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Dramatic Publishing

THE JUST SO STORIES

by
RUDYARD KIPLING

Adapted for the stage
by
JOSEPH ROBINETTE



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(THE JUST SO STORIES)

ISBN 1-58342-062-2

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ABOUT THE PLAY

Young Elsie Kipling is visiting her aunt while her parents are on a trip. She receives from her father a recently published copy of his new book, *The Just So Stories*, a series of animal adventures which were first told to the Kipling children.

Elsie proudly shares the stories with several new friends she has made while visiting her aunt, and they proceed to act out five of their favorites. In the process, Elsie becomes even more attached to her friends as she discovers something very important about them and herself as well.

THE JUST SO STORIES

A Play in One Act
For a cast of 8-21 (flexible)*
and two offstage adult voices – m and f

CHARACTERS

(for a cast of 8, with all roles interchangeable except for Elsie)

ELSIE KIPLING
AGNES (ARTHUR)
FAITH (FRANK)
LIZZIE (LEWIS)

GIRARD (GEORGETTE)
TEDDY (TRUDY)
BERT (BARB)
PETER (PATRICE)

The cast may consist of children or teenagers (or youthful adults) or any combination thereof.

TIME: The early 1900s.**

PLACE: The living room of an upper-class Victorian home.

* See production notes for a large cast

** Period costuming optional (see production notes)

THE JUST SO STORIES

SCENE: *The living room of an upper-class Victorian home. To the back, left and right, are doors—or openings—to a den and parlor, respectively, which may be partially visible. A door to the outside is at right, and a stairway leading to the second floor is at left. (NOTE: The stairway may be replaced with a door at left which leads to a bedroom.)*

AT RISE: *ELSIE KIPLING, a young girl, is calling to the upstairs area (or through the open door at left).*

ELSIE. Have a good rest, Aunt Georgie!

AUNT GEORGIE'S VOICE (*offstage*). Thank you, child! Wake me in an hour if I'm not up!

ELSIE. I will! (*She walks slowly away from the stairwell—or closes the door to the bedroom—and quietly moves to the center of the room, then calls loudly.*) All right—the coast is clear!

(*SEVEN CHILDREN—or early TEENAGERS—bound into the room with reckless abandon from the offstage den and parlor. They chatter animatedly as they pair up for games. PETER and AGNES play tag. LIZZIE and BERT engage in hide-and-go-seek. GIRARD and TEDDY*

play an "odd-even" fingers game, and FAITH joins ELSIE in a hand-clapping game.)

PETER (*tagging AGNES*). You're it, Agnes!

AGNES. You missed me by a mile, Peter! (*She tries to tag him.*) Anyway, I got you back.

PETER. Did not.

AGNES. Did, too. Elsie, you saw me tag Peter.

ELSIE. Sorry, I wasn't watching.

AGNES. Lizzie?

LIZZIE. I missed it, too. I'm playing hide-and-go-seek with Bert.

AGNES. Girard, you saw me tag him.

GIRARD. I'm playing odd-even with Teddy.

(He and TEDDY each quickly pump a closed fist three times, then "throw" two fingers each.)

TEDDY. Even—I win again!

GIRARD. Not fair. Agnes distracted me.

AGNES. Bert!

BERT (*popping up from behind a chair*). Don't ask me. I was hiding from— (*Realizing he has been seen by LIZZIE.*) —oh, no!

LIZZIE. Aha! Caught you. Now I get to hide.

FAITH. I know who tagged who!

(ALL await the answer.)

ELSIE. Well—who was it, Faith?

FAITH (*after a silence*). I'm not going to tell.

(Laughingly, ALL begin chasing FAITH about the room. They stop suddenly when a door chime is heard.)

ELSIE. Shh!

POSTMAN'S VOICE *(offstage)*. Parcel here. Parcel for

Miss Elsie Kipling, care of Lady Georgina Burne-Jones.

ELSIE. Quick. You've got to hide till he's gone.

TEDDY. He can't see us.

ELSIE. We don't know that for sure. Now, hurry.

(ALL find hiding places—two or three behind furniture pieces, the others just inside the adjoining rooms.)

POSTMAN'S VOICE. I say, is anyone here? I have a parcel for Miss—

(ELSIE opens the door at right and speaks to the POSTMAN who remains unseen just offstage.)

ELSIE. Hello.

POSTMAN'S VOICE. Good afternoon. And who might you be—Miss Kipling or Lady Burne-Jones?

ELSIE. I'm Elsie—Kipling. Aunt Georgie's upstairs *(In her room.)* taking a nap.

POSTMAN'S VOICE. Can you write your name in cur-sive?

ELSIE *(proudly)*. Yes.

