

(PELICAN turns back to his guests; MOLLY continues preparing, obviously perturbed. PELICAN tries to ignore it, tries to make light of it.)

PELICAN

(to guests) This is your lot with a land-loving bride. Joshua Slocum's wife, his second wife, that is, was this way too. I could wish Molly had a bit less Hettie Slocum in her but then she wouldn't be... Molly Pelican.

Come now, Molly, don't turn sourpuss before your time. You'll get wrinkles all over your face. Think of it this way: juggling my fashionable tardiness can only help you become a more supreme hostess. The party is perfect—be no grander were I three hours early.

MOLLY

Just... keep your head for the remainder, grant me that?

(PELICAN leads his guests to the bar and begins getting smashed.)

MOLLY

So where are you from? Danny and I live in Maine. Danny was born there.

PELICAN

Blue Hill Bay! Lighthouses and the death of the spirit!

MOLLY

Danny.

He gets this way when he's been...

(*sotto voce*) Perhaps we've started a little early tonight?

PELICAN

My father drank like the fishes! Mother'd have to ferry me all the way off the rock! *All* the Pelican men drink! We *have* to! It's the only way to deal with our Irish wives!

(MOLLY comes over to the bar and takes the drink from PELICAN's hand.)

MOLLY

That's enough, Danny. I'm cutting you off.

PELICAN

Don't you swipe a drink from a Pelican! That's the first commandment!

MOLLY

No, that's the second commandment. The first is, I need you to keep a clear head.

(MOLLY walks away with the drink and attempts to act as if nothing embarrassing has happened. PELICAN pouts like a child, then:)

PELICAN

MOLLY!

MOLLY

Yes?

PELICAN

May I have my drink? Please?

MOLLY

You've got too much hooch in you already. You're over your limit. I don't need you losing your mind tonight.

PELICAN
Molly-coddle.

(PELICAN pulls a mouth harp from his pocket, gets on his knees, and comes over to MOLLY, playing a wedding march. It's cheap, but she smiles and hands his drink back. PELICAN holds it up and whispers to someone nearby:)

PELICAN
I don't require it, but this has greased the gears for more than one grand idea, I'll tell you that. And what she don't uncover, she smother! The lot of the Pelican name.

MOLLY
What did you say?

PELICAN
The lot of the Pelican name!

MOLLY
You're going to get on your soapbox about the Pelican name again? I'll just take these good people down to the parlor to listen to the wireless 'til you've run your course.

(PELICAN throws himself into a chair to sulk.)

MOLLY
You have a bird for a last name! I think it's poetic! There's nothing more to it!

PELICAN
Nothing more to it, eh? Molly, when did your family arrive in this country?

MOLLY
We came over when I was three. You know that.

PELICAN
The *Pelicans* were a *Mayflower family*—now, I don't expect you to understand that, but the natural-born Americans here can tell you that's some pedigree! Most people would be terrified to live up to it! But what a challenge! "BLAM! *There's* your name, Pelicans, do it proud!" Ha! But did they?

MOLLY
Your family did a great service.
Danny's family has been in charge of keeping the Bass Harbor Lighthouse out on Blue Hill Bay since the day it was built in 1858.

PELICAN

So *that's* my role in the grand scheme? To be a fourth-generation *lighthouse keeper*? Just like Father, and Grandfather before him? Some epitaph! "Here lies Daniel Pelican—no boats foundered on his watch"! Father knew what kind of sentence it was to be a Pelican man. "No Pelican's *ever* flown off this goddamn Light. I prayed you would be a *daughter* instead. You remember I even made you grow your hair long, and kept you in skirts 'til you were ten. Did I ever tell you I wanted to be an Arctic explorer? *Do something!*" I'd sit atop that Light with him and all he'd do was play his mouth harp.

(PELICAN pulls out the mouth harp and plays it.)

PELICAN

Father would test me. One time, I was about ten or so, I led my gang to the top of our light—they bet me I couldn't shoot fifty seagulls in a row. Need I say who won? Blam. Blam. But Father came up, shouted me down right in front of them. So I just train on him with my gun. He smiles, puts his arm 'round me, "That's the way, son. You keep shooting."

How could this, the best of all worlds, allow Father to so go to ruin?

The query tormented me—'til I realized: *his* failure was exhibited for *my* benefit! That is to say, without failure there can be no success. *That* Pelican came to nothing. Not *this* Pelican! The world ruined *him* that *I* might live as his *reciprocal!*

MOLLY

You chalk seventy years of your father's life up to *that*?

PELICAN

Do I laugh at the bleeding Jesus you hung on our wall?

MOLLY

Not that I've heard.

PELICAN

Then don't attack *my* religion.

(Pause. PELICAN plays the mouth harp again, has a sudden notion.)

PELICAN

Molly sings, don't you, Molly?

MOLLY

No.

