

The Swiss Family Robinson

*Freely adapted for the stage by James DeVita
Based on the novel by J.D. Wyss*

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7m, 2f)

CAPTAIN
MOTHER
BOATSWAIN
FATHER
SAILOR
FRITZ
RAT
ERNEST
KRILL
FRANZ
MAWG
JENNY

DOUBLING POSSIBILITIES

CAPTAIN — RAT
BOATSWAIN — KRILL
SAILOR — MAWG

SCENE ONE

(A terrible storm. LIGHTNING, THUNDER. Waves crashing. Howling WINDS. Dialogue being yelled above the sound of the storm.)

CAPTAIN: Fall to it, and lively, men! Or we run ourselves under!

BOATSWAIN: *(To FATHER.)* I pray you, sir, you and your family keep below!

SAILOR: Out of our way! You do assist the storm!

FATHER: My boys and I can help!

BOATSWAIN: Aye, by staying below, you can! *(To OTHERS.)* Look to the mainsail!

SAILOR: LAND! Land ho!

CAPTAIN: Where, man!?

SAILOR: LAND!

CAPTAIN: Where do you see land?!

SAILOR: Off the starboard beam!

FATHER: I see it! There!!

FRITZ: What country is it, Father?!

CAPTAIN: *(To SAILORS.)* Bring her about and turn her in to shore! Make for shelter, lads, and quickly!! *(A huge mast poles sweeps across the length of the deck.)* Watch your heads, you fools! *(ALL duck.)*

MOTHER: *(To FATHER.)* John, is it true?!

FATHER: Yes. There's land not far off. Keep the children below and gather our things together.

BOATSWAIN: What island is it, Captain?

CAPTAIN: No way to tell; we could be anywhere.

SAILOR: How do we know there aren't savages there?!

CAPTAIN: We don't, but I prefer a dry death to drowning. Now, stop cackling and get the rest of those Robinsons below!

SAILOR: *(To FATHER.)* You're a minister! Minister these waves and winds to cease!

BOATSWAIN: Down with the topmast a'fore she splits!

SAILOR: Reef! REEF off the larboard! REEF OFF THE LARBOARD!!

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BOATSWAIN: *(Simultaneously.)* REEF OFF THE LARBOARD!!

CAPTAIN: Set her off to sea again! Lay her off!! *(Overlapping.)* Lay her off!

BOATSWAIN: Bring her about! Hard to starboard, man! Hard to—

(The ship strikes the reef and begins to break up. SOUNDS of wood splintering and water rushing in. Chaos. MEN yelling, swearing, praying.)

SAILOR: She's breakin' up! We're lost sure! Save yourselves!

BOATSWAIN: Lower away the boats! Lower away, I say!

CAPTAIN: You'll do nothin' o' the sort! *(To the SAILORS.)* Courage, boys! We're all above water yet! Now, get aloft and rig more sail! Aloft, I say!

SAILOR: Get aloft yourself! I'm not going up in this!

CAPTAIN: You cowards! Take the children, then, and lay off in the shallows until she ...

BOATSWAIN: Lay off this! *(HE strikes the CAPTAIN.)* That's the last blasted order I'll take from the likes o' you! *(Strikes HIM again.)*

FRITZ: *(Trying to help the CAPTAIN.)* Captain!

SAILOR: Leave 'im be! *(SAILOR swings at FRANZ.)*

FATHER: Fritz! *(FATHER helps FRITZ away from the SAILORS.)*

MOTHER: Come, children! Ernest, take hold of your brother. *(i.e. FRANZ.)*

FATHER: *(Bringing FRITZ over to MOTHER.)* Stay here, Fritz. *(To the sailors as THEY EXIT.)* In the name of decency, I beg you, take my wife and children!

BOATSWAIN: Cast off! Cast 'er off!

FATHER: There's more than enough room! Please!!

MOTHER: John. John ... stay with me now. I need you by me. John.

(The storm crescendos. It is a horrific storm. The FAMILY stays huddled together.)

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FRANZ: Shall we pray now, Papa?

MOTHER: Yes, Franz.

ERNEST: Father.

FATHER: Not now, Ernest.

ERNEST: Father, look at the water line on the reef. It's low tide!

FATHER: Ernest, please.

ERNEST: But, Father, the tide will be turning soon.

FATHER: (*Trying to pray.*) Elizabeth, take the children below.

MOTHER: Come, children.

ERNEST: But, Father ...

FATHER: (*Angry.*) What is it?!

ERNEST: If we can hold out long enough, the tide might float us in to the island.

FRITZ: We're stuck fast to these rocks, Mr. Professor! We're not floating anywhere.

FATHER: Your brother is right, Ernest. Please go below.

FRITZ: He's not so right, Father. (*Holding up and empty canister and some large cork floats.*) We just have to make ourselves float.

FATHER: Heavens! Of course! Everyone, quick! Gather up anything that'll float ... good thinking, Ernest! Barrels, empty wine casks, canisters, tins, anything! Fritz! Cut me some lengths of rope. (*FATHER cuts rope too and begins tying floatables to MOTHER and FRANZ.*) If we can last out the worst of the storm, we'll make for the shore.

FRITZ: Let's go now! We'll miss the tide if we wait too long.

FATHER: Fritz, stop! It's too dangerous now.

ERNEST: Father, look out! (*Something falls in Father's direction. HE avoids it.*)

FATHER: Quickly now! Fritz, help Franz and your Mother! Tie them together!

FRITZ: Father, look! (*Sound of the lifeboats being crushed against the reef.*) The lifeboats! They're running into the reefs!

FATHER: Heaven help them, poor souls. (*MOTHER covers FRANZ' eyes.*)

FRITZ: Poor souls!?! They left us to die!

FATHER: Come, let's finish these life vests. *(Another huge howl of wind and cracking of wood is heard.)* Stay together! Everyone try to stay together!!

(SOUNDS of the storm continuing and the ship breaking apart.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE TWO

(The next day. Dawn. On a deserted island. The island is white hot, humid, steamy. The buzz of insects creeps in. The storm has passed. The shore is littered with pieces of the wrecked ship, supplies, of every sort: sails, lines, block and tackle, barrels, splintered wood, etc. At first we see nothing move at all. After a moment or two, we see the clump of sails begin to move. FRANZ comes out from under it, then MOTHER, and then, FATHER.)

FRANZ: Where's Ernest, Papa?

FATHER: He's ... We're going to look for him now that it's light, Franz.

MOTHER: Fritz. Fritz, wake up. *(From behind something else, FRITZ sits up.)* Help your father to look again for Ernest. Please find him, John.

FATHER: Franz, I need your help too. *(Father gives HIM a knife.)* Here. Put this on your belt. I want you to wear it always. Now listen closely ... I need you to look after Mother while we're gone. Can you do that?

FRANZ: Yes, Papa.

FATHER: Good.

FRITZ: *(Holding up a rifle.)* Father, look! *(FRITZ has opened a chest containing arms.)* Rifles!

FATHER: Are they dry?

FRITZ: Yes.

End of Freeview

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