

CRUISE PROMOTION
By Dave McClain

The head of security on a cruise ship must solve the mystery of a passenger's disappearance, with only twelve hours left in the voyage... but that's only the beginning.

FADE IN:

EXT. - A CRUISE SHIP AT SEA - NIGHT

With passengers on deck, a ship's siren sounds, followed immediately by "Man Overboard!" over the loud speaker.

INT. - A HALLWAY OF A CRUISE SHIP AT SEA - NIGHT

BILL CHARLES, mid-40s, the ship's head of security, exits a storage room, brushing a bit of dust from the sleeve of his dark blue uniform jacket. He quickly checks his appearance in a mirror on the wall, then walks calmly but purposefully.

INT. - A SMALL, SECURITY OFFICE ON THE SHIP - NIGHT

Bill enters the office, almost running into his assistant, BLAKE, hurrying toward the door, carrying a small black bag.

BLAKE

Oh, hey, boss! I was just heading out to coordinate with the rescue team.

BILL

I heard the alarm as I was finishing checking supplies. I want a SITREP every 10 minutes. Got your radio?

BLAKE

In the bag. Gotta run.

Blake slides by Bill and runs down the hall. Bill calls out.

BILL

Where's Kelly?

BLAKE

She's with the search. I'll call you!

Bill watches Blake run down the hall towards the rear of the ship. He looks at the black bag that Blake's carrying, still staring down the hall even after Blake turns the corner.

A TALL MAN with premature gray hair rounds the corner and glances at Bill as he walks by. Bill barely notices the man. Looking distracted, he enters the office and shuts the door.

INT. - A PLAIN ROOM BESIDE THE SECURITY OFFICE - 2 HRS LATER

Bill, Blake and KELLY sit around a small, round conference table with some papers on it. Blake is briefing Bill.

BLAKE

Our rescue team has handed the search over to the Coast Guard. We still can't find any witnesses who heard any more than a single splash and the rescuers haven't found anyone or anything in the water, but a Miss Renee Walters is unaccounted for.

BILL

Has the maintenance chief reported?

BLAKE

Yes, he has. Pursuing your theory that Miss Walters could still be on board, the crew has completed that preliminary inventory of the aft section. They report one piece of furniture missing - a small veranda table - from an unoccupied stateroom on the same hallway as Miss Walters'.

BILL

That's interesting, but those tables are made of aluminum. They wouldn't make much of a splash - or float.

BLAKE

Yes, but if you added some weight, it might sound like a body hitting the water and it might even sink.

BILL

Good work, Blake. Kelly, did you find anything unusual in that inventory of Renee's room... Renee Walter's room?

Kelly quickly grabs a set of forms and scans through them.

KELLY

Yes, one thing. Let's see... Here it is. Huh! There was a half-empty roll of duct tape found under the bed.

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BLAKE

Boy, I tell ya boss. If you're right about this - and we find her - alive! You'd definitely get that promotion at the detective agency - and get to work back on dry land again.

BILL

That'd be nice, but now, I'm focused on finding our missing passenger. We only have a few hours until we make port. I need you and Kelly to get that maintenance chief and his team to search all parts of the aft that haven't been searched yet, including secure areas and all storage rooms.

BLAKE

You got it boss.

INT. - THE SECURITY OFFICE - ONE HOUR LATER

BLAKE

Sure enough! There she was - just sitting there in that dusty room where we store holiday decorations.

BILL

Has she said anything?

BLAKE

Not a word. She looked like she was about to, but then stopped herself.

BILL

Thanks, Blake. I got it from here.

Bill looks up at the security monitor showing the hallway outside the security office. He sees Emily, a stateroom hostess exiting the office, after an interview with Kelly. Bill noticed the man with the premature gray walk up to Emily, say a couple sentences, then leave. Bill furrows his brow for a moment and then he walks away from the monitor.

Bill enters the room with the small conference table and sits down next to a video camera on a tripod. The camera is pointing at an attractive young woman sitting across the table. She has dust on her clothes and she seems scared and confused. Bill turns on the camera and looks at some papers.

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BILL (cont'd)
Please say your name for the record.

The woman looks at Bill, then up at the blinking red light above the camera lens, sighs and looks down at the table.

RENEE
My name is Renee Walters.

BILL
Miss Walters, you are under no obligation to speak to me. I do not have arrest authority, you have not been read your rights and you have no legal counsel present. Understood?

RENEE
Yes.

BILL
Good. However, we will be in port soon and the FBI have been briefed on this situation. They'll meet us at the dock and you could face a variety of charges, unless you cooperate now.

RENEE
What more do you want from me?

BILL
Why did you pretend to jump ship?

RENEE
I didn't. I just...

BILL
According to our records here, you received a room service delivery at 5:37. The waitress, Sharon, says you answered the door in a bikini. Yes?

RENEE
Sounds right. I'd been lying out on my veranda most of the afternoon and didn't want to go to the restaurant.

BILL
Lying out? On such a hot, sunny day?

RENEE
Yes, about three or four hours. So?

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BILL

Aren't you a cancer survivor, Miss Walters? Skin cancer, I believe. Your stateroom attendant, Emily, told us that you had mentioned it to her.

RENEE

Yeah? So what?