PELICAN

She sings. Lovely voice. Sing for them, won't you, darling?

MOLLY

Danny.

PELICAN

Here, I'll sing with you. Where's my mouth harp?

MOLLY

In your hand.

MOLLY & PELICAN

(singing)

A is the anchor that holds a bold ship,

B is the bowsprit that often does dip,

C is the capstan on which we do wind, and

D is the davits on which the jolly boat hangs.

Oh, hi derry, hey derry, ho derry down,

Give sailors their grog and there's nothing goes wrong,

So merry, so merry, so merry are we,

No matter who's laughing at sailors at sea.

PELICAN

Follow me. Molly, you'll show the rest of them.

(PELICAN leads the audience to another part of his house. Nothing has been set up for their arrival. A few scattered party trimmings—crepe decorations, Chinese lanterns—is all. PELICAN immediately flicks on his radio; jazz dance tunes play. Awkward pause.)

PELICAN

(pause; bellowing) MOLLY!

(MOLLY comes and stands in befuddlement.)

PELICAN

We need chairs.

MOLLY

You had time to tinker but you didn't have time to prepare seats?

(MOLLY quickly improvises some seating while PELICAN continues his reverie.)

PELICAN

Wonderful! More time to mingle.

You know your way around ships? I myself have been sailing *forever*. I've got 25,000 blue water miles under *my* belt. Father encouraged it—he obviously wanted to sow larger seeds early. Even my first book—what was it, Molly?

MOLLY

Alone Around the World by Joshua Slocum.

PELICAN

Exactly. You know about Josh Slocum? Now *that* was a hero! First man to sail alone around the world—1898! And what did he go around in?

MOLLY

In an oyster boat.

PELICAN

In an *oyster boat*, no less! Charles Lindbergh has *nothing* on Slocum! Sit where you please, there's places over there. For instance one epic voyage. He got shipwrecked in Brazil! Did he cry "The universe is telling me to stop"? No! He lashed together timbers from the wrack and sailed 5500 miles north to Washington!

"To risk it and fail is far grander
Than a slothful and useless meander!"

MOLLY

Who said that?

PELICAN

Pelican!

MOLLY

Anybody want to guess Danny's Army nickname?

PELICAN

She thinks she's embarrassing me...

MOLLY

"Pelican the Loon." "Pelican the Loon!"

PELICAN

I had *El Diabolo* in me! I'd pull all sorts of stunts. "Bootleggers are running a shipment of whiskey across the border tonight—let's get drunk and hijack it!"

MOLLY

You drove your mother into such fits.

PELICAN

She was a *Methodist!* My religion? Logic.

MOLLY

You drive us *all* into fits. I suspect it's your purpose on Earth.

PELICAN

What kind of fits? Fretful fits? Fantastic fits?

MOLLY

Fistfuls.

PELICAN

Who built you your radio for three dollars?

MOLLY

You did.

PELICAN

Who didn't believe I could do it? And who told you he would? And who did?

MOLLY

(aside; making sure he doesn't hear) He *did*. It works beautifully. He's a wonder in his radio shop.

(MOLLY picks up some books PELICAN has scattered around.)

MOLLY

Daniel! Why can't you put your books back on the shelf?

PELICAN

Which are those?

MOLLY

The Ethics, Spinoza.

The Monadology, Leibniz.

PELICAN

Leibniz.

MOLLY

And Meditations on First Philosophy, Descartes.

PELICAN

Why don't you tell them why those books are out in the first place?

MOLLY

Every night Danny's teaching me about the Rationalists.

PELICAN

Rationalists.

MOLLY
Rationalists. It's quite fascinating.

PELICAN
Anybody here familiar? Better yet, do we have any *Christian Fundamentalists* in our midst?

MOLLY
Danny, please. He likes to debate.

PELICAN
You care to go a couple of rounds with me, old gal?

MOLLY
What, and go up against God himself?

PELICAN
That's right!

MOLLY
Danny's just been teaching me about Leibniz's theories of Monadology. "This is the best of all possible worlds."

PELICAN
Who could argue otherwise?

MOLLY
I think that's beautiful.

PELICAN
I have also been reading lately in the field of body-soul duality... Indian mysticism, that sort of thing.

MOLLY
Danny, please.
I don't like it when he talks about the Indian mysticism.

PELICAN
Who are you, friend? "I'm Daniel Pelican. I'm from Maine. I'm a businessman." You've got that name, you've got that *body*, but who are *you*?

MOLLY
Danny. You *are* from Maine. You *are* a businessman.

PELICAN

I believe our souls transmigrate *independent* of our bodies. In a few centuries, I believe, we will all become truly enlightened, and exist without bodies at all!

MOLLY
Bunk.

PELICAN
Just supernatural nonsense, eh, old gal? Why don't you tell them the story of our first date?

MOLLY
Danny...

PELICAN
Back when I was courting Molly here, I took her up to the cliffs above Thunder Hole, told her we must become psychic brother and sister. We knelt facing each other—here, let's show them—touching foreheads and noses...

MOLLY
And mingled our chakras.

PELICAN
"Tonight," I said, "you'll find a special mark on your body that proves our bond. If you do, you have to marry me." And what did you find, Molly?

MOLLY
A ring raised up around my neck.

PELICAN
I will admit I have attended seances! Was anybody here that time we did the ouija board on Charles Lindbergh? Remember, Molly?

MOLLY
I certainly do. Shaman Pelican presided, and each answer came up fortelling death and disaster.

PELICAN
At which Mrs. Pelican here made us put the board away and play *penachle!*

(By now the audience have all arrived and settled in. The Pelicans turn off the radio and take center stage in their parlor. PELICAN gives his wife a glass.)

PELICAN
A toast!

MOLLY

A toast!

(PELICAN and MOLLY raise their glasses.)

PELICAN

To all our guests.

MOLLY

Thank you for coming.

(The Pelicans clink glasses and drink.)

PELICAN

I was the first Pelican since 1858 *not* to tend the Blue Hill Bay Light! I enlisted in the Army!

MOLLY

And then he stole a motorbike on a dare.

PELICAN

So I enlist in the Navy!

MOLLY

And snuck out to a lingerie review.

PELICAN

So I apply to Yale!

MOLLY

You just needed to pass your Greek exams.

PELICAN

So I work for Westinghouse Radio!

MOLLY

After which he proceeds to crash the company Chrysler.

PELICAN

So I start my OWN firm, Pelican Radio Unlimited, to market my OWN invention—the Molly Radio Tube!

MOLLY

Aww.

PELICAN

Five workers—our factory.

(pause)

"Patent infringement," they called it. Reduce workforce to one.

MOLLY

Part-time.

(Pause.)

PELICAN

So I persuade Mr. Mario Albertini—businessman from Bangor—to back us! It's all part of a beautiful scheme! The Pelican will not be licked!

(Sweeter, happier times—June, 1927. PELICAN turns dance music on the radio once again, invites MOLLY into some slow dancing. The music segues into a Charlestonsque CROONER's song and the Pelicans cut a fun rug:)

CROONER V/O

(singing) From coast to coast we all can boast and sing a toast

To one who's made a name for being game

Lucky Lindy, up in the sky

Fair or windy, he's flying high

Lucky Lindy, show them the way

Yes, he's the hero of the day!

(At the first mention of Lindbergh, PELICAN has lost interest in the dancing. A report breaks in—PELICAN stops dancing, MOLLY's interest becomes quite piqued.)

CBS V/O

The Columbia Broadcasting System suspends programming to bring you live coverage of the triumphant return of Captain Charles Lindbergh! Ticker tape is showering around me as four million New Yorkers have turned out to glimpse Lucky Lindy being driven home up Broadway... A fitting welcome for America's hero who, in his trusty little monoplane, made the first ever solo flight across the vast Atlantic. We're told the Lone Eagle has just been offered 2.5 million dollars to make a *round-the-world* flight his next endeavor. But nothing could be worth more than the Lindy Fever sweeping the nation!

(PELICAN turns the radio off, eyes MOLLY.)

PELICAN

What's the fuss? Charles Lindbergh's the first person to go across the Atlantic Ocean? I'd like to see Charlie Lindbergh go across the Atlantic *in a boat!* Better yet—I'd like to see Charlie Lindbergh go *around the world* in a boat!

MOLLY

He's a pilot.

PELICAN

He's a farm boy. *1898! Joshua Slocum!* Ever heard of him?!

MOLLY

Once or twice.

PELICAN

And what did he go 'round in?

MOLLY

In an oyster boat.

PELICAN

In an *oyster boat*, no less! Now *that* was a hero! (to radio) 1925—Harry Pidgeon! Ever heard of him? (to MOLLY) Conor O'Brien! Ever heard of him?

MOLLY

Yes.

(Pause.)

PELICAN

*Lucky Lindy, up in the sky
Fair or windy, he's flying high
Lucky Lindy, show them the way
Yes, he's the hero of the day!*

Hero of the day?! Right man at the right time, that's all this bugger is. Christ on a crutch, Molly! An *ape* could go across the Atlantic in an airplane!

MOLLY

Oh, now, Daniel, I don't believe that.

PELICAN

Only *remarkable* thing is he even MADE it—the bugger's dumber than dirt!

MOLLY

Danny!

PELICAN

Molly. You know how old Lindy is?

MOLLY

Twenty-five.

PELICAN

Twenty-five. Forget Charles Lindbergh. Forget Pelican Radio Unlimited! To *sail!* Alone, around the world.

MOLLY
It's been done.

PELICAN
Without stopping? Harry Pidgeon made stops. Did Conor O'Brien make stops?

MOLLY
You know he did.

PELICAN
Even Joshua Slocum *made stops! Dozens!*

MOLLY
They make them for a *reason*, Daniel.

PELICAN
Yes—everyone so far's made stops along the way.

(Pause.)

MOLLY
Daniel...? What's going on in that little head? I see those wheels spinning...

PELICAN
Molly, shhh, I know, I know I flirted with other projects—

MOLLY
Rowing across the Atlantic in a rowboat...

PELICAN
I was in *way* over my head with that one. But. The first man to sail, *nonstop*, around our globe! Hilary of Everest! Lindbergh of the Air! Scott of the Antarctic! Well, he died, but. Pelican of the Sea?

MOLLY
Pelican of the Sea.

PELICAN
Wouldn't you be proud of me?

MOLLY
I already am, Daniel.

PELICAN

"It is with great pleasure that I bestow upon you the Congressional Medal of Honor, Admiral Pelican! Endorse our line of staysails, Admiral Pelican? Right this way to your table, Lady Pelican—how does it feel to see yourself in the newsreels? Hot off the press—"The Voyage of Daniel Pelican" in *Swahili*, Admiral Pelican!" To say nothing of what it could do for us, what it could do for Pelican Radio Unlimited!

(PELICAN turns the radio back on. They dance a spirited Charleston. A radio report comes on and they mix drinks.)

DEARBRIDGE V/O

Ladies and gentlemen, this is William Dearbridge of the *Boston Globe*. It is difficult to articulate but obvious to see how Lindy Fever has intoxicated our nation. The *Boston Globe* has been deluged with over a thousand pleas to sponsor sportsmen in various land, sea, and air endeavors—from flying solo 'round the world, to scaling the highest peaks of our continents. We believe Captain Lindbergh has ushered in a new era with his humble misty morning takeoff. Therefore, the *Boston Globe* takes pride in announcing our sponsorship of... The First Annual *Boston Globe* Around Alone Sailing Regatta!

(Distinctive *Boston Globe* Regatta theme music plays.)

DEARBRIDGE V/O

The skipper arriving home first will receive the *Boston Globe* Cup as well as \$25,000! The global yachting community has already dubbed this "The Race of the Century!"

(The telephone rings.)

PELICAN (over radio)

Pelican here... Mr. Albertini! Say hello, Molly!

MOLLY (over radio)

Hello!

PELICAN (over radio)

Are you listening to the radio?...

DEARBRIDGE V/O (under)

Beginning from any port above Delaware Bay, the contestants will sail alone, nonstop around the world via the 2 great southern capes—Good Hope, to Cape Horn—then back up the Atlantic, home. 25,000 miles.

The declared contestants form an impressive list:

Our personal favorite, Italian skipper Augie Ciro;

nautical daredevil Bradford Chesting;

Submarine Commander Colin Nivens;

Merchant Naval Officer Scott Barrister;

New York Yacht Club Captain Gabriel Spade;
 the legendary Colonel “Baltic Jack” Pocktree;
 professional explorer George Pleasant;
 Spanish Lieutenant Primo de Angelo;
 Rear Admiral Randall H. Moorick;
 head of the Swedish Navy, Bjorn Ulverness;
 British Commodore Travis Hartman;
 and the most decorated naval hero of the Great War, Captain Gate Gashman!

PELICAN

What?... (to MOLLY) He’s pulling out.

MOLLY

Pulling out of?

PELICAN

Of Pelican Radio Unlimited...

(MOLLY turns off the radio and sits, dumbfounded.)

PELICAN

No, more than willing to refund your investment...

MOLLY

We don’t have his money!

PELICAN

Shhh! (little pause) But I would rather light a candle than curse the darkness... Yes, I can guarantee your return. In fact, I can double it... One word. *Catamaran*.

MOLLY

Catamaran?

PELICAN

Catamaran. Catamarans are a controversial type of boat having two hulls... So, they accelerate much more rapidly!... so, you can sail them *four times as fast... Unsinkable!*... A catamaran once defeated the *entire* fleet of the New York Yacht Club!

MOLLY

Really?

PELICAN

Yes—she was so good they banned her *for life!*... It’s been a developmental secret, but Pelican Radio Unlimited has *already* launched an immense research venture... geared towards the implementation of completely new nautical-radio innovations...

we're on the brink of patents... My Switchboard—are you familiar with the German term *Gestalt*?

MOLLY
Gestalt?

PELICAN
Gestalt. Yes, it means “all.” That’s exactly what my *Gestalt Switchboard* does—coordinates all my onboard equipment—reduces sail, monitors for drastic wind shifts, regulates the generator... But what if these innovations can be exhibited in such a *dramatic* manner as... winning the *Boston Globe Race*? Yes, they can premiere in *this Regatta!*... Ha! When I win it will be *twenty five times* Lindbergh! I thought, since we have a history together, I’d offer you a piece of the front end. That’s why I called you.

MOLLY
He called you.

PELICAN
Right, you called me... Yes, I’m willing to bet. *All* of it! All of my personal savings as well as my entire stake in the business...

MOLLY
Daniel!

PELICAN
Shhh... *A matching sum...* *Tiny*, if you compare it to the surety of your return... Book rights, endorsement deals, and newsreel commissions...

MOLLY
Newsreel commissions?

PELICAN
Yes, newsreel commissions! I am already in final negotiations with the Fox Newsreel Company regarding the prospect of taking their sound film camera with me, that I might share my voyage with folks in motion picture houses across the nation... Mr. Albertini, I went to sea at two years old.

MOLLY
Daniel.

PELICAN
I have been on the ocean the better part of twenty-five years. Financial considerations did not compel me into this... Who’s the favorite? Augie Ciro? In a monohull? That’s twenty knots... average distance: 95 miles per day. Duration: 319 days. Now that’s last

place. Pelican in a catamaran? Average distance: 280 miles per day! But I'll say 225 to remain conservative. Duration: 125 days. Place: 1st! (pause) All right.

(PELICAN hangs up.)

MOLLY
What did he say?

PELICAN
What do you think? Yes!

(PELICAN re-dials.)

MOLLY
Daniel, you need to think this through.

PELICAN
Operator, get me Castine 6-8745, *Cape Judith Observer*.
(pause)
What?

MOLLY (overlap)
You need to think this—

PELICAN (overlap)
Samson Teagle, please.

MOLLY
Who are you calling?

PELICAN
My press agent.

MOLLY
Press agent?

PELICAN
Samson, it's Daniel. Yeah, I've got the name of the boat. *Molly Pelican Radio Unlimited*. Yeah!... No, I'm sailing out of Blue Hill Bay, not Cape Judith... Yes, I know it would mean a ton of free publicity for you, but that's not... I'm well aware what state Pelican Radio Unlimited is in... Hold please. (to MOLLY) He says they'll start me a fundraising campaign if I set sail from Cape Judith.

MOLLY
Well, a fundraising campaign...

PELICAN

...And add "Judith" to the name of the boat.

MOLLY

Molly Pelican Radio Unlimited Judith?

PELICAN

Yeah, it's too long. I'm sorry, Samson, I'm naming her *Molly Pelican Radio Unlimited...* Well, how about *Molly Judith?*... Too many words. Right. Just... *Judith*. Yessir. I'll have it painted on by morning. No, thank *you*.

(PELICAN hangs up, feels MOLLY's gaze.)

PELICAN

Don't stare at me.

(Light shift. PELICAN takes up an immense pile of handwritten notes of things to do. At the same time, MOLLY climbs onboard the boat with a box, unloading and sorting vital things to outfit her husband's trip:)

MOLLY

Pencils—half dozen.

Logbooks—two.

PELICAN

To buy in Castine: detectors, rectrons, base shells, bulbs, tube holders, Dumet wire, grid caps, beeswax, leechline, bench hook, ruler, turnbuckles, tangs, toggles, glue, saber saw.

MOLLY

Screwdriver, pliers, wrench.

Flashlight. Knife.

(pulling out a tea kettle; *aside*) A little touch of Molly. He'll grumble but you know he loves it. And...

(tucking a bottle of champagne away; *aside*) *Christmas!*

(MOLLY brings the empty box back into the parlor. MOLLY retrieves the mail.)

PELICAN

"To General Electric, IPT Fibers, and Akron Blanket Company. Dear Sirs. I feel we have an interest it would be mutually profitable to explore. In calling this 'The Race of the Century,' the *Boston Globe* admits that all other voyages have been mere undercard bouts for this main event, which is going to be won in the first round by Daniel Pelican! Blah blah blah meet my needs *gratis*, blah blah blah free publicity, blah blah blah your timely response. Sincerely, blah blah blah."

(MOLLY returns carrying a sizable crate and a thick stack of mail.)

PELICAN

What in heaven's name is that?

MOLLY

Beats me. Have you seen the mountain of stuff out there?

PELICAN

I'll get a hammer!

MOLLY

I'll get the hammer. There's the box. You need to pack the spares.

(MOLLY gets a hammer. PELICAN opens the mail instead.)

PELICAN

"Dear Mr. Pelican: Regarding your request to use self-built radio set in *Boston Globe* Regatta. (flips down rest of page) Vetoed. Sincerely, *Boston Globe* Race Committee."
(noting) Buy RCA equipment, pay RCA to install it post-haste.

MOLLY

Daniel, *the spares*...

PELICAN

(opening another letter) Ah, from Mr. Albertini! "Dear Daniel: Afraid YOU will have to write a cheque to the RCA men, as this is not my expense."

MOLLY

"Note clause: 'Cost of all radio and other internal equipment must be borne by Pelican Radio Unlimited.'"

PELICAN

Molly, we have to transfer my radio set onto *Judith*.

MOLLY

But the Committee said—

PELICAN

(ripping it up) I didn't receive any letter! Just throw her on, we'll hook her up later. It'll be fine.

(Meanwhile MOLLY tries to open the crate but can't. PELICAN watches her struggle. They open the crate together. It's the camera, sound equipment, and film reels.)

MOLLY

What's all this?

PELICAN

Fox Movietone— they sent their camera!
(looking towards the outside) Where's the newsreel crew?

(Pause. MOLLY stares at him.)

PELICAN

The newsreel crew! To record my preparations! To film me setting sail!

MOLLY

This is all they sent.

PELICAN

They're probably still tied up with Lindbergh. They'll come later.

MOLLY

I'm sure.

(Pause. PELICAN inspects the equipment rapturously.)

PELICAN

Aeroscope! Ingenious—you see—rather than a crank, the film is moved by a reservoir of compressed air. And the gyroscope automatically maintains horizontal stability.

(comes across a list, then hands it off to MOLLY:)

Oh, here's the list for when you go to Castine.

"Vital Rigging Jobs." Vital Rigging Jobs? Here. And remember we have to load the radio.

MOLLY

We? Here, I'll take the radio down. There's the box—pack the spares.

(The phone rings. It's the boat builders. MOLLY prepares to load the radio.) PELICAN
Pelican here.

(MOLLY loads the radio. PELICAN talks to the boatbuilders and assembles the box of spares.)

PELICAN

Where are you?... First you said mid-September! It is now October...

MOLLY

Twenty-fifth.

PELICAN

Twenty-fifth! I have to depart by the first of November! Would you risk sailing past Cape Horn during the southern winter?... Screws... Well, *I'm* working an eighty-hour week too!... Generator spares... Well, send down men from the *next* yard! You expect my wife and me to outfit this vessel?... Radio spares... No! I'm not letting go of *any* of the radio equipment! I need weight to stabilize the boat so I don't capsize off Cape Horn!... Where are my tablets?

MOLLY

What are you looking for?

DANIEL

My tablets!

But I cut weight on the *skin and frames!*... (to MOLLY) He says, "Have you ever seen what wave pounding does to a hull?"

MOLLY

Well, Daniel, this isn't lake sailing.

PELICAN

No! If that generator fails, it's *poor workmanship*, that's *Nelseco's* problem! Inferior metallurgy!... (to MOLLY) He says I'm looking at inferior metallurgy all over... Aluminum is *three times* as light as cedar!... No, I've never heard of galvanic action. (to MOLLY) Have *you* ever heard of galvanic action?...

MOLLY

Nope.

PELICAN

Nobody's ever heard of galvanic action but *you!*... I *know* salt water is an electrolyte, *Jesus!*... (to MOLLY) He says my screw holes are gonna corrode and all my screws are gonna fall out... This launch will not be postponed any further! (to MOLLY) Here.

(MOLLY takes the box of spares over.)

PELICAN

We have both signed on to a major challenge. So far you've done a magnificent job. I only hope to perform as well as you have. But my success hangs upon you completing what you can in the time we have left to the very best of your ability.

(PELICAN hangs up angrily and recites a mantra to himself.)

PELICAN

It's only to steel your resolve...

(As antidote, PELICAN decides to make his first film. He brings the camera to MOLLY.)

PELICAN
Film! Film!

(MOLLY begins filming the boat.)

PELICAN
Don't film *that*, film me!

MOLLY
She's the boat!

PELICAN
I'm the *captain*!

(MOLLY films her husband.)

PELICAN
Rolling? I am pleased Fox Movietone has seen fit to buy the exclusive recording rights to the Voyage of Daniel Pelican! The two hundred dollars is coming in handy. "Around the World in Pictures" indeed! Plus every bit of poundage helps stabilize the boat so I don't capsize off Cape Horn! I won't lie and say I haven't lain in bed at night and sworn I heard Magellan, DaGama, whispering to me, urging me on. Confidence as I venture into the unknown as they once ventured into the unknown. It's corny but I truly believe I understand what Leif Ericsson must have felt when he first set off for Newfoundland, or Columbus upon pointing for the Indies.

MOLLY
Mr. Pelican—

PELICAN
Admiral.

MOLLY
Admiral Pelican, would you mind telling the audience about your revolutionary *Gestalt Switchboard* you're taking on your voyage?

PELICAN
Sorry. My Switchboard? Oh, yes. Operating successfully! Trials have been scheduled, and patent applications are imminent—the day I return I expect Pelican Radio Unlimited to begin manufacturing it full force.

