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Dramatic Publishing

Heubner the Reluctant

A Play in One Act

by

ALAN HAEHNEL



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(HEUBNER THE RELUCTANT)

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Reviews from Festival Judges and Directors

“Loved the script! Powerful show! Strong individual characterizations...nice visual, auditory piece...very funny lines...my cast was in tears when it was over. Their makeup was ruined.”

Tracey Wesley, Long Trail High School, Dorset, Vt.

“You [Alan Haehnel] captured what theater is all about: making a story come real and the importance of it, that without making stories real the Craven win! Congratulations on a great story!”

Bill Vinton, St. Johnsbury Academy, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

“One of the best moments of theatre I have seen in a while; on the professional level.”

*John Walker, Festival Judge, Vermont State Festival,
St. Johnsbury, Vt.*

“I want to thank you [Alan Haehnel] for a great story that unfolded very naturally and kept us enthralled. Just a great show!”

Rebecca Brown, Peoples Academy, Montpelier, Vt.

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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

HEUBNER THE RELUCTANT was first presented at Hartford High School in White River Junction, Vermont, in February of 2003. It was directed by the author, Alan Haehnel, and included the following:

CAST

Heubner CARTER BEIDLER
Floating Woman BRIDGETT DORNIK,
KAITLIN HAEHNEL, CHRISTINE GIFFORD
Historian KAHT NORTH
Cristoff RIGEL CABLE
General JULIA EDDY
Messenger BRIGID GUARINO
Warriors . . . ANNA KNAPP, BREANNA MOHLA, BRIGID GUARINO,
CHRISTY DORNIK, INGRID WEISS, JESSIE STUART,
EMILY FINNEGAN, KAHT NORTH, MELINDA QUILLIA,
WENDY TUCKER
First Two Craven TOM HENCK, NICK WOOD
Young Heubner WENDY TUCKER
Voice in the Cave NICK WOOD
Craven ANNA BORCHERT, JORDAN WOOD,
NICK WOOD, TOM HENCK, ZACH MAYER, RYAN FRAZER,
NICOLE HARD, CHRISSY HAWKINS, HAILLEY THERRIALT,
MICHELLE PANNIELLO, JENNIFER RIGGS, KELLY ADAMS,
HOLLY CONRAD, K. BEVIN AYERS, EMILY SMITH

PRODUCTION STAFF

Box Director ALEX KOZAK
Lighting Design JESSICA CLIFFORD
Costume Design PAULA STEVENS
Make-up Design MARCIA KNAPP

HEUBNER THE RELUCTANT

A Play in One Act
For 2m., 9w., 12 either

CHARACTERS

HEUBNER. a reluctant storyteller
FLOATING WOMAN. Heubner's floating guide
CRISTOFF. Heubner's neighbor
HISTORIAN
GENERAL leader of the warrior women
MESSENGER a warrior woman
HEUBNER THE YOUNGER Heubner's younger self
THE HEAD one of the Craven
WARRIOR WOMEN (7)
CRAVEN (10) . . the enemy who wield the Unseen Swords

CAST NOTES: Heubner and Cristoff may be cast as women. If this is done, change the names to Helga and Berdine, respectively.

The Warrior Women and the Craven could be ensembles of 5-20 each.

SET DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The design of the set should mirror one of the main character's major questions: Is this a dream? The set will need to be constructed in such a way that it can move and transform in front of the audience, from Heubner's shack to open sky to a lake to a cave and back to Heubner's shack. Large pieces of cloth may achieve the desired effect, as may many separate pieces of wood or other rigid material which actors or technicians might move or hide behind. The audience should see that, though the scenes change, they are all created from the same material, like a mass of clay that is being shaped and reshaped.

HEUBNER THE RELUCTANT

(In darkness we hear a low, ominous drone. As the lights come up dimly, we see a raised platform spinning slowly. In the center of the platform, asleep, lies HEUBNER. He jerks in his sleep, dreaming. We see a brief flash of his dream, R: red light illuminates a female WARRIOR being struck by a black, wraith-like adversary. No weapons are visible; they fight in pantomime. At this flash of HEUBNER's vision, we hear the deep clang of steel against steel, striking once. As the platform continues to spin, we see this nightmare vision several more times. Each flash brings with it the clash of metal—once at one point, twice at another, then once again, coinciding with the strikes the wraith-like figure lands against the WARRIOR. Eventually, another sound comes in over the drone and replaces it: the sound of a beautiful, wordless song from three female voices. Near the end of this opening scene, the flashes become more frequent and the swords sound over and over until HEUBNER screams out. At HEUBNER's scream, the lights suddenly brighten, fully illuminating HEUBNER and the platform, which represents his rude home.)

