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Family Plays

Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER

One-act drama by
Herman Ammann



THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER

Drama. By Herman Ammann. Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen. *Cast: 5m., 6w., extras.* While the birthday girl sleeps, the toys around her cake come alive and act out Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about the handicapped tin soldier who loved a dancing paper doll. Herman Ammann's unique ability to instill his characters with traits that make us think of our friends (and a few enemies) gives us a Phi Beta Kappa egghead named Humpty Dumpty, a slob of a shoe salesman named Prince Charming, a dyspeptic jack-in-the-box who hides when things get unpleasant and a monkey who "likes to monkey around with the pretty girls." Andersen's fairy tale was the foundation upon which this original play was built. Those familiar with the fairy tale will remember that the original tin soldier had only one leg and that he and his dancing doll (she was made of paper) had a tragic ending in a fire. This play adds not only a happy ending but also several new characters (including some old friends from other fairy tales) and a timely message. In the fairy tale, the tin soldier is melted into a lump resembling a heart; in this play the soldier grows a heart—which, as in the fairy tale, turns out to be the secret of his steadfastness. Whether played by adults for children or by children for adults—or by children for other children—*The Steadfast Tin Soldier* has that particular charm which alights only in the world of make believe: the personification of our suspicions that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of" in our sometimes drab world of reality. Simple costumes and a simple set, with a bit of music and special lighting if available, can bring out the magic of this charming play. The script itself will suggest many of these technical features. The busy director, however, will find the available directors script to be a delightful aid in staging. The director's script contains drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, and discussion of characterization, plot and theme, and it suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business. A children's play that charms audiences and delights actors of every age. *Simple set. Costumes: fairyland. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: S1A.*

I. E. Clark Publications

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170

Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.ieclark.com

ISBN-13 978-0-88680-186-1

ISBN-10 0-88680-186-9



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A One-Act Play

by

Herman Ammann

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-186-1

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THE STEADFAST TIN SOLDIER

***The Steadfast Tin Soldier* was presented for the first time on March 20, 1969, at the Schulenburg, Texas, High School Theatre Festival under the direction of Beuna West. The cast was as follows:**

***The Tin Soldier*.....Mark Meyer
Mother.....Barbara Bucek
Daddy.....Ray Grasshoff
Cook.....Betty Wagner
Good Fairy.....Amy Hawkins
Humpty Dumpty.....Billy Wagner
Monkey.....Alan Mikesky
Jack-in-the-Box.....Charlene Hepner
Witch.....Marilyn Lippman
Cindy, the dancing doll.....Nancy Sustr
Prince Charming Cad.....Mike Hepner
1st Lackey.....Debbie Winkler
2nd Lackey.....Suzanne Hafer
Sally.....Beth West**

Time: *The Present*

Place: *Sally's birthday party*

ABOUT THE PLAY

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," was the foundation upon which this original play was built. Those familiar with the fairy tale will remember that the original Tin Soldier had only one leg and that he and his dancing doll (she was made of paper) had a tragic ending in a fire.

This play adds not only a happy ending but several new characters (including some old friends from other fairy tales) and a timely message. In the fairy tale the Tin Soldier is melted into a lump resembling a heart; in this play the soldier grows a heart—which, as in the fairy tale, turns out to be the secret of his steadfastness.

Whether played by adults for children, or by children for adults—or by children for other children—"The Steadfast Tin Soldier" has that particular charm which alights only in the world of make-believe: the personification of our suspicions that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of" in our sometimes drab world of reality.

COSTUMES AND STAGING

Simple costumes and a simple set, with a bit of music here and there—and a dab of special lighting if available—can bring out the magic of this charming play. The script itself will suggest many of these technical features. The busy director, however, will find the 'STAGE MAGIC' Production Script, available for this play, to be a delightful aid in staging. The Production Script gives costume sketches, directions for the use of music and lighting effects, plans for building scenery, detailed stage directions, and other helpful suggestions.

The Steadfast Tin Soldier

By Herman Ammann and I. E. Clark

Before curtain opens, sound of drum is heard with beat very slow. Beat picks up, becoming very fast and loud. A voice cries, "CHARGE!" There is a crash of cymbals, flashing of lights. Pause. And then the drum beat begins again, slowly tapering off. Spotlight moves to left of apron and TIN SOLDIER enters. A cardboard boat, about five or six feet long, is attached to his waist, giving the illusion that he is floating across the stage from left to right—very slowly.

