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# **Miss Fancy: Elephant Queen of the Zoo**

By

G. RILEY MILLS

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(MISS FANCY: ELEPHANT QUEEN OF THE ZOO)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-327-5

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For Sawyer

*Miss Fancy: Elephant Queen of the Zoo* was commissioned by Birmingham Children’s Theatre (Brandon Bruce, artistic director) in 2019 and premiered on March 15, 2023.

**CAST:**

MISS FANCY ..... Theo Edwards-Butler  
JOHN TODD ..... Marc Raby  
RICKY ROUND ..... Taj Johnson  
GLORIA..... Jala Sherese  
LESLIE BELLSNYDER ..... Caleb Clark  
WOMAN..... Rebecca Yeager  
HENRY HOLLINGSWORTH..... Rebecca Yeager  
DOROTHY PIERCE ..... Rebecca Yeager  
POLICEMAN ..... Rebecca Yeager  
HARRIET EVANS ..... Jala Sherese  
CONDUCTOR..... Caleb Clark

**PRODUCTION:**

Directors..... Aija Penix and Ashley Ann Woods  
Scenic Design ..... Ashley Ann Woods  
Lighting Design ..... Lyndell T. McDonald  
Sound Design ..... Aija Penix  
Costume Design ..... Brittany Dee Bodley  
Prop Design..... Allie Nichols  
Musical Direction..... Aija Penix  
Stage Management ..... Tyler Stidham  
Script Development Director ..... Carlton V. Bell

# Miss Fancy: Elephant Queen of the Zoo

## CHARACTERS

JOHN TODD: A zookeeper. Black and in his mid-40s.

RICKY ROUND: A young Black boy.

MISS FANCY: An elephant.

GLORIA: A peacock.

LESLIE BELLSNYDER: A member of the Parks Board and comes from a very wealthy family.

HENRY HOLLINGSWORTH: A British Colonel and big-game hunter.

DOROTHY PIERCE: President of the Avondale Civic League.

HARRIET EVANS: Manager of the Cole Brothers Circus.

Also, POLICEMAN, WOMAN and a CONDUCTOR.

NOTE: All characters may be played by any gender. Names and pronouns may be changed as needed.

SETTING: The play takes place in Birmingham, Ala., in the early 1930s. The main setting is the interior of the Avondale Zoo, with additional scenes on a vaudeville stage, a rural country road, inside the Bellsnyder mansion and at a circus.

## MUSIC NOTE

The following songs are played and/or sung within the play and can all be found in the public domain:

“All by Myself”

Written in 1921, with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin.

“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”

Written in 1905, with music by Charles H. Gabriel and lyrics by Civilla D. Martin.

“It All Depends on You”

Written in 1926, with music by Ray Henderson and lyrics by Buddy G. DeSylva and Lew Brown.

“I’m Just Wild About Harry”

Written in 1921, with music by Eubie Blake and lyrics by Noble Sissle.

“I’m Sitting on Top of the World”

Written in 1925, with music by Ray Henderson and lyrics by Sam M. Lewis and Joe Young.

# Miss Fancy: Elephant Queen of the Zoo

## PROLOGUE

*(Lights rise on the stage of a grand show palace. The year is 1900. MISS FANCY, an elephant, enters to applause. She wears an elegant dress adorned with twinkling jewels. The scene is dreamlike, a flashback where we see FANCY at the peak of her fame. She bows to the crowd as music begins. She performs “All by Myself.”)*

FANCY.

ALL BY MYSELF IN THE MORNING  
ALL BY MYSELF IN THE NIGHT  
I SIT ALONE WITH A TABLE AND A CHAIR  
SO UNHAPPY THERE, PLAYING SOLITAIRE  
ALL BY MYSELF, I GET LONELY  
WATCHING THE CLOCK ON THE SHELF  
I'D LOVE TO REST MY WEARY HEAD ON  
SOMEBODY'S SHOULDER  
I HATE TO GROW OLDER, ALL BY MYSELF

*(She scat sings and dances, basking in the audience's love and adulation. The music gradually changes, distorted and less beautiful. Lights shift as the flashback fades.)*

## SCENE 1

*(Lights rise on an interior section of the Avondale Zoo in the early 1930s. It is night. While the zoo was once a popular and impressive exhibit, it has fallen into disrepair. The*



*stage contains various rusted animal cages, most seemingly empty. C is a larger cage with a tattered banner in front of it that serves as a curtain and reads: "Behold Miss Fancy! Elephant Queen of the Zoo!" There is also a poster on one wall of a peacock and the words "Gloria the Glorious!" Leaning against another wall is a bullhook, a steel rod used to discipline elephants. JOHN TODD enters, wearing overalls and work boots. He moves with a silent, weary strength and confidence. He grabs a mop and a bucket and cleans an area of the floor. He finishes and switches off the lights. A buzzer sounds, signaling a visitor. After a moment, RICKY ROUND enters. TODD flicks on the lights.)*

TODD. Who are you?

RICKY (*startled*). I—

TODD. How'd you get in here?

RICKY. The latch on the front gate is broken, sir.

TODD. What's your name, son?

RICKY. Ricky Round, sir.

TODD. Zoo's closed.

RICKY (*pulling out paper*). I read this old article in a newspaper, sir, about Miss Fancy—

*(As if on cue, FANCY peeks out from behind the curtain, unseen by RICKY.)*

RICKY (*cont'd*). And I was wondering if—

TODD. I said the zoo's closed. You'll have to come back another time.

*(RICKY turns to leave, then stops.)*

RICKY. The latch is fixed, sir.

TODD. What's that?

RICKY (*pulling out a screwdriver*). The latch on the front gate. I fixed it.

(*RICKY starts to leave.*)

TODD. Say, you looking for work?

RICKY. Yes, sir.

TODD. Well, I could probably use a hand around here.

RICKY. Really?

TODD. Can't pay you much. I can feed you though, give you a warm place to sleep.

RICKY. Thank you, sir.

TODD. Call me Mr. Todd.

RICKY. Thank you, Mr. Todd.

TODD. Well, don't just stand there, get to work. Take this mop and bucket out back. (*He tosses RICKY a pair of overalls.*) And try these on, see if they fit.

(*RICKY exits. FANCY enters.*)

TODD (*cont'd*). Don't say anything, you.

FANCY. Sometimes you can be so hard-hearted, Mr. Todd.

TODD. He shouldn't be here. If anyone sees him—

FANCY. He's a sweet boy. Besides, I can't remember the last time we had a visitor.

(*RICKY enters.*)

RICKY. Mr. Todd, I couldn't find an empty hook so I— (*He sees FANCY.*) Whoa, you're Miss Fancy!

FANCY. That's right!

RICKY. You used to be big.

FANCY. I am big! It's the zoo that got small.

TODD. This is Ricky Round, Miss Fancy.

FANCY. Pleasure to meet you, young man.

RICKY. I read about you in the newspaper. They said you eat one hundred pounds of food a day.

FANCY. That's true.

RICKY. And that the city bought you from a circus.

FANCY. Also true!

RICKY. But then another paper said a fella won you in a poker game, so I don't know what to believe.

FANCY. I was a gift to the children of Birmingham, generously subsidized by Birmingham Railway, Light & Power. They even provided a special streetcar that brought people straight out to see me. Isn't that right, Mr. Todd?

TODD (*nodding*). Miss Fancy came to the Avondale Zoo in 1913, and she never left.

RICKY. Wow, that's almost twenty years ago!

FANCY. Do you know what they call Birmingham, Ricky? The Magic City of the World. The Marvel of the South. The Miracle of the Continent. The Dream of the Hemisphere. The Vision of all Mankind! Say, do you want to hear a joke?

RICKY. Sure.

FANCY. What's gray, stands in the rain and doesn't get wet? An elephant with an umbrella! I'm happy you're here, Ricky.

RICKY. Me too.

FANCY. Why'd you wait so long to come see me?

RICKY. Laws in Birmingham say colored folks and whites can't mix.

FANCY. I think those laws are terrible, don't you?

RICKY (*nodding*). When my pa and me first heard about you, our church petitioned the City Commission to give us a day—just one—where colored folks could come to the zoo and see Miss Fancy with our own eyes. And the commission said yes! But then someone from the Avondale Civic League caught wind of our plans, and they put a stop to that real quick.

FANCY. Well I'm certainly glad you're here now. I hope you're not disappointed in what you see. I'm not quite as spry as I used to be, but once Mr. Todd gives me a nice soap-and-water scrub I'll be as shiny as a diamond!