HEUBNER. Wha...! Oh, horrible dreams, horrible. Must have been something I ate. When did I last eat? Must have been something I didn't eat, then. Oh, Heubner,

Heubner, you are a sorry wretch, alone, hungry and yammering to yourself. If only words were food! Then I'd have a belly full! Pork pie...what a delicious word. Pork pie. *(He claps his teeth as if eating the word.)* Very unsatisfying. Go back to sleep, Heubner. Yes, Heubner, I will. Don't dream anymore, Heubner. No, Heubner, I won't. Stop talking to yourself, Heubner. Yes, Heubner, I will. *(He lies quietly for a moment, then sits back up again suddenly, bumps himself in the head with the flat of his hand, looks puzzled.)* I was asleep and I heard singing in my dream. But now I'm awake and I still... *(The singing stops suddenly.)* Now it's gone. Leftovers, I guess. Dream leftovers. Why couldn't I have pork pie leftovers? Sleep, Heubner. Yes, Heubner.

(Through the black curtain directly upstage of HEUBNER's platform, a FLOATING WOMAN in startling white enters. HEUBNER does not see her.)

FLOATING WOMAN *(speaking with the voice of many).*

Heubner.

HEUBNER. I am sleeping, Mother. Goodnight, Mother.

FLOATING WOMAN. Heubner, you are the Chosen. I have come for you.

HEUBNER. That's nice, Mother. *(He sits up suddenly again, turns to see the FLOATING WOMAN in white floating in his room, screams and scuttles back away from her.)* You're, you're, you're...

FLOATING WOMAN. Heubner, you are the Chosen one.

HEUBNER. A leftover. A floating woman leftover. That's fine. That is perfectly fine, Heubner. Just go back to sleep and she'll go away.

FLOATING WOMAN. Heubner, you are not dreaming. I have come for you.

HEUBNER. You have... Oh. Oh! So you're it. So I'm... forgive me, but I always thought the Angel of Death would be a man. Tell me, am I dead or about to die? Minor question, I realize, but I'm just curious. Actually, a more important question is this: Is there good food in heaven?

FLOATING WOMAN. Heubner, you are the Chosen.

HEUBNER. You said that before, at least once. And I understand. Everyone has to go sometime. It will be said, I'm sure, that I died of starvation. Not my preferred method of leaving this earthly existence—I mean, I would rather people were able to say, “Poor Heubner, he died from eating too many raspberry tarts and pork pies”—but death is death and I realize I have little choice in the matter. But back to my original question.

FLOATING WOMAN. The hour is fast approaching, Heubner, for the great battle. We need you, Chosen One.

HEUBNER. I don't like the sounds of “the great battle.” My understanding of death is that it is a great sleep, a great rest, and, I hope, a great banquet. Never, in any of my reading or listening—and I have heard a great many tales in my life, too many, truth be told—I have never heard of any “great battles” in the great beyond, though I suppose it's possible that the maggots could fight over which of my parts would be tastiest.

FLOATING WOMAN. Chosen One!

(The HISTORIAN—in a deep purple robe, the face obscured in shadow—rises through the floor.)

HEUBNER. I prefer just plain Heubner, if you don't mind, though Chosen One does...

HISTORIAN. Heubner Harrison, son of Harris, son of Grandalf, son of Medilene, son of Jether the Great, Twelfth Oracle of the Fifth Reign of the Kings whose gift of story saved a nation from The Great Forgetting. Heubner, great-great-grandson of that noble Oracle, by blood, by word, by spirit, is, indeed, the Chosen. (*The HISTORIAN sinks back through the floor.*)

HEUBNER. Clearly, then, I'm not going to heaven. The other place it is. Is there good food there? I'm very hungry. Eternal torment, I realize, is supposed to be bad, but if you've got a fire burning down there anyway, might I have the chance to, say, roast a good bit of venison?

FLOATING WOMAN. Take my hand, Heubner, and we will depart.

HEUBNER. I'm not generally accustomed to taking the hands of floating people. Tell me, you are the Angel of Death, aren't you?

FLOATING WOMAN. Chosen One, we must go.