TIN SOLDIER. [*Looking about*] I seem to be having nothing but bad luck. First I lose an arm in the battle. Then a little boy puts me in this boat and sails it into this dark sewer. There are rats in here. I can hear them scurrying about. Will I ever see my dear Cindy again? I must remain brave and steadfast, but it is very hard. [*As he speaks, he moves slowly across stage and has almost arrived at the right side by the time he says the next line.*] What is that swimming this way? It is the biggest fish I have ever seen! It is as large as a whale and it's going to——... [*Lights go out just as a loud "gul-l-lp" is heard.*]

[*Curtain opens revealing a table, center stage. MOTHER and DADDY enter Up Left. MOTHER is carrying a birthday cake. DADDY is carrying a box. MOTHER places cake on center of table and DADDY sets box on floor.*]

MOTHER. Did you pick up the toys for Sally's birthday party?

DADDY. Yes, they're in the box. Has Sally gone to bed?

MOTHER. Yes, and right to sleep. I'm so glad she was tired. It will give me a chance to put out her gifts. I do hope

you got the little Dancing Doll!

DADDY. She's in the box.

MOTHER. [*Begins taking toys out of box*] Oh, here she is. [*Places Dancing Doll on table left of cake*] And old Humpty Dumpty. [*Puts him in the middle*] What a cute little Monkey! You stand next to Humpty. And no monkey business from you either. My goodness, a Jack-in-the-Box. I was hoping they still made them. I remember I had one when I was a little girl. I had more fun scaring people. [*Puts him in front of cake*] Here is the Good Fairy. All little girls have to have a Good Fairy around. [*Places Fairy on top of cake*] Say, where is Prince Charming?

DADDY. I couldn't get him. They were sold out.

MOTHER. What a shame. Sally wanted him for a sweetheart for the little Dancing Doll.

COOK. [*Runs in from Right*] My goodness, gracious me! Come here quick! Look what I found in a fish I was cleaning.

[*MOTHER meets cook at Right. Takes object from her.*]

MOTHER. Honey, look. [*Holds up Tin Soldier*] A Tin Soldier!

DADDY. I'll bet that fish had a stomach ache.

COOK. [*As she exits*] That's the funniest bait I ever saw!

MOTHER. Let's add him to Sally's gifts—he can be the Dancing Doll's sweetheart.

DADDY. Say, he has only one arm.

MOTHER. That doesn't make any difference. I'll just tell Sally he was wounded in battle. [*Puts him on table right of cake; backs off a bit*] You know, they look like real people, don't they?

DADDY. They surely do. Well, I think I'll go to bed. I have an idea we are going to get an early start in the morning. Coming? [*Exit Up Left*]

MOTHER. [*Admires table for a moment*] Yes, I believe you are right. [*Follows her husband UL. At exit she pauses for another look at table, puts her hand on light switch.*]

[**BLACKOUT.** When lights come on, the **TOYS** have become life size, but they are still arranged around the cake as **MOTHER** left them. (The cake may be a two-dimensional cut-out of cardboard or plywood, matching the size of the live dolls. The **GOOD FAIRY** may be perched on a ladder. The scene change may be accomplished quickly by using a scrim or a revolving stage. Otherwise, the table will have to be removed and the cake and jack-in-the-box placed on stage during the blackout.) As the lights brighten, we hear a clock striking midnight. At the last stroke, the **GOOD FAIRY** comes to life, surveys the tableau below her, and awakens the dolls, one at a time, by waving her wand at them. As each **DOLL** awakes—in the order in which they were placed on the table (**DANCING DOLL** first, **HUMPTY DUMPTY** next, and so on)—it walks downstage and exits—**CINDY** to the Right and others to the Left. Finally, only the **TIN SOLDIER** remains (plus the **JACK-IN-THE-BOX**, which is hidden in its box.) **GOOD FAIRY** waves her wand at **TIN SOLDIER**. He yawns, stretches, and comes alive. **FAIRY** climbs down and runs to him.]

TIN SOLDIER. [*XC, looks around, not sure where he is*] Where am I? Oh, this has been one long day. First I lose an arm in battle, then I get sailed through a sewer full of rats, a fish gobbles me, and if I weren't made of tin, I would most likely be chewed and digested.

GOOD FAIRY. [*X to him*] Hello, soldier boy. Welcome to Sally's birthday party.

TIN SOLDIER. I didn't think I'd ever make it. [*Looks at cake and around the room*] Who else will be here? Do you think Cindy will come?

GOOD FAIRY. You mean the little Dancing Doll you used to know before the war?

TIN SOLDIER. She was my sweetheart...but I haven't heard from her in a long, long time. [*He suddenly puts his hand to his chest as though he felt a pain.*]

GOOD FAIRY. She'll be here. Why don't you sit down and rest—you look tired.

TIN SOLDIER. [*Looks for a place to sit and sees MONKEY and HUMPTY DUMPTY approaching off UL*] Look, here comes a monkey...and an egg!

GOOD FAIRY. That's Humpty Dumpty—don't you remember him?

TIN SOLDIER. Oh, sure. I think I've helped pull him together several times.

[*MONKEY and HUMPTY DUMPTY enter UL.*]

MONKEY. Hi, Fairy. I'm all washed and powdered, and I combed my hair all over—so let's start the party!

HUMPTY DUMPTY. Thank heavens there are no walls at this one.

MONKEY. [*Spying JACK-IN-THE-BOX's box*] Chirping chimps! Look at that big box! A present for me, I bet! [*He runs to it and hops on top, trying to open the lid. HUMPTY DUMPTY X to left of box, and FAIRY and SOLDIER to right of it.*]

FAIRY. Watch out—curiosity killed the cat, you know.

HUMPTY. And I have a feeling it's about to murder a monkey.

[*Box lid pops open, throwing MONKEY to floor, C. Head of the JACK-in-the-BOX pops up.*]

JACK. Surprise! Surprise! [*Everybody laughs at MONKEY sprawled on floor looking bewildered.*]

GOOD FAIRY. [*Clapping her hands*] Birthday parties are great fun. I have been going to them for about a thousand years.

HUMPTY. I manage to scramble to a few now and then myself.

JACK. [*Sarcastically*] Why would anybody want a scrambled egg at a party?

TIN SOLDIER. I wish my sweetheart would show up at this one. I have such a strange feeling here [*puts hand to chest*]...

MONKEY. [*Interrupting, rubbing his seat*] I've got a funny feeling *here!*

TIN SOLDIER. [*Continuing to rub his chest*] It feels just like something is growing inside me. And somehow I have a feeling it has something to do with Cindy.

JACK. Girls he wants! Yuk! [*Disappears, closing his lid after him*]

GOOD FAIRY. [*To Tin Soldier*] Cheer up. You're just tired from all the things that have happened to you. She'll be along after a bit. You know how girls are. They like to make an entrance.

[*There is a loud knock at door UR.*]

TIN SOLDIER. I'll get it. It is probably Cindy. [*Opens door and WICKED WITCH comes barreling in on a broom. She runs about the room laughing loudly. Stops at C, faces audience*] I am the Wicked Witch Cad. I get mad when people are glad. I'm going to spoil this party. [*Runs about laughing*] Har-de-har-har-de-harty!

HUMPTY. How do you propose to do that, madam?

WITCH. [*Ignores him, looks at TIN SOLDIER, who backed DR on Witch's entrance*] Your girlfriend didn't write when you were in the army, did she? [*Jabs finger at him*]

TIN SOLDIER. No, she hasn't written. She has probably been busy.

WITCH. I'll say she's been busy. She's been dating Prince Charming.

GOOD FAIRY. [*XDRC*] You mean the shoe salesman?

WITCH. That shoe stuff is just a clever bit he uses with all the girls. Tells them he has a glass slipper that will fit their feet. [*She laughs raucously and hops about, stopping at D C.*]

TIN SOLDIER. [*XDC*] I have always heard Prince Charming was quite a decent fellow.

WITCH. Oh, you are a dumbo! [*Thumping his head*] Just an empty tin can. Charming is his middle name. [*Smirks*] Last name's Cad.

GOOD FAIRY. You mean he's your—?

WITCH. That's right, girlie. He's my boy. [*Bounces up and down on broom*] He is going to come over here after a

while and take your girl [*facing Tin Soldier*] away from you. [*Laughs raucously again and hops about stage, stopping at C. FAIRY X to Soldier.*]

TIN SOLDIER. I am steadfast in my love. Right is might.

MONKEY. [*Hops to his feet, X to Tin Soldier*] You are too nice. I am going to toss her and her broom right out of this room. [*Advances toward Witch, standing upright and sparring like an old time English fighter. Doesn't land any blows. WITCH waits until he is close and then clouts him over the head with her broom. He turns around holding his head and bending over. She whacks him on the seat with broom. This banging—alternately on the head and seat—happens again and again. He runs to Humpty for protection.*]

WITCH. Who's next? He didn't even warm me up!

MONKEY. She's a mean one. A regular old switch-witch. Boy! [*Alternately rubs head and seat of pants*]

HUMPTY. [*X to her*] Could we pay you to leave us alone?

WITCH. Nope. I am a rich witch.

