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Dramatic Publishing

EDWARD, THE OWL AND THE CALICO CAT

A Play

by

EMILY CICCHINI

with traditional folk music

of America, Scotland, England and Wales

Based on the life and work of

EDWARD LEAR



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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EMILY CICCHINI
Based on the work of
EDWARD LEAR

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(EDWARD, THE OWL AND THE CALICO CAT)

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EDWARD, THE OWL AND THE CALICO CAT was commissioned and first produced by the Pollyanna Theatre Company. It was presented June 27-July 14, 2002, at the Dougherty Arts Center in Austin, Texas. The production was directed by Judy Matetzschk, Ph.D.; set design by Jeff Cunningham; sound design by Damian Gillen; costumes by Ia Layadi; with the following cast:

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Edward/The Pig | DAMIAN GILLEN |
| Grace/The Bluebird | BETSY MCCANN |
| Tex | JESSIEPATRICK |
| Everyone and Everything Else | JASON MARLETT |

The play won the B. Iden Payne Award for Best Original Script.

MUSICNOTE

Please feel free to enlarge the music at the back of the book for your purposes.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play came from many long-cultivated seeds: my first talent show in elementary school where I recited *The Owl and the Pussycat*; my parent's love of poetry and folk music; and a long-time friendship with director Judy Matetzschk. But it owes its playful spirit and distinctive voice to the gifted Edward Lear. It's been a privilege to share the page with him.

Edward Lear (1812-88) was an English humorist, poet and visual artist. He is best known for his pen-and-ink illustrated limericks and nonsense verse, which were collected in *A Book of Nonsense, Nonsense Songs, and Laughable Lyrics*. His poem *The Owl and the Pussycat* was a favorite of my father's, a wise old college professor turned entrepreneur, who would on occasion sing the verse in a hooting stage voice.

Edward Lear was born the youngest of 21 children of an unsuccessful London stockbroker. At a very early age, Edward was sent to live with his sister, Ann. At the age of 15, he was drawing and painting out of necessity. When I was 15, my parents fell on hard times financially. I escaped to the theatre, wrote my first plays for children and had my first professional acting role in a new play.

Even as his popularity began to rise, Lear supported himself by teaching and selling paintings, in watercolors and oils, on traditional subjects such as portraits and landscapes. I have supported myself with a variety of teaching and administrative jobs in the arts. I kept coming back to *The Owl and the Pussycat* because I was concerned that

people, particularly children, were not aware of the work of Edward Lear. Apparently from the play's warm reception, Lear fans are everywhere!

Lear traveled frequently to warmer climates due to his poor health including Greece, Egypt and India. He made friends easily, particularly with children. In Cannes, he met a young girl named Janet and composed *The Owl and the Pussycat* for her. Near the end of his life, he settled in Italy, built a home by the sea and lived in the company of a cat named "Foss." I had a dear childhood playmate named Janette Foss. My husband is part Italian, where Cicchini comes from: it's easy to say, the Ci is like an English "Ch," and the cch is like a "k." We have a graceful but sassy cat that has traveled with us to 18 states and Mexico. She showed up as a wet and injured kitten on our doorstep one morning: she was lost, but found us.

Biographers note that Edward Lear was prone toward depression and had a seizure disorder. In writing this play, I asked myself questions about the sense of loss and loneliness that these conditions can generate: what emerged were the lessons learned from such experiences. Sometimes, you have to let something go to show you love it: but that cannot mean that you ignore or dismiss it. Life may throw you lots of curves, but things are seldom what they seem. It's important to remember that an artist's work is the proof of his or her joy: and that nothing is as relevant to understanding as the work itself. So, as you engage in producing this play, I encourage you to turn to Lear's original writings and illustrations, and let his rich imagination fully inspire your own.

Edward, the Owl and the Calico Cat

A Play in One Act
For 4m., 1w., 10 either gender

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

EDWARD. . . a lonely little boy who likes to make up funny words
GRACE, THE CALICO CAT. . . an exotic girl cat who wants to be different and have fun
THE BLUEBIRD. . . from Brooklyn, who's been around the block
TEX, THE OWL . . . a wise old cowbird, who likes to travel and doesn't talk much
LITTLE FISH a quick, colorful little clown
EEL. big, shiny and squirmy
LOBSTER bigger, red with big scary claws
WHALE biggest, blue and floats like a balloon
THE PIG. a Scottish pig
MOUSE a little tiny white one, all dressed up in frills
THE TURKEY. a justice of the peace
DRAGONFLY a knightly kind of chap
GRASSHOPPER. qui est français
BUTTERFLY a lovely lady
BEETLE a no-nonsense bug
BEE a small, quick and high-pitched speck

SETTINGS

Edward's bedroom in England - Window, bed, drawers and coat tree: dark and austere.