POSTMAN'S VOICE. Then you may sign for the parcel yourself. *(A male hand thrusts a tablet and pencil to ELSIE who signs.)* This should have been delivered yesterday, but the regular postman is on vacation. *(ELSIE hands him the tablet and pencil.)* Nicely done. You have good

penmanship. Perhaps you'll be a famous writer like your father someday. *(The hand gives a parcel to ELSIE.)*

ELSIE. Thank you, sir. Good day.

(She closes the door, and ALL come out of their hiding places as ELSIE looks at the parcel.)

It's from Papa.

(She begins to open it as the OTHERS crowd around.)

LIZZIE. You never told us your father's a famous writer.

ELSIE. I don't like to brag. But I'm proud of him all the same.

TEDDY. What's in the package, Elsie?

ELSIE. I can hardly wait to see. *(Pulling out a book and letter.)*

LIZZIE. It's a book.

BERT. And a letter.

AGNES. What does it say?

PETER. Don't be so nosy, Agnes. *(He stands close behind ELSIE and tries to look at the letter.)*

ELSIE *(reading)*. "My dear Best Beloved—" *(To the OTHERS.)* That's what he calls me—Best Beloved. *(Reading.)* "While Mum and Little John and I are away, I'm sending you the very first copy of our brand new book. It really is *our* book, because if it weren't for you and dear Josephine— *(She hesitates for a moment.)* —I would never have written this book."

FAITH *(reading the title)*. "The Just So Stories."

GIRARD. "By Rud-yard Kipling."

BERT. Are these the stories you told us?

ELSIE (*nodding*). And these are the pictures he drew for them. (*She flips to different pages as ALL react favorably to the pictures. She reads again.*) "Have you made any friends yet at Aunt Georgie's?" (*ALL exchange nods and smiles with ELSIE.*) "If so, maybe you could read the stories to them, then act them out the way you and Mum and—dear Josephine—and I used to do. All our love, Best Beloved. We'll be by for you a day earlier than planned. Tell Aunt Georgie we'll pick you up late Saturday. Fondly, Papa."

PETER. Saturday.

FAITH. That's today.

TEDDY. Well, we haven't much time.

ELSIE. Time for what?

LIZZIE. Time to act out the stories—like your father said.

(*ALL agree enthusiastically.*)

ELSIE. But I have chores to do. And now I have to pack as well.

BERT. But you already told us the stories.

AGNES. Now all we have to do is act them out. Please?

ELSIE (*looking at their eager faces*). Oh, all right. I suppose we can do a *few* of the stories. The shorter ones anyway. (*ALL cheer.*) That way I can let Aunt Georgie rest a little longer before telling her I have to leave today.

FAITH (*looking over Elsie's shoulder*). Which one shall we do first?

GIRARD (*looking over ELSIE's shoulder*). "How the Camel Got His Hump." That's my favorite. And since I chose it, I get to be the camel.

ELSIE. Very well.

PETER. That's no fair. *I* want to be the camel. He's the main character.

ELSIE. There'll be plenty of main characters to go around. (*Looking through the pages of the story.*) Peter, you can be the horse.

PETER (*with a whinny*). Yeeeeees!

ELSIE. Lizzie, the dog.

LIZZIE (*with a growl*). Grrrrreat!

ELSIE. Teddy—the ox.

TEDDY (*an "ox-like" drawl*). Oh, thank you!

ELSIE. And Bert—the Djinn.*

BERT (*excitedly*). The Djinn! I get to be the Djinn. Wait a minute—what's a Djinn anyway?

FAITH. Don't you remember, silly? He's the man of magic.

BERT. Oh yeah. The magic man. I'm perfect for the part.

FAITH. Of course. Whenever you walk into a room, everybody disappears.

(*ALL laugh as BERT playfully chases FAITH.*)

ELSIE. Agnes, you can be the farmer...*and* you can also be the water, along with Faith.

FAITH. Water?

ELSIE. There's a pond in this story.

AGNES. How can we be water?

ELSIE. Use your imaginations.

FAITH. I'd rather use water.

ELSIE. Okay. Everyone has a part. You already know the story, so just make up the words as you go along... And

* Pronounced "De-JIN."

use anything you find to help you with your characters. Okay, everybody into the den or the parlor until you're called on to enter.

(ALL except ELSIE exit excitedly, dividing themselves between the den and parlor.)

Ready?

ALL *(offstage)*. Ready!

ELSIE *(reading)*. "How the Camel Got His Hump."* ...
"In the beginning when the world was so new and all, the Animals were created to be Man's helpers. The Horse—"

(The HORSE enters whinnying.)

HORSE. I was created to give Man rides on my back.

ELSIE. "—the Dog—"

(The DOG enters barking.)

DOG. I was created to fetch things—like Man's slippers and such.

ELSIE. "—the Ox—"

(The OX enters.)

* NOTE: All characters in the stories are referred to with masculine pronouns. Feminine pronouns may be substituted, if desired, when females play the characters.