MOLLY

(*a little too pointedly*) Weren't you going to take it *with* you, to publicize your business? Wasn't it going to *innovate* your voyage and greatly increase the *safety factor*?

PELICAN

Yes, but... there's so much else to do, it'll just have to wait. It's in development. It's at a very exciting stage.

(Awkward pause.)

MOLLY

And books?

PELICAN

What?

MOLLY

Which books will be comprising your oceangoing library? *Nigger of the Narcissus*? Books.

PELICAN

Ah, yes! Textbooks. *The Mechanics of Screened Grid Valves. Pentodes* by E.M. Saylor. Oh—and all my Conrad. And Homer. My Melville. Oh, and *Discourse on Metaphysics* and *The Monadology*, by Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibniz.

MOLLY

Tell the audience, Mr. Pelican, do you have any reservations about making this voyage?

PELICAN

Many people have asked me, "Why are you going solo around the world?" and I tell them: because I *can*, and because it is the *only* thing I can do.

(He gives the "cut" sign. MOLLY stops filming.)

PELICAN

Molly, remember you were worried about my fresh water supply? I got it all calculated. Two people for 90 days need 50 gallons. Ergo 25 gallons, or 100 gallons for 180 days, adding 25 more for 220 days, or 125 gallons, halving the amount for one person, ergo 63 gallons.

(MOLLY spies a leak in the float. PELICAN remains oblivious.)

PELICAN

Promotional Idea. Miss Maine 1927 poses on my bow like a clipper ship maid, we sail a lap 'round Cape Judith with the whole Castine fleet, the hour strikes, she leaps like a mermaid into the sea!

MOLLY

Daniel. The float is dripping. Couldn't that mean the boat is leaking?

(Pause.)

PELICAN

Where are the stores, are you packing the stores?

MOLLY

This is it so far.

PELICAN

THIS IS IT SO FAR? Tea cakes and tinned meat?

MOLLY

(grumbling, under) You're welcome.

(MOLLY withdraws. PELICAN attempts to load the camera onto the boat, but can't find room. He takes the spares off, puts them on the dock, and sets up the camera in their place. Turns it on.)

PELICAN

(to camera)

Let me give you the nickel tour.

Judith herself is a floating innovation, right down to her bones—her hulls are wood, but the frame that binds them is made of a controversial new aluminum. The advantage—Damn! She's not even out of port!

(pause)

There's a complex phenomenon called galvanic action... the long and short of it is we sometimes shed screws. Get the yard—no, scratch that, no time. Just replace 'em, they'll be fine.

(PELICAN stops filming and fiddles absently with his radio set. MOLLY, at home, has made tea. It begins to grow dark. PELICAN sits on the boat, paralyzed. MOLLY comes over to him.)

MOLLY

Danny.

PELICAN

(whispering) I've got to go to town. I need some twine. And a first aid kit. And a compass.

MOLLY

You've got to get some sleep.

(PELICAN wordlessly comes home. He sits, staring into space. MOLLY hands him a teacup.)

MOLLY

Chamomile.

(PELICAN doesn't drink. MOLLY tries to comfort him. She turns on the radio; it plays a slow tune. Suddenly a news report comes over the radio.)

CBS V/O

You're listening to the Columbia Broadcasting System.

CBS news time: 3 a.m.

(*Boston Globe* Regatta theme music.)

CBS V/O

The Race of the Century!

Report on the *Boston Globe* Regatta: The thirteen skippers are all at sea, and sailing astoundingly: Pleasant, Spade, Pocktree, de Angelo, Moorick, Hartman and Barrister hurtling down the Atlantic, Nivens and Gashman about to cross the Tropic of Cancer, Ulverness and Chesting at the Cape Verdes, and Augie Ciro in the lead, as expected, surging towards the Equator! All, of course, save *one*, Daniel Pee-lican—

PELICAN

(quietly) *Pelican*.

CBS V/O

Due out this very morning, a mere three hours under deadline.

(Pause; the radio fades into a soft white tone.)

PELICAN

Sweetheart, the boat... she's not... I'm... If I leave with things like this... Will you worry night and day?

MOLLY

If you withdrew, would you be miserable for the rest of your life?

(PELICAN says nothing.)

MOLLY

Come to bed. (pause) Don't stay up too late.

(MOLLY waits a moment, then goes off to sleep. PELICAN stays awake, staring into space. All we hear is the sound of the clock in their parlor ticking softly as he stays awake until morning. Pause. The radio begins a start-of-day broadcast. PELICAN hurries out. Focus on MOLLY, above on the catwalk to christen the boat.)

MOLLY

I, Molly Pelican, christen thee... *Judith!*

(MOLLY swings the bottle against the deck. It does not break. Awkward pause. Rain begins to fall, punctuated occasionally by far-off thunder. PELICAN runs in covering himself in the rain, sets up his camera on the deck of his boat, turns it on, steps out of frame, and films himself climbing aboard. He raises sails—hoists the wrong one.)