BILL

It just seems strange to me that a skin cancer survivor would lay outside on a sunny day for most of the afternoon with no sun screen.

RENEE

What are you talking about? Of course I use sun screen! Every single time I've laid out since the surgery!

BILL

This is an inventory that we took of your room while you were missing and there's no mention of sun screen. None on the dresser or in the bathroom. No empty bottles in the trash. None. Can you explain that?

RENEE

What is this all about?

BILL

I've been in touch with the attorney for the cruise line and she's waiting for my recommendation on whether we should press charges. In short, what you say here in the next few minutes may bear heavily on your future.

Bill leans forward over the table and smiles slyly at Renee.

INT. - THE SECURITY OFFICE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Bill is at his desk talking on the phone. Blake and Kelly are standing next to him, listening.

BILL

That's right, counselor. She says she was being harassed by another passenger and had started to fear for her safety.

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BILL (cont'd)

She says she didn't know if our office could do anything about it and since we were less than twelve hours from port, she thought that making people think she had gone overboard would buy her time and enable her to sneak off the ship without this guy looking for her at debarkation... Well, it's up to you, but I wouldn't press charges. She has expressed remorse and we tied this one up pretty quickly. No real harm done. Yes. Yes. I appreciate that... Sure. I'll do that. Thank you, Pam.

Bill hangs up the phone and turns towards Blake and Kelly.

BILL (cont'd)

The attorney is going to advise the line not to press charges. Better to keep this one quiet. Cut Renee loose.

BLAKE

Will do, boss. But maybe we should keep an eye on her, in case that guy tries to bother her anymore tonight.

BILL

Uh, yeah. Good idea. I should've thought of that. Too tired, I guess. Yeah, advise her to stay in her room for the rest of the night. Arrange for room service to deliver her breakfast and comp it. Escort her off the ship at 9 a.m., after all of the other passengers have disembarked.

BLAKE

Good plan, boss. Leave it to me.

BILL

I will. I'm going back to my room to get some sleep before debarkation. Kelly, you're in charge of the office in Blake's absence, until Kerry comes on duty. Brief her and get some rest.

KELLY

Yes, sir. We'll call if we need you.

Bill laughs as he walks down the hall towards his room.

INT. - THE SECURITY OFFICE - TWO AND A HALF HOURS LATER
Bill walks into the office bleary-eyed and sees Blake.

BILL
Blake, what's up? Why did you call?

BLAKE
It's like I told you on the phone.
There's been a development regarding
the woman, Miss Walters.

BILL
What development? What's going on?

BLAKE
We can brief you in the meeting room.

Bill opens the door to the meeting room and sees Kelly, Kerry, ROBIN PENN (the ship's captain), Renee and the tall man with the premature gray hair, all seated at the table. There's a speaker phone in the middle of the table.

ROBIN
Sit down, Bill.

Bill sits down, glaring at the man with the premature gray.

BILL
Who the hell is this?

ROBIN
Bill, meet Robert Bacon. He's been
working this cruise under cover.

ROBERT
Bill, I was contracted by your agency
to evaluate your work on this cruise
as they considered you for promotion.

BILL
Considered? Past tense?

ROBERT
The evaluation is indeed over, Bill,
and I have to congratulate you. You,
William Charles, are the first
detective in the history of your
agency to be fired for cause.

BILL
FIRED?!? But I just solved...

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ROBERT

I thought something was fishy about tonight's situation, so I started to dig. Only someone with your level of clearance could've hidden someone in the least utilized storage room on the ship. When you let Miss Walters go, I had a little chat with her.

RENEE

Yeah, they know all about you hiring me through my acting agent to pretend to throw myself overboard. I needed that \$10,000 to pay the rest of my medical bills from the cancer center, but I'm not going to jail for it! Directing the searchers to where you hid me, instead of sneaking me off the ship as agreed, might have made it seem like a better story for your bosses, but you pushed me too far! At first, I thought if I kept quiet, everything would be okay, but then...

ROBERT

I told her that whether or not the cruise line pressed charges, she'd have to answer for the unnecessary Coast Guard rescue operation.

PAM (ON SPEAKER PHONE)

And I advised her that if she didn't come clean before she left the ship, and she got arrested, no one would believe her story, but if she told us what really happened, we'd be able to help her out with the authorities.

ROBIN

And the FBI agents you contacted to put more pressure on Miss Walters to keep quiet are still meeting the ship ...and then they'd like to meet you.

The Captain stands and everyone else but Bill follows suit.

ROBIN (cont'd)

Good work, team. I'll be putting a letter of commendation into each of your personnel files. Blake, you're now the acting chief of security.

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BLAKE

Thank you very much, ma'am.

ROBIN

But before we decide whether to give
you the position permanently, you've
GOT to replace that little black bag
that you run around the ship with.
That thing always makes it look like
you're up to something!

Everyone laughs and they leave the room. The door closes,
but then reopens seconds later. Blake sticks his head in.

BLAKE

Looks like you won't be getting that
promotion after all, huh, "boss"?

Blake closes the door and turns the bolt, loudly locking the
door. Startled by the sound, Bill looks at the door lock and
then slowly turns, staring blankly at the blank wall.

FADE OUT