HEUBNER. You know, I'm beginning to think you might have the wrong person entirely. Try two doors down, a fellow named Cristoff. He's been looking very chosen lately.

FLOATING WOMAN. Believe, Heubner. You are the Chosen!

HEUBNER. I'd like to believe that if I only knew a couple things: What exactly am I chosen for and will I be fed for the honor?

FLOATING WOMAN. The Craven approach for the final battle. The ground will shake with the force of their coming.

HEUBNER. Craven? Battle? I very much dislike the gist of...

FLOATING WOMAN (*receding behind the curtain*). The ground will shake with the force of their coming. The ground will shake with the force of their coming.

HEUBNER (*after a moment of silence*). You know, Heubner, now would be an excellent time for a bit of warm milk; perhaps, even, some rum. If you had either, you could fall blissfully into... (*From under the floor comes a rumbling sound, and then the floor begins to shake. Along with the rumbling comes a sound of distant screaming. HEUBNER stumbles, falls, tries to get back up, falls again. When the shaking, rumbling and screaming fade and finally stop, HEUBNER lies on the floor breathing hard, terrified.*) The...the...place looks the same as it did before. This could still be a dream.

(CRISTOFF bursts in suddenly from offstage, running up a ramp onto HEUBNER's platform.)

CRISTOFF. Heubner! Heubner, did you feel that?

HEUBNER. You felt that?

CRISTOFF. It shook me out of my bed!

HEUBNER. I thought I was dreaming. You felt it?

CRISTOFF. How could I not feel it? The trees, the houses, everything shook! What was it?

HEUBNER. It was, it was, a big shaking.

CRISTOFF. A tremendous shaking!

HEUBNER. Yes. And you felt it. That is comforting, in a way.

CRISTOFF. Do you know what I think? Here is my theory: The sun seemed to go down very quickly last night,

quicker than I have ever seen it. So, when it landed, it hit the other side of the earth with so much force that it caused this, this shaking. That's what I think happened.

HEUBNER. Cristoff, why are you in my house?

CRISTOFF. Well, I...

HEUBNER. If I remember correctly, the last time you were in my house, you called me a good-for-nothing storyteller who can't even tell a story. Do you remember that?

CRISTOFF. Dimly.

HEUBNER. And I told you if you ever set foot in my house I would tear out your hair and make myself a new rug of it.

CRISTOFF. I remember that, yes. But Heubner, I rushed in here in a fit of great concern for your health when the ground shook, and because I had to talk to someone, so don't you think that might be reason enough for a brief truce?

HEUBNER. Truce it is, for long enough for me to ask you one question, Cristoff.

CRISTOFF. A one-question truce. Does that include time enough for my answer?

HEUBNER. One question, one answer. And then you leave here immediately, or I'll have your hide, you filthy dog.

CRISTOFF. Agreed. You question, I answer, I leave with my hide unskinned.

HEUBNER. Now. Before you came in, I thought that everything that was happening to me was a dream, including the shaking.

CRISTOFF. Was that the question?

HEUBNER. No, just introduction.

CRISTOFF. So the truce includes introduction, question, answer, and then I leave. (*HEUBNER gives him a warning look.*) Please continue, Heubner.

HEUBNER. So, if the shaking was real, then can I assume that everything else that was happening before the shaking was also real? For instance, if a floating woman in white who spoke with a voice of many said to me, "Heubner, you are the Chosen," and "The ground will shake with the force of their coming," then that was real, too?

CRISTOFF. That's the question?

HEUBNER. That's the question.

CRISTOFF (*after a long pause*). What did I call you before, when you got so angry at me that you never wanted me to set foot in your house again?

HEUBNER. You said I was a good-for-nothing storyteller who couldn't even tell a story.

CRISTOFF. But I didn't say you were out of your mind, did I?

HEUBNER. No.

CRISTOFF. I should have.

HEUBNER. Oh, you... (*He moves as if to strike CRISTOFF. CRISTOFF runs away.*)

CRISTOFF (*off*). You're crazy, Heubner!

HEUBNER. I don't care if the ground shakes and the sun falls on your head, don't you ever come back to my house, Cristoff!

(Behind HEUBNER, the FLOATING WOMAN has reappeared. Though dressed as before, her face is different. Her voice, however, is the same. HEUBNER mumbles as he turns away from where CRISTOFF has exited.)

HEUBNER. Comes here, in my own house, and tells me...

(Sees the FLOATING WOMAN.) Aaaah! Don't you ever knock like any decent human being? You know, Angel of Death or not, you really should learn manners.

FLOATING WOMAN. You are the Chosen, Heubner. You must believe.

HEUBNER. I...you're not the same one who was here before.

FLOATING WOMAN. I am multitudes, Heubner.

HEUBNER. Oh. Am I supposed to understand that?

FLOATING WOMAN. The hour is fast approaching. We must go.

HEUBNER. What hour? Where are we going? What am I chosen for? What battle? Who are you?

FLOATING WOMAN. You are the Chosen. You must believe.

HEUBNER. And why do you keep repeating yourself?

FROM THE FLOOR BENEATH HEUBNER. Believe!

HEUBNER *(jumping away)*. Ah! I suspected I had mice, but...

FROM THE FLOOR BENEATH HEUBNER. Believe!

HEUBNER. I heard you! *(Referring to the FLOATING WOMAN.)* I heard her! Why can't someone explain...

FROM THE FLOOR ALL AROUND HEUBNER. Believe!

HEUBNER. All right, all right. *(Crossing to the FLOATING WOMAN.)* I assume you have something to do with...with...whatever is under here. Could I have just a moment without a "Believe" or "The ground will shake" or "You are the Chosen" or any of that, from anywhere, for just a moment, so I can gather my thoughts? *(She says nothing.)* Answering would be the polite thing, but

I guess that's too much to ask so I'll just have to interpret the silence as a "Yes, I can have a moment." So thank you. (*He crosses away and starts to talk to himself.*) Are you the Chosen, Heubner? Chosen for what? I don't know. Should you go with her, Heubner? Go with her where? I don't know. Is this a dream, Heubner? It could be. But the ground did shake, and she did say it would, and Cristoff, that dirty dog, did affirm that it shook, and who's to say you didn't dream him coming in, too? For that matter, Heubner, all of your life to this point could be a dream and you could wake up to find that you are actually a well-fed king who only dreamt he was a starving beggar. Fat chance, Heubner.

FROM THE FLOOR BENEATH HEUBNER. Believe, Heubner!

HEUBNER. Oh, no! Not this again!

FROM THE FLOOR BENEATH HEUBNER. Believe!

HEUBNER. Of course, of course—now, everyone together.

FROM THE FLOOR. Believe! Believe! Believe!

HEUBNER. Three times for emphasis, as if I didn't hear you the first twelve times.

FROM THE FLOOR. Believe!

HEUBNER. Yes! Yes, I believe! Heubner, do you believe?

Heubner, yes I do. Yes, I am the Chosen. Yes, why not?

You have convinced me. (*To the FLOATING WOMAN.*)

You with the faces (*to the floor*) and you with the voices and the shaking, have made of Heubner a firm believer.

FLOATING WOMAN. Take my hand.

HEUBNER (*after a deep breath*). Knowing full well that there is at least a ninety percent chance that you are a dream, the product of a starved mind, I take your hand.

(As soon as HEUBNER touches the FLOATING WOMAN's hand, the platform flies apart. HEUBNER jumps onto the FLOATING WOMAN's dress, screaming long and loud. A spotlight centers on them. The platform, that had initially seemed whole, now breaks into nine individual boxes. Six move to line up extreme up-stage; three spin to reveal themselves as rocks in a cave. HEUBNER and the FLOATING WOMAN move down-stage; the main drape moves in to hide most of the action of the set movement isolating just HEUBNER and the FLOATING WOMAN. HEUBNER is hyperventilating.)

HEUBNER. We're, we're, we're, we're, why, we're, I... *(He looks down, moves his head as if watching things pass by far below him. He can barely keep from crying as he speaks.)* We're way up in the air. Way, way up in the...we're flying through the air. Goodbye, town. Hello, moon, stars. Hello, floating woman. *(He squeaks miserably.)* I really don't like it up here. Where are we going?

FLOATING WOMAN. To prepare for the great battle.

HEUBNER. Oh, that. Listen, dream or no, I think you have the wrong idea about me.

FLOATING WOMAN. You are the Chosen.

HEUBNER. Beyond a doubt, I am, but I get the feeling that what this endeavor calls for is a hero. And you see, I am not that. Oh, I don't know how birds do this. Flying does not agree with me. *(Looking off.)* That is a very large lake over there. Back to what I was saying: I am a coward. Believe me—"believe," that's a favorite word of yours—believe me when I say I would love to