

Act 1, Scene 1 – The Ample Chest

[We see a rickety harbour-side inn where several Villagers are sitting at tables being served by Jim. A very large Matryoshka doll stands at the back. The Squire walks in along with Arabella and Dr Shipshape.]

Villager 5 Look, it's the Squire with his freak of a daughter.

Jim Come on guys, don't be like that. She's perfectly lovely.

Squire How is she looking today Dr Shipshape?

Dr S Not very well, I'm afraid, Squire. The transformation seems to be speeding up. By the day of her seventeenth birthday, she would have metamorphosed completely into a denizen of the aquatic depths.

Squire Uh... what?

Dr S By her next birthday, she will have turned into a fish Squire.

Squire Oh my poor darling Arabella. What are we going to do?

Arabella Well, since I only have a week left, what I'd really love is to go on a sea voyage. It's always been my dream.

Dr S My darling, that is absolutely out of the question. It would be far more beneficial if you just spent your time in a state of repose.

Squire What?

Dr S She should spend her time resting Squire.

Squire Oh.

Arabella But I've spent my whole life resting. I am now completely restless. **[Jim approaches holding a large red and violet flower.]**

Jim *[shy]* Hi Miss Arabella.

Arabella Oh, hi Jim.

Jim This is for you – for your birthday.

Arabella Thank you Jim, but you know I only like you as a friend, right?

Jim Oh. *[The flower droops in his hand.]*

Squire Jim, I was supposed to meet with your mother to talk about organising Arabella's birthday party. Is she around?

Jim Yes. In fact she's been waiting for you to arrive so she can make her grand entrance. Do you want me to call her?

Squire Please do.

Jim *[to the audience]* Do you guys want me to call her as well?

Audience Yes.

Jim I can't hear you!

Audience Yes!

Jim Great, then let's call her together. Let's all shout: Mama Sufia, someone is here. Really loud, all at the same time – okay? Here we go; one, two, three!

All Mama Sufia, someone is here! *[Soviet-sounding music plays as the Matryoshka doll starts to open (or move aside). Inside is another Matryoshka doll and this one also opens to reveal Mama Sufia in all her glory.]*

Sufia Hello everybody! How are you all? How nice to see so many wonderful peoples here today. Welcome to my Ample Chest – where weary sailors get their rest and accommodation is the best! All the way from the snows of Siberia to the shore of *(locality)*, I am Mama Sufia – with the finest service you can get. Hello Squire, how are you today?

Squire Not very well Mama Sufia. My darling daughter only has a week left before her curse takes her away from us forever.

Sufia *[embracing him]* Oh my sweet, sweet Squire. Not to worry. You come to me and we make you other daughter – yes?

Arabella Uh, I am right here...

Dr S Mama Sufia, might I remind you that as soon as she turns seventeen, young Miss Arabella will turn into a fish forever.

Sufia So you keep saying. But what is this curse that you're talking about?

Dr S Well Mama Sufia, it all started seventeen years ago when the Squire found baby Arabella on his doorstep. The first thing he did was to take it to the Voodoo priestess Salty Sue... *[There is a flashback transition as the Squire walks over to the side-stage and collects a baby on the way. Salty Sue appears.]*

Salty Sue Well, well, well... If it isn't the Squire of *(locality)*... What's this? Your baby?

Squire Not exactly. I just found it outside my –

Salty Sue I have a doll for your baby. *[Salty Sue reveals a doll.]* It's a miniature version of you.

Squire Wow, that's... not creepy at all.

Salty Sue Those pirates have been at it again! Stealing everything they can get their hands on... But this time they've gone too far. They have stolen something very precious from me.

Squire Your sense of humour? [**Salty Sue** slaps the doll's face.] Ow!

Salty Sue They have taken my magic amulet! And until I get it back, I'll be holding you personally responsible for its loss. That's why I shall be cursing this baby of yours.

Squire It's not my baby...