*(Buzzer sounds.)*

RICKY. What's that?

FANCY. It means we have a visitor!

*(TODD hustles RICKY behind a cage, out of view.)*

TODD. Stay here.

*(He pulls the curtain across FANCY's cage, hiding her from view. LESLIE BELLSNYDER, a well-dressed man in a crisp white suit, enters.)*

BELLSNYDER. Good evening.

TODD. Afraid the zoo's closed, sir. You'll have to come back another—

BELLSNYDER *(curt)*. I'm not a visitor. I'm with the Birmingham Parks Board.

TODD. My apologies, sir. I usually deal with Mr. Morgan.

BELLSNYDER *(sharply)*. Mr. Morgan is no longer with the Parks Board. My name is Leslie Bellsnyder, of the Tuscaloosa Bellsnyders.

TODD. John Todd.

*(BELLSNYDER crosses to FANCY's cage.)*

BELLSNYDER. So this is the famous Miss Fancy I've heard so much about. Word is she was quite a draw back in the day. Let me have a look at her.

TODD. She's asleep. What can I do for you, Mr. Bellsnyder?

BELLSNYDER. I'm here to survey the property. This parcel of land that the zoo currently occupies is of civil and municipal interest to the Parks Board. It's prime real estate.

TODD. The zoo is not for sale.

BELLSNYDER. That's not for you to say, Mr. Todd. The Parks Board is the body who will decide what happens to this property. Is there an inventory of the remaining animals? I want to see it.

*(TODD hands him a ledger, which he inspects.)*

BELLSNYDER *(cont'd)*. So aside from Miss Fancy here, all you have left is a peacock and a wolf?

TODD. Plus that bank of swans out in the lagoon.

BELLSNYDER. Barely qualifies as a zoo, if you ask me.

TODD. Yes, well, I've been working with Mr. Morgan to—

BELLSNYDER *(bristling)*. As I mentioned, Mr. Morgan is no longer with the Parks Board. You'll be dealing with me from now on. And unless you can convince me why we should keep this zoo open, we may need to consider a more financially prudent alternative for this property. I'll be in touch, Mr. Todd. *(Calls out.)* Good night, Miss Fancy! Don't let the bed bugs bite!

*(BELLSNYDER exits. RICKY emerges from hiding. FANCY enters, agitated.)*

FANCY. I don't like that fellow. I don't like him one bit!

TODD. Easy now.

FANCY. Who does he think he is, coming in here and threatening to close our zoo? He's got no more feelings than a hyena.

TODD. Calm down, girl.

FANCY. Bullies like that make me so cross-eyed sore I could spit. I try not to get angry, Mr. Todd, but sometimes it's hard.

TODD. I know. *(Claps.) Da-bal! Hit-a-boo!* Back to bed now.

FANCY *(calming)*. Good night, Ricky.

RICKY. Good night, Miss Fancy.

*(She exits into her cage, pulling the curtain shut behind her.)*

RICKY. Who was that man, Mr. Todd?

TODD. Just some fella looking to stir up trouble. You hungry?

RICKY. A little.

TODD. I'll go find you something to eat.

*(He exits. RICKY looks around. He notices the bullhook and picks it up. TODD enters with a bowl of soup.)*

TODD *(cont'd)*. That's a bullhook.

RICKY. What's it for?

TODD. Some people use it to train elephants. *(Hands RICKY the bowl of soup.)* Chicken gizzard soup.

RICKY. Thank you, Mr. Todd.

*(He eats, barely taking time to swallow.)*

TODD. Slow down there. You'll get a bellyache.

RICKY. I can't remember the last time I had meat. We mostly get by on powdered milk these days. Mr. Todd, what were those words you used with Miss Fancy?

TODD. You mean *da-bal* and *hit-a-boo*? That's just some circus jabber I picked up from her last trainer. Elephant commands.

RICKY. I wish I could speak elephant.

TODD. I reckon anyone can learn those magic alley-oops if they want.

RICKY. Really?

TODD. I should warn you though, when it comes to training elephants, you either got it or you don't. Where do you stay, kid?

RICKY. McCulley's Quarters, up until yesterday. My pa was working a farm there. Place went belly up though on account of the drought.

TODD. Where's he now?

RICKY. Left for Mississippi to find work. Do you like living in Birmingham, Mr. Todd?

TODD. I like it better than country life.

RICKY. Why's that?

TODD. I don't like being told what to do. I can be more independent in the city.

RICKY. Don't you ever get mad though? With all the rules saying what colored folks can and can't do in this town, where we can and can't go?

TODD. That's the law.

RICKY. Doesn't it make you mad though?

TODD. Of course it does.

RICKY. What do you do when you get mad, Mr. Todd, when all that anger builds up till you can't hold it in no more?

TODD. I just keep going. People keep going. We all keep going.

RICKY. Miss Fancy gets mad.

TODD. An elephant is a mighty creature, Ricky. An elephant can snatch a man off his feet and cast him to death against a brick wall if it has the mind to. Not that Miss Fancy would ever hurt anyone. She's a gentle sort most days, but she has her moments.

RICKY. Mr. Todd, why do you stay here at the zoo if no one comes anymore?

TODD. Someone's got to take care of these animals. Me and Miss Fancy, we've been together a long time. She won't listen to anyone else. Heck, she barely listens to me.

*(RICKY yawns.)*

TODD *(cont'd)*. Let's head out back, find you a place to sleep. Work starts at sunrise. I'll ring the bell. When you hear that, means it's time to get up.

RICKY. Yes, sir.

TODD. I hope you ain't scared of wolves.

RICKY. Why?

TODD. You'll be in the bunkhouse. Wolf house is right next door.

*(A wolf howls in the distance. They exit as lights fade.)*

## SCENE 2

*(The following morning. Lights rise on the zoo. Sunlight streams through the windows. The curtain is pulled in front of FANCY's cage. TODD enters, pulling a wagon covered by a tarp. RICKY follows, wearing the overalls and carrying two buckets.)*

TODD. Once we get all the animals fed, I'll need you to organize that old shed out back.

RICKY. Yes, sir. Say, what's in these buckets, Mr. Todd?

TODD. Morning chow. The smaller one is fruits, vegetables and crickets for our peacock.

RICKY. Did you say crickets?

TODD. That's right! Peacocks love crickets. *(Calls out.)*  
Gloria! You ready to eat, girl?



*(GLORIA, a peacock, appears in one of the cages before quickly disappearing again.)*

TODD *(cont'd)*. She's a little shy until she gets to know you. *(Calls out.)* It's OK, Gloria. This is Ricky. He's got some breakfast for you.

*(GLORIA enters. RICKY places food in her cage.)*

TODD *(cont'd)*. That bigger bucket there is for the wolf.

*(GLORIA gesticulates a message to RICKY.)*

RICKY. What's she saying?

TODD. She's saying "thank you." And also reminding you not to feed her any chocolate. It gives her the toots.

*(FANCY enters.)*

FANCY. Hello, everyone. Good morning, Ricky.

RICKY. Good morning, Miss Fancy.

FANCY. Looks like it's another beautiful day here at the Avondale Zoo. Did you meet Gloria?

RICKY. I did!

FANCY. She's a real peach. Make sure you don't give her any chocolate though. It gives her the—

RICKY. Toots. I know.

FANCY. Hey, Ricky. Why did the elephant cross the road? It was the chicken's day off!

RICKY. That's a pretty good one.

TODD. Ricky has a surprise for you, Miss Fancy. Go ahead, kid.

RICKY *(claps)*. *Da-koo.*

*(FANCY spins in a circle.)*

RICKY (*cont'd*). *Vri-dee*.

(*FANCY blows a kiss.*)

RICKY (*cont'd*). *Ran-gu*.

(*FANCY takes a bow.*)

FANCY. Wow, he's a natural!

RICKY (*proudly*). Mr. Todd has been teaching me commands.

(*GLORIA gesticulates a message.*)

RICKY (*cont'd*). What's she saying?

TODD. She's saying, "Don't forget, Miss Fancy can do marching too."

RICKY. What's the elephant word for marching?

TODD (*claps*). *Bee-la*.

(*FANCY starts marching.*)

TODD (*cont'd*). She won't stop until you give her the command.

RICKY (*claps*). *Jet!*

FANCY. That's good, Ricky. *Very* good! Maybe one day we can take a stroll down Highland Avenue together. Or make an appearance at Legion Field to get the crowds excited before a big game. I used to do that all the time in my younger years.

TODD. She was also quite good at boosting stranded automobiles stuck in bog holes.

FANCY. True! With a little nudge from Miss Fancy, I'd have people on their way in no time. I love making people happy. I'm really just a big kid at heart.

TODD. A big kid that'll tear up everything in her path if she gets the chance.

FANCY. I just like to play. Do you like to play, Ricky?

RICKY. Of course.

FANCY. My favorite thing to do is eat. My all-time favorite snacks are apples, peanuts and hay!

TODD. Speaking of ...

*(TODD pulls back a tarp, revealing a mound of fruits.)*

FANCY. My breakfast!

RICKY. Wow! If I ever ate that much food, I think my stomach would explode.

FANCY *(eating.)* When I first arrived at the zoo, there was a whole menagerie of animals out here. We had an owl, a goose, a goat who ate paper, a monkey, two pelicans, an anteater—

*(GLORIA gesticulates a message.)*

FANCY *(cont'd)*. That's right, Gloria. And a rattlesnake named Dick!

TODD. And those were just the animals in this building.

RICKY. Where'd they all go?

TODD. Parks Board sold them off.

RICKY. Why?

TODD. The city ran out of money.

FANCY. Let's not talk about sad things. What's something that makes you happy, Ricky?

RICKY *(after a beat)*. I like music.

FANCY. Me too!

RICKY. Do you know "His Eye Is on the Sparrow?"

FANCY.

WHY SHOULD I FEEL DISCOURAGED?

WHY SHOULD THE SHADOWS COME?

RICKY. My mom used to sing me that song every night before bed.

FANCY.

WHY SHOULD MY HEART FEEL LONELY  
AND LONG FOR HEAVEN AND HOME?

FANCY & RICKY.

I SING BECAUSE I'M HAPPY  
I SING BECAUSE I'M FREE  
HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW  
AND I KNOW HE WATCHES OVER ME  
HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW  
AND I'M SAFE BECAUSE HE WATCHES ME  
I SING BECAUSE I'M HAPPY  
I SING BECAUSE I'M FREE  
HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW  
AND I'M SAFE BECAUSE HE WATCHES ME

FANCY. Oh, I wish you could've seen me back in my prime, Ricky. I was the star attraction at the Hagenback-Wallace Circus. We performed all over the country. I even had my very own entry song. *De dee boom boom boom boom boom boom, De dee boom boom boom boom boom boom!* And in I would come! The applause from the crowd was like waves of love coming over the footlights. Had you ever met an elephant before you met me, Ricky?

RICKY. The only elephant I'd ever *seen* was in a Tarzan picture down at the Lyric Theatre.

FANCY. The Lyric! I played the Lyric Theatre back when it was an old vaudeville house. I danced the fandango, the hula and the Charleston.

RICKY. All in the same show?

FANCY. All in the same act! I was the biggest thing in vaudeville—literally. I'd walk across the stage and the whole building would shake!

RICKY. Can you still dance, Miss Fancy?

FANCY. Oh, I haven't done anything like that in years. No one wants to see an old elephant dance.

RICKY. I do.

FANCY. I'm afraid my dancing days are all behind me now. But thank you for reminding me of some wonderful memories. You've made this old elephant very happy.

TODD. Let's get the rest of the animals fed, Ricky.

RICKY. Enjoy your breakfast, Miss Fancy. It was nice to meet you, Gloria.

*(GLORIA gesticulates a message.)*

RICKY *(cont'd)*. Yes, I'll remember. No chocolate!

*(RICKY and TODD exit. GLORIA retreats to her cage. FANCY makes sure she is alone, then practices some ballet moves as lights fade.)*

### SCENE 3

*(Lights rise on the zoo. A few days have passed. TODD is giving FANCY a bath with a sponge and brush. She wears a bathing cap and giggles with each touch.)*

FANCY. You've got to use firm, circular strokes, Mr. Todd. You know how ticklish I am.

TODD. Stop squirming.

FANCY. I'm trying! Look how dry my hide is—and these cuticles! Someone has been neglecting my pampering.

*(The buzzer announces a visitor.)*

FANCY *(cont'd)*. We have a visitor! How exciting!