HUMPTY. That is the trouble with the world. The wrong people have all the money.

GOOD FAIRY. You cast an evil spell.

MONKEY. [*Holding his nose*] You sure do!

WITCH. [*Threatening with her broom*] She said "spell"—S-P-E-L! You ape!

TIN SOLDIER. [*Begins to approach her threateningly, then hesitates and says, aside, as he XDRC*] I would cast her out myself if I weren't so honorable. It is not right to wrestle with a lady.

WITCH. What do you propose to do about it, Dearie? [*Raises broom and advances toward Good Fairy*] A couple of whacks with my broom—

GOOD FAIRY. [*Advances toward Witch, sighs*] They never learn. [*She jabs her Magic Wand at the Witch. Wand glows. WITCH waggles broom in air, then sinks slowly to the floor.*]

WITCH. [*Begins crawling out of room to Right, dragging*

broom and crying] Oh, you are so good, you make me sick.
[*Leaves UR*]

HUMPTY. She'll recover; they always do.

GOOD FAIRY. Yes, I am afraid she will.

TIN SOLDIER. Don't worry, dear friends. I'll protect you to the end. [*He again grabs his chest as though he is having a severe pain.*]

GOOD FAIRY. [*To Tin Soldier*] She said Cindy stopped writing you. You didn't tell me you had a quarrel with Cindy.

TIN SOLDIER. We didn't have a quarrel. She just quit writing. But I have been true to her.

GOOD FAIRY. We will get things patched up when she gets here. I don't think that Witch will cause any more trouble.

TIN SOLDIER. The Witch doesn't bother me nearly as much as that Prince does. Cindy has never been able to get a shoe to fit her feet. And that's especially bad for a dancing girl. That glass slipper gives the Prince a great advantage.

[*Knock at the door UR*]

MONKEY. Knock, knock. Who's there?

HUMPTY. Just hear the baboon babble. Open the door, not your mouth!

GOOD FAIRY. Yes, open the door.

TIN SOLDIER. I will open the door— [*he starts to move but moves very slowly, and after two slow steps he stops altogether.*]

MONKEY. I thought you were going to open the door. What happened?

GOOD FAIRY. Yes, what's wrong?

TIN SOLDIER. Well, if you must know, I seem to have a dead battery.

HUMPTY. The worst thing that can happen to a Tin Soldier—or any other toy for that matter—is to have a dead battery.

MONKEY. They tell me some real live dolls have the same trouble.

HUMPTY. This is no time to be funny. Plug him into the recharger.

[*TIN SOLDIER has almost collapsed. MONKEY leads him to left side of Jack-in-the-Box, setting him on the floor and leaning him against the box.*]

MONKEY. Where is the recharge unit? I don't see one anywhere. This is awful. [*Hunts for it, ending at UR.*]

HUMPTY. It is a disaster. Toys without a recharge unit!

GOOD FAIRY. Don't be alarmed. My Magic Wand has one built right into it. [*She demonstrates, causing the tip of the wand to light up. She X to Tin Soldier and puts the Wand into his hands.*] When it lights up, he will be recharged.

HUMPTY. It is a great relief. When Sally gets to playing with us tomorrow, I have an idea we will all need recharging.

[*Louder knock at the door*]

MONKEY. Looks like I will have to get the door. [*Admits DANCING DOLL, who pirouettes around stage, ending at C.*]

HUMPTY. [*XLC*] Who are you?

DANCING DOLL. I am the Pretty Little Dancing Doll. They call me Cindy.

MONKEY. [*Aside, at R*] Now there is something I'd like to monkey around with.

GOOD FAIRY. [*XRC*] Where have you been? We were expecting you some time ago.

CINDY. I am sorry to be late, but I had a date with a shoe salesman. He dresses up real cute like a Prince and says he is going to fit me with a glass slipper. [*Twirls happily about stage.*]

GOOD FAIRY. I suppose you mean Prince Charming. Are you in love with him?

CINDY. I don't know. He has me so confused. He and his mother live in a big castle and have a lot of money.

GOOD FAIRY. Are his intentions honorable?

CINDY. Oh yes, and I have agreed to be his if the shoe fits.

HUMPTY. You mean the glass slipper.

CINDY. [*Dancing again, ending at DLC*] I'll be the only dancing girl in the world with glass slippers.

GOOD FAIRY. You mentioned his mother. Have you ever met her?

CINDY. Oh, I wish you hadn't mentioned her. She is a terrible person. Rides around on a broom.

GOOD FAIRY. [*X to her*] But what about love? I heard something about your being in love with a Tin Soldier.

CINDY. It's true. [*XDRC as she thinks*] I once knew a Tin Soldier, and I did love him...but that was a long time ago. I don't even know whether or not he is still alive.

[*Groans, cackles, hoots, jeers come from JACK-IN-THE-BOX's box.*]

MONKEY. What is that?

HUMPTY. I don't know, but it doesn't sound good.

MONKEY. Sounds terrible.

JACK. [*Popping up*] Hello again, folks! I'm Jack-in-the-Box. I get my kicks giving other people licks!

HUMPTY. [*X to his right side*] You sound like a spoilsport. We have too many of those around here already.

GOOD FAIRY. Try to behave yourself, Jack.

CINDY. You act a bit rude.

GOOD FAIRY. Don't pay any attention to him, dear. Let's go to the Powder Room and freshen up a bit. I want to talk to you about your love life. [*CINDY and FAIRY exit DR.*]

MONKEY. [*XDC, watching girls; speaks to Humpty*] What is that thing she is wearing—a miniskirt?

HUMPTY. [*X to him*] That, my dear fellow, is a tutu.

MONKEY. What is the difference between a miniskirt and a tutu?

HUMPTY. About four inches.

MONKEY. You're an egghead all over. Where did you learn all these things?

HUMPTY. I am well read. [*XDLC*]

MONKEY. Red? I thought you were half yellow. [*X to him*] What is that medal you're wearing?

HUMPTY. That is no medal. It is a Phi Beta Kappa key.

MONKEY. A key. To what?

HUMPTY. It isn't *to* anything. [*XDRC. MONKEY follows*] It is an honorary award given me by men of letters. It is a recognition that I have attained a superior standard of academic excellence.

MONKEY. Funny I never noticed it before.

HUMPTY. [*XDLC*] I don't usually wear it, since I don't wish to appear ostentatious.

MONKEY. Os-ostacious?

HUMPTY. [*Facing him*] That means, as you would put it, showing off.

MONKEY. [*X to him*] Then why didn't you say so? Why use such a big word?

HUMPTY. [*XDRC*] I used it because it expressed what I meant clearly and precisely. Sometimes one word takes the place of a lot of other words.

MONKEY. [*X to him*] You mean like instead of saying something is causing me a lot of trouble and making me mad and I don't know what to do about it, I can just say, "It bugs me."

HUMPTY. Exactly.

MONKEY. [*Confidentially*] We have something in common. I have a key too.

HUMPTY. Really. Whatever for?

MONKEY. You won't tell anyone? [*Looking around, speaking more confidentially*] You see, I wouldn't want to appear ostacious, but I was kind of proud of my key when I got it.

HUMPTY. Come, my dear fellow, what is the key for? I won't tell anyone.

MONKEY. It is to the little room down the hall.

JACK. [*Pops up*] I thought he was going to say it was a Mon-Key. [*Pops back down*]

HUMPTY. You know, I like you, Monkey. There are a lot

of ways to be smart. You seem to be smart in a sort of dumb happy way.

MONKEY. Well, thank you for that lefthanded compliment, but I am not as happy as I could be. I would like to see the Tin Soldier win his girl back. He is brave enough, but when it comes to love, his coconut is as cracked as a rotten egg—[*looks at Humpty's egg shape and realizes what he has said*]—oops, pardon me.

JACK. [*Pops up, looks at soldier leaning against his box*] That Soldier is in bad shape. He hasn't a chance with that chick.

GOOD FAIRY. [*Re-enters DR*] Look, gang. We have a problem. [*XC, MONKEY and HUMPTY following*] We have to get Cindy and the Tin Soldier together again and all she can think about is that glass slipper.

JACK. The Soldier's all washed up. The army doesn't want him and now he's got a dead battery.

GOOD FAIRY. I'm worried about that. The recharger should have brought him around by now. I noticed it flicker when I came in, but it should have stayed on.

MONKEY. What else can we do?

GOOD FAIRY. Medicine and science can do only so much. The rest is up to the patient. But I do believe he has something else going for him. Something wonderful.

HUMPTY. Wonderful?

GOOD FAIRY. Yes, I believe he has a heart.

MONKEY. A heart?

JACK. What in the world is a heart?

GOOD FAIRY. It is a device that some people have, and it is a marvelous thing. Did you notice how he kept putting his hand to his chest—especially when Cindy was mentioned? I think that was a heart growing inside him.

MONKEY. But what is a heart good for?

GOOD FAIRY. Well, in a way it takes the place of a battery. Of course you need a battery, too, but a heart is something far superior. Yes, I would say he is very lucky. Only a few have a real heart.