OX. I was created to help Man plow the fields and other 'scrucciatingly heavy burdens.

ELSIE. "And there was another animal created when the world was so new and all. The Camel—" (*A pause.*) The Camel! (*Another pause.*) The Camel!

(The CAMEL, without a hump, enters nonchalantly—almost disdainfully—muttering two or three "humphs.")

Tell them what *you* were created for.

CAMEL (*with his nose in the air*). Humph.

(The other ANIMALS go to him.)

HORSE. Come, Camel. Come trot like the rest of us.

CAMEL. Humph.

DOG. Come, Camel. Come fetch like the rest of us.

CAMEL. Humph.

OX. Come, Camel. Come plow like the rest of us.

(The CAMEL exits, emitting two or three scornful "humphs.")

HORSE. I'm going to tell on him.

DOG. Yeah, he should work like the rest of us.

OX. Look, here comes the master right now.

(The FARMER enters as the ANIMALS go to him.)

ANIMALS. Master! Master!

FARMER. Hello, my helpful animal friends.

(The ANIMALS surround him and whisper loudly while gesturing animatedly.)

FARMER *(cont'd)*. Oh, really? ... Is that right? ... I see. *(The ANIMALS stop whispering.)* That is truly a shame. But I really don't know what to do about it—what with the world so new and all. I'm afraid you'll just have to work overtime to make up for the Camel. Sorry. See you back at the farm. *(The FARMER exits.)*

HORSE. Well, what do you think of that?

DOG. It's unfair.

OX. 'Scrutiatingly unfair.

HORSE *(looking toward offstage)*. Look.

DOG. Here he comes.

OX. Chewing his milkweed.

(The CAMEL enters.)

ELSIE. "The Camel came to a pond of water—"

(FAITH and AGNES enter quickly, holding a length of blue chiffon and a hand mirror. They stretch out the chiffon, forming the pond.)

—and admired himself in the pond's reflection.

(The CAMEL looks down at the pond as FAITH holds the mirror over the chiffon. The CAMEL preens at what he sees as the three ANIMALS cross to him.)

HORSE. Hey, Camel. How about pitching in.

DOG. Doing your share.

OX. Helping us work.

(The CAMEL laughs at them with a series of "humphs" as he exits.)

HORSE. Well, did you ever?

DOG. It's unfair.

OX. 'Scrutiatingly unfair. What are we to do?

HORSE *(looking offstage)*. Look! It's a cloud of dust.

DOG. A cloud of dust in the desert.

OX. A cloud of dust bearing the mighty Djinn!

ELSIE. "Now a Djinn is a magic person who always travels in a cloud of dust."

(The ANIMALS call to offstage.)

HORSE. Oh, mighty Djinn!

DOG. Djinn of the desert!

OX. Djinn who travels in a cloud of dust!

(The DJINN enters dusting himself off.)

DJINN. You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me!?

HORSE. Oh, yes, mighty Djinn.

DOG. Djinn of the desert.

OX. Djinn who travels in a cloud of dust.

HORSE. We've got a problem.

DJINN. Oh, yeah?

DOG. The Camel won't work.

OX. And is it right for anyone to be so 'scrutiatingly lazy, what with the world so new and all?

DJINN. Certainly not.

HORSE. Then will you help us, oh mighty Djinn?

DOG. Djinn of the desert.

OX. Djinn who travels in a cloud of dust.

DJINN (*after a moment*). Decidedly.

(The ANIMALS react enthusiastically.)

HORSE. Shhh—look. Here he comes.

(The CAMEL enters.)

DOG. He's probably going back to that pond to admire himself.

(The CAMEL goes to the "pond" and looks at his reflection.)

DJINN. You guys relax. I'll take it from here.

(The ANIMALS move away and crouch down as the DJINN crosses to the CAMEL who admires himself with a few "humphs.")

Top of the day, my long and bubbling friend. Pretty pleased with yourself, aren't you?

(The CAMEL nods with a "humph" as the DJINN changes his tone.)

Look, bubbles, what's this I hear about you not willing to do your share?

(The CAMEL gives a derisive “humph.”)

DJINN *(cont’d)*. The world was created on Monday, and here it is Thursday. You’ve missed three days of work already. What do you say to that?

(The CAMEL smirks, gives a loud “humph” and starts to exit.)

Hey, you, bubbles—look at me.

(The CAMEL stops and leisurely looks back at the DJINN.)

You know who I am?

(The CAMEL sneers, shakes his head and “humphs.”)

I am the mighty Djinn. Djinn of the desert. Djinn who travels in a cloud of dust.

(The CAMEL is suddenly frightened.)

And you’d better start traveling yourself, bubbles, ’cause I’m coming after you!

(The CAMEL emits a series of high-pitched “humphs” and hurriedly exits, closely followed by the DJINN who emits incantations.)