PELICAN

Thank God this is a solo regatta!

(turns to the camera) With their help it's a wonder I haven't sunk already!

(PELICAN turns the camera off, fixes everything. He turns the camera back on, and repeats his movements exactly, raising his sails successfully. A moment as he swells with pride, breathes in the salt air, takes a sight with his sextant. Makes notes to camera. Suddenly spies something, grabs his binoculars, and observes whales off his starboard side. He smiles genuinely, forgetting himself for a moment, puts the binoculars down, turns the camera off, enters his cabin, takes off his raincoat, shakes it out, looks for a place to hang it, hangs it, discovers a kettle tucked away by MOLLY.)

PELICAN

Molly...

(He puts tea on, washes out a teacup, puts a teabag in, goes over to his radio, uncurls his headphones, wires it up, fiddles with it, tunes it to most cultured classical music, pauses, listening to the sea, feeling the motion of the water and the feeling of utter aloneness. Has a thought—locates his logbook and settles in to write his log entry.)

PELICAN

November 8th—off Delaware.

Sighted my first whales today. Three of them, great spouting sperms off *Judith's* starboard—a receiving line to welcome me from the sheltering coast into the fold of the great blue herself.

(The kettle boils. PELICAN pours tea.)

PELICAN

Might be back in my own study, curling up with some Stendhal.

(His radio shorts and broadcasts static. PELICAN messes about with the radio. Static still. He starts the generator running—moderately, then increases the speed little by little to test its limits. Then he notices his hull frame has shed a screw. He sticks his pencil in the hole and breaks it.)

PELICAN

Where's that box of spares?

(Looks for his missing spares box. He replaces the screw with one from the radio. The screwdriver's the wrong size and he tightens the screw twice as much as he should. Gets queasy.)

PELICAN

I must find my tablets.

(PELICAN searches for his tablets. Cannot find them. Stands in the center of the boat, dumbfounded.)

PELICAN

I wish Molly was here.

(He puts tea on and turns on his radio. Still static. He runs the generator, running it much higher than it should go. Returns to the radio, fiddles with it, gets it to work. He sits and listens as he drinks more water. An ironically upbeat swing tune plays. All of a sudden PELICAN notices water at his feet. He runs off to see the trouble. Runs back in, grabs his bucket and raincoat.)

PELICAN

Goddamn galvanic action!

(He bails. Succeeds in ridding the boat of water, comes back on, grabs a mop, mops the deck dry. A moment of rest; he leans on his mop, tired but smiling. Has a thought. Takes off his raincoat, sets up his camera, checks his hair in the lens, vomits, resets, turns camera on, saunters in front of it and turns as if being surprised.)

PELICAN

Hello! Well now, who shall we dredge up, hmmm? Poor Robin Crusoe? Mystical Melville? How about some Conrad?

I've been a-sea now for two weeks, and I'm taking you, yes, very you, along with me on this tour 'round our little marble... would you ask *Magellan* why? (Chuckles.) Because I can, and because it is the only thing I can do... that must be enough reason for me, here, in the great Atlantic, in the middle of November, alone, making sound films, aboard a tiny boat.

Most of you—I imagine you're in some cushy palace like the Roxy—most of you associate boating with some sundrenched cruise in the French Riviera—a bathing

beauty lolling about the decks of some gleaming white yacht, the Stars and Stripes whipping in the salt wind above, while her cap'n with pomaded hair, bright blue cap, and dressed to the nines, stands at the wheel with a Melvillian air sculpted on his face. Well let me tell you of reality out here. A boat is its own universe, with its own set of laws. And the first law is you gotta watch everything. And it's not as if twelve things aren't always in revolt. Water for one. Everything on this boat is wet, ocean wet. Salt water. Every opening a potential leak. Not that going solo isn't wonderful. You've no danger of mutiny, that's for one, and the conversation is always pleasant and agreeable. You'll find everyone agrees with your seamanship one hundred percent. The only drawback is there's no cabin boy to tell to boil up a potato or ring out the wet underwears. (Chuckles.) As a result I will admit: I am standing in dirty damp drawers, which I've gotten quite used to, even while sleeping, which is got when you can get it—or rather, when the wind and waves dictate you may close your eyes for a moment—and I'm already losing weight fairly rapidly. That's for the best—too much time on land has made me soft. In the mouth of the sea, the sailor learns to recognize every tragedy not as a defeat, but as a further opportunity to become the perfect seaman. A tight body and a challenge 'fore the mind. And no shortage of challenges out here.

(All of a sudden his generator, lights, and radio sputter completely out. He is left in darkness.)

PELICAN

I've hit some snags—*of course*—but I plan to sort them out in short order.

**To read the rest of this play, please contact me at:
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