Salty Sue Oh vindictive spirits of the Voodoo... lay your vengeful curse upon this child... unless my magic amulet is returned to me, this... is it a boy or a girl?

Squire I don't know – how can you tell? [**Salty Sue** casually flicks the doll between the legs and the **Squire** keels over.] Ooh!

Salty Sue After seventeen years, this child shall transform into a fish.

Squire No!

Salty Sue Yes! So find me that amulet, or you shall lose this child forever to the salty depths. Understood?

Squire But it isn't even... Fine.

Salty Sue In the meantime, these two mermaids will watch over the baby from afar.
[**Nettuna** and **Nittiena** appear.]

Squire Wow, are you real mermaids?

Nettuna Indeed. I am the daughter of Neptune: Nettuna.

Nittiena And I am her sister: Nittiena. [*She winks at the Squire.*]

Squire Ooh. I think I'm going to like – [**Salty Sue** throws the doll offstage and the **Squire** flies off back into the previous scene.] – you...! [**Salty Sue** walks off shaking her head.]

Dr S And that's why when the sun rises on her seventeenth birthday, poor Miss Arabella is cursed to become a fish.

Billy Bones [*off*] FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST

YO-HO-HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM

Sufia Who's that? [**Billy Bones** appears dragging a large chest. He drinks from a bottle and sways in a drunken manner as he walks.]

Billy Bones DRINK AND THE DEVIL HAD DONE FOR THE REST

YO-HO-HO AND A BOTTLE OF RUM [*He takes a swig and looks confused.*]

What? This bottle be empty. You! Boy! Get me some rum.

Jim Sure thing.

Sufia Wait just one minute. How are you going to pay for that rum? You have money?
Gold? (*topical reference*)? [**Billy Bones** laughs.]

Billy Bones What I have in this here chest can buy this entire land.

Sufia You have a (*topical reference*) in there?

Billy Bones No. It be riches beyond anyone's wildest imaginations. You can count on that – as sure as my name be Billy Bones.

Sufia *[suddenly very nice]* Well why you not say so, you silly Billy? Jim, get this nice man a bottle of our finest house rum. *[Jim goes off.]*

Squire Excuse me Mr Bones, I hope you don't mind my asking but are you, by any chance, a pirate?

Billy Bones Aye, that I am – and a scurvier dog has never sailed the seven seas.

Squire You see, the Squire of this town doesn't... allow... pirates here. So... you know.

Billy Bones Is that so? And where be this Squire right now? Methinks I need to have a word with him.

Squire Um... I don't know.

Billy Bones I didn't think so. *[Jim returns with a bottle of rum.]*

Jim Here's your rum Mr Bones.

Billy Bones *[snatching the bottle]* Arr! Come to papa! *[He opens the bottle and drinks it in one gulp.]*

Sufia Wow, that is one thirsty pirate.

Dr S As a qualified doctor I feel it is my duty to inform our audience that it is important to drink responsibly and in moderation.

Billy Bones *[finishing the bottle]* Ah, that's some good grog.

Dr S Otherwise... *[Billy Bones collapses.]*

Sufia What's wrong? Why he fall? He sick? *[Dr Shipshape checks his pulse.]*

Dr S I do believe the medical term is: wasted.

Sufia Wasted? Oh boozdarof. Then I will have to open his chest and take the money myself.

Squire I don't think that's a good idea Mama Sufia. He might not like it.

Sufia Well I don't like it when people don't pay me. I hate being stiffed.

Squire That's not what I heard.

Sufia Shut up. Now let me see what the audience thinks. Tell me my little babaganushes; should I open this great big chest?

Audience Yes.

Sufia See? Now let us reveal this great treasure... *[They gather around the chest and Mama*

Sufia opens it to reveal that it's full of clothes.] What? This is not treasure. This looks like... lots of Nutella... wrapped in fabric. Why would he have Nutella wrapped in fabric? Is strange, no?

Miss Huta I hate to break this to you but... those are dirty underpants.