The seashore - Rolling waves, with the Calico Tree.

The sea - Rolling waves, minus the Calico Tree.

The land where the bong tree grows - A desert landscape with bong tree.

Turkey hill - A desert landscape with a round hill and a large cactus.

TIME

The early 1800s from a modern imagination.

THE CAST CAN BE DOUBLED in the following ways:

EDWARD

GRACE

TEX

EVERYONE AND EVERYTHINGELSE

or

EDWARD/THE PIG/THE TURKEY

GRACE/THE BLUEBIRD

TEX

EVERYONE AND EVERYTHINGELSE

Or in other configurations as desired. Additionally, the BLUEBIRD, ALL FISH, MOUSE and INSECTS may be played effectively by puppets. EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING ELSE may appear on stage even when not indicated, as EDWARD's visual alter ego and general helper to everyone: but this is not necessary.

The use of light accents is encouraged but also not necessary.

The director is encouraged to explore the text and staging playfully, vigorously and imaginatively.

Edward, the Owl and the Calico Cat

(Edward's bedroom: Very dark, austere, and monochrome. Music plays. A massive bed, window, dresser, coat tree and trunk, which all help EDWARD look quite small. An OWL puppet peers into the room through the window and hoots. EDWARD wakes.)

EDWARD

Good morning, feathered friend!

(Getting out of bed, he is a typical British schoolboy, in short pants, a little overdressed. He notices the audience, speaking directly to them.)

Good morning—again and again!

(Going to the coat tree, getting and putting on his bow tie.)

Morn ing is the best time
For boys like me to make my rhymes
Before the busy school day comes
Before the noise of news and sun...

(The puppet OWL at the window hoots again.)

EDWARD *(cont'd)*.

Hello. Did I just say school? Why. There is no such thing as school!

I'd rather be a jewel than be tucked away at school.
School is a pool of fools. A krull of skulls.
A flew of schnew. A double pill that makes me ill!

Ahem. The golden rule is life's the school. I've made myself clear on that stipulation.

Besides—*(throwing off bow tie)* —it's summer vacation!

(He starts to look around the room.)

My name is Ed

I'm out of bed

And looking for my kitty cat, Grace.

She's quite petite, and very sweet,

With a dot in the middle of her face!

Have you seen her?

(EDWARD shrugs, looks in the trunk, and pulls out toys and stuffed animals, strewing them all over the floor: a drum, a boat, a fish, a piggy bank, a mouse, a turkey leg. He picks up the boat and plays with it.)

EDWARD *(cont'd)*.

When I grow up I want to be

A lion or a circus flea

I want to draw pictures of things I see

Like animals, and the deep blue sea...

Good morning, Ma! *(Long pause.)*

Good morning, Da! *(Long pause.)*

Mother and Father

They think I'm a bother.

For I like to make up funny words.
Like syllabub, and Gromboolian.
They think I sound quite absurd.

Good day-up, Mums! (*Long pause.*)
Good fore-fast, Pops! (*Long pause.*)

Mums and Pops
Live high on the rocks
on a house balanced on one stone.
This little pebble is all kind of trebble,
If they move it one inch, they'll be thrown!
(*Hoot, again.*)
Good sun-spickle, Owl!
(*Meow, very human sounding.*)
Good dawn-crash, Cat, wherever you're at!

(GRACE THE CAT enters and tiptoes to hide behind the dresser. She wears a very exotic quilted calico coat: orange, white and black, with shiny beads and feathers. She motions to the audience to keep quiet.)

EDWARD (*cont'd*).

It's nearly June
And the wandering moon
Is made of stinky cream...
But cats like cheese, and, if I please,
Here's a song that will make kitty scream!

(SONG: “EDWARD DRUM”)

(EDWARD picks up the drum and beats on it with a ladle. Meanwhile, GRACE quickly goes to hide behind the bed.)

EDWARD *(cont'd, sings)*.

**THERE WAS A BOY LIVED IN THE MOON,
LIVED IN THE MOON, LIVED IN THE MOON
THERE WAS A BOY LIVED IN THE MOON,
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM.**

**AND HE PLAYED UPON A LADLE,
A LADLE, A LADLE
AND HE PLAYED UPON A LADLE,
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM.**

(Music stops. He runs to the dresser, but no GRACE. He speaks while continuing to play the drum.)

My name is Edward
I've come from bedward
I'm looking for Grace, my cat.
She's short and buzzy, full of honey.
Some say she's quite fat!

GRACE

(pops her face out from behind the bed).
MEOW!

(GRACