

✓ AUNT SPONGE. Why don't we just lower the boy down the well in a bucket and leave him there for the night? That ought to teach him not to laze around like this the whole day long.

AUNT SPIKER. That's a very good idea, my dear Sponge. But let's make him finish chopping up the wood first. Be off with you at once, you hideous brat, and do some work! (JAMES slowly and sadly gets up, goes back to the woodpile and begins to chop again.)

AUNT SPIKER. Sponge! Sponge! Come here at once and look at this!

AUNT SPONGE. At what?

AUNT SPIKER. A peach! Right up there on the highest branch! Can't you see it?

AUNT SPONGE. You're teasing me, Spiker. You're making my mouth water on purpose when there's nothing to put into it. Why, that tree's never even had a blossom on it, let alone a peach.

AUNT SPIKER. There's one on it now, Sponge! You look for yourself!

AUNT SPONGE. Very funny . . . Ha, ha . . . Good gracious me! There really is a peach up there! (ALL freeze.)

Z NARRATOR (turning to the audience). Now, it's at this point in our story that James feels that something peculiar is about to happen at any moment. (He turns to watch the action as ALL unfreeze.)

AUNT SPONGE. Hey, you! (She looks at JAMES.) Come over here at once and climb this tree! I want you to pick that peach up there on the highest branch. Can you see it? (She pauses.)

JAMES. Yes, Auntie Sponge, I can see it.

AUNT SPONGE. And don't you dare to eat any of it yourself. X

- ✓ CENTIPEDE. *Very peculiar. Very, very peculiar indeed.* I was messing about in the garden under the old peach tree and suddenly a funny little green thing came wriggling past my nose . . .
- JAMES. Oh, but I know what that was!
- LADYBUG. It happened to me, too!
- SPIDER. And me! Suddenly there were little green things everywhere. The soil was full of them!
- EARTHWORM. I actually swallowed one!
- LADYBUG. So did I!
- CENTIPEDE. I swallowed three! But who's telling this story anyway? Don't interrupt!
- OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. Not now, Centipede! Why don't you get to the top and get started! (CENTIPEDE waddles toward the top of the peach.)
- JAMES. What's going on?
- SPIDER. In case you don't know it, we are about to depart from the top of this ghastly hill that we've all been living on for so long. We are about to roll away inside this great big beautiful Peach to a land of . . . of . . . of . . . of . . . to a land of --
- JAMES. Of what?
- LADYBUG. Never you mind! But nothing could be worse than this desolate hilltop and those two repulsive aunts of yours . . .
- ALL. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!
- OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. You may not have noticed it, but the whole garden, even before it reaches the steep edge of the hill, happens to be on a steep slope. And therefore the only thing that has been stopping this Peach from rolling away right from the beginning is the thick stem attaching it to the tree. Break the stem and off we go!
- CENTIPEDE. I've done it! We're off! The journey begins!

EARTHWORM. And who knows where it will end, if *you* have anything to do with it. It can only mean trouble.

LADYBUG. Nonsense! We are now about to visit the most marvelous places and see the most wonderful things. Isn't that so, Centipede? ~~X~~

CENTIPEDE. There is no knowing what we shall see!

We may see a creature with forty-nine heads
Who lives in the desolate snow,
And whenever he catches a cold (which he dreads)
He has forty-nine noses to blow.

We may see a dragon and nobody knows
That we won't see a unicorn there.
We may see a terrible monster with toes
Growing out of the tufts of his hair.

We may see the sweet little Biddy-Bright Hen
So playful, so kind, and well-bred;
And such beautiful eggs! You just boil them and then
They explode and they blow off your head.

But who cares! Let us go from this horrible hill!
Let us roll! Let us bowl! Let us plunge!
Let's go rolling and bowling and spinning until
We're away from old Spiker and Sponge!
(The lights go down and the curtain closes.)

SCENE THREE

✓ The AUNTS stand outside of the curtain waiting for the people to come so that they can make more money. The peach light is on.

AUNT SPONGE. Why did we have to get up so early, Spiker?
Why . . . it's still dark outside.

AUNT SPIKER. Well . . . if an early bird catches the worm, then two early aunts will catch the suckers . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . .

AUNT SPONGE. Ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . that's funny . . .
Ha . . . ha . . . (She pauses.) I . . . don't . . . get it, Spiker! What do you mean?

AUNT SPIKER. Money! We're out here to make money, Sponge! Get it? Make money! *M-o-n-e-y!* We shall make a fortune today. Just look at all those people coming up the hill!

AUNT SPONGE. I wonder what became of that horrid little boy of ours last night? He never did come back in, did he?

AUNT SPIKER. He probably fell down in the dark and broke his leg.

AUNT SPONGE (hopefully). Or his neck, maybe?

AUNT SPIKER. Just *wait* till I get my hands on him. (She waves her cane.) He'll never want to stay out all night again by the time *I've* finished with him. Good gracious me! What's that awful noise?

AUNT SPONGE. Spiker, I know this sounds silly, but I . . . it . . . looks as if the fence is breaking . . . and . . . the Peach is . . . the Peach is . . .

AUNT SPIKER. Are you ill, Sponge? Are you? *Are you?* You must be . ~~X~~ (SPIKER notices the Peach moving towards them.)



EARTHWORM (worriedly). What are they?

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. Probably some kind of fish, come along to say hello.

EARTHWORM. They're sharks! I'll bet you anything you like that they're sharks and they have come along to eat us up!

CENTIPEDE (unconvincingly). What absolute rot!

EARTHWORM. I am *positive* they are sharks! I just *know* they are sharks! (ALL are worried and look down at the approaching sharks.)

CENTIPEDE. Ahem. Just assuming that they *are* sharks, there still can't possibly be any danger if we stay up here . . . is there?

GLOWWORM. Look! They're all swimming in towards us!

ALL. Go away! Go away, you filthy beasts!

GLOWWORM. Look at the size of their jaws!

SPIDER. Oh dear, they're attacking! We are finished now! They will eat up the whole Peach and then there'll be nothing left for us to stand on. Then they'll start on us!

LADYBUG. She is right! We are lost forever!

EARTHWORM (wailing). Oh, I don't want to be eaten! But they will take me first of all because I am so fat and juicy and I have no bones!

LADYBUG. Is there *nothing* we can do? (She appeals to JAMES.) Surely *you* can think of a way out of this! (ALL look hopefully at JAMES.)

SPIDER. Think! (She is frantic.) *Think*, James, *think*!

CENTIPEDE. Come on! Come on, James. There *must* be something we can do!

JAMES. There *is* something that I believe we might try. I'm not saying it'll work . . .

EARTHWORM. Tell us! Tell us quickly!

CENTIPEDE. We'll try anything you say! But hurry, hurry, hurry!

LADYBUG. Be quiet and let the boy speak! Go on, James!

ALL (except JAMES). Go on! Go on!

JAMES. I . . . I . . . I'm afraid it's no good . . . after all . . .
(He shakes his head.) I'm terribly sorry. I forgot. We don't have any string. We'd need hundreds of yards of string to make this work.

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. But, my dear boy, that's exactly what we do have. We've got all you want.

JAMES. How? Where?

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. The Silkworm! Didn't you ever notice the Silkworm? He's still downstairs!

LADYBUG. Yes, he never moves! He just lies there sleeping all day long, but we can easily wake him up and make him spin!

SPIDER. And what about me, may I ask? I can spin *just* as well as any Silkworm. What's more, *I* can spin patterns.

JAMES. Can you make enough between you?

SPIDER. As much as you want.

JAMES. And quickly?

SPIDER. Of course! Of course!

JAMES. And would it be strong?

SPIDER. The strongest there is!

CENTIPEDE. But why? What are you going to do!

JAMES. I'm going to lift this Peach clear out of the water!

EARTHWORM. You're mad!

JAMES. It's our only chance.

LADYBUG. Go on, James. How are you going to do it?

CENTIPEDE (jeeringly). Skyhooks, I suppose.

JAMES. Seagulls! The place is full of them. Look up there! ~~He~~

LADYBUG. You were very brave, Earthworm.

CENTIPEDE. Good-bye, sharks!

SPIDER. Oh, boy, this is the way to travel!

LADYBUG. Why, you can almost see forever from up here.

CENTIPEDE. How can you see . . .

JAMES. Oh, look! There's a ship below us!

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. It looks like a big one.

LADYBUG. It's got three funnels.

CENTIPEDE. You can even see the people on the decks.

SPIDER. Let's wave to them. Do you think they can see *us*?

(While waving, ALL freeze while the NARRATOR turns to the audience and speaks about the ship. The PEOPLE on the ship enter the floor in front of the stage and freeze until the NARRATOR finishes.)

NARRATOR. What an adventure! // Can you believe it? // Wow! //

Now neither James nor any of the others know it, but the ship that is passing beneath them is actually the Queen Mary, sailing out of the English Channel on her way to America. // And on the bridge of the Queen Mary, the astonished Captain is standing with a group of his officers, all of them gaping at the great round ball hovering overhead. (He turns to watch the action as ALL unfreeze.)

✓ CAPTAIN. I don't like it!

FIRST OFFICER. Nor do I, sir.

SECOND OFFICER. Do you think it's following us?

CAPTAIN. I tell you, I don't like it!

FIRST OFFICER. It could be dangerous!

CAPTAIN. That's it! It's a secret weapon! (He jumps up and down.) Holy cats! Send a message to the queen at once! The country must be warned! And give me my telescope! The FIRST OFFICER hands him the telescope and he looks

through it.) There are birds everywhere! The whole sky is teeming with birds! What in the world are *they* doing? And wait! Wait a second! There are *people* on it! I can see them moving! There's a . . . a . . . do I have this darned thing focused properly? (He hits and adjusts the telescope.) It looks like a little boy in short trousers! Yes, I can distinctly see a little boy in short trousers standing up there! And there's a . . . there's . . . a . . . a . . . a . . . a sort of *giant ladybug*!

FIRST OFFICER. Now just a minute, Captain!

CAPTAIN. And a *colossal green grasshopper*!

FIRST OFFICER. Captain! Captain, *please*!

CAPTAIN. And a *mammoth spider*!

SECOND OFFICER (whispering to the FIRST OFFICER). Oh dear, he's been at the whisky again.

CAPTAIN (screaming). And an enormous . . . a *simply enormous centipede*!

FIRST OFFICER. Call the ship's doctor! The Captain is not well. (To the SECOND OFFICER.) Get help, *quickly*!

SECOND OFFICER. But, look! It's disappeared into those thick clouds! Now we'll never see it again!

FIRST OFFICER. Never mind that! The Captain has flipped his lid! He's popped his cork! I'm the Captain now! Get him off the bridge! Take him below! He's sick! Sick! *Sick! Sick!* X
(The lights go out and the CREW exits.)

SCENE SIX

The Peach spotlight is on and everything seems fine as ALL float through the sky.

✓ CENTIPEDE (grinning). With pleasure. (He sings.)

AUNT SPIKER WAS THIN AS A WIRE,
AND AS DRY AS A BONE, ONLY DRIER.
SHE WAS SO LONG AND THIN
IF YOU CARRIED HER IN
YOU COULD USE HER FOR POKING THE FIRE!

"I MUST DO SOMETHING QUICKLY," SHE FROWNEO.
"I WANT *FAT*; I WANT POUND UPON POUND!
I MUST EAT LOTS AND LOTS
OF MARSHMALLOWS AND CHOCS
'TILL I START BULGING OUT ALL AROUND."

"AH, YES," SHE ANNOUNCED, "I HAVE SWORN
THAT I'LL ALTER MY FIGURE BY DAWN!"
CRIED THE PEACH WITH A SNIGGER,
"I'LL ALTER YOUR FIGURE -"
AND IRONED HER OUT ON THE LAWN! ✕

(ALL clap and shout glad cheers.)

LADYBUG. Bbbrrrr . . . It's getting colder.

SPIDER. And darker. Why don't we all go down below and keep warm until tomorrow morning?

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. No! I think that would be very unwise. It will be safer if we all stay up here through the night and keep watch. Then, if anything happens, we shall be ready for it. (ALL FREEZE.)

NARRATOR (turning to the audience). Well . . . I see that James Henry Trotter and his companions are crouched close together to keep warm. Little do they know what still lies ahead. Oh dear, it scares even me. Well . . . anyway, to get on with the story . . . there is not a sound anywhere. Listen how quiet

SPIDER. Hooray! Let's go up and see! (JAMES goes up first and looks around.)

JAMES. It's all clear! I can't see them anywhere!

SCENE SEVEN

ALL follow JAMES back up onto the Peach.

LADYBUG. How fast we are going all of a sudden! I wonder why?

JAMES. I don't think the seagulls like this place any better than we do. I imagine they want to get out of it as soon as they can. They got a bad fright out of the hailstone-throwing experience we just had. (ALL freeze.)

✓ NARRATOR (turning to the audience). Yes, faster and faster fly the seagulls, skimming across the sky at a tremendous pace, with the Peach trailing out behind them. // Cloud after cloud goes by on either side, all of them ghostly white in the moonlight, and several more times during the night the travelers catch glimpses of Cloud-Men moving around on the tops of these clouds working their sinister magic upon the world below. // They even pass a snow machine in operation, with the Cloud-Men turning the handle and a blizzard of snowflakes blowing out of the great funnel above. // They see huge drums being used for thunder. // They see frost factories and wind producers, and, deep in the hollow of a large billowy cloud, something that can only be a Cloud-Men's city. // Just before dawn, they hear a soft *whooshing* noise above their heads and they glance up to see an immense grey bat-like creature swooping down towards them out of the dark. It circles round and round the Peach, flapping

its great wings slowly in the moonlight and staring at the travelers. Then it utters a series of long, high cries and flies off again into the night. /How terrifying! /They all sit motionless. Fearfully, they sit in silence, waiting for the sun, and watching it as it comes up slowly over the rim of the horizon for a new day. (He turns to watch the action as a mixture of footlights and overhead lights create the "brand-new day" feeling. ALL unfreeze and get slowly to their feet to stretch.)

CENTIPEDE. Look! There's land below!

ALL (except EARTHWORM). He's right! Hooray! Hooray!

GLOWWORM. It looks like streets and houses.

SPIDER. But how enormous it all is!

LADYBUG. But what tremendous tall buildings! I've never seen anything like *them* before in England.

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. This couldn't possibly be England.

SPIDER. Then where is it?

JAMES. You know what those buildings are? (He jumps up and down with excitement.) Those are skyscrapers! This must be America! And that, my friends, means that we have crossed the Atlantic Ocean overnight!

OLD-GREEN-GRASSHOPPER. You don't mean it!

CENTIPEDE. It's incredible! It's unbelievable!

EARTHWORM. It's not possible!

CENTIPEDE. Oh, I've always dreamed of going to America! I had a friend once who —

EARTHWORM. Be quiet! Who cares about your friend? The thing we got to think about now is *how on earth are we going to get down to earth?*

LADYBUG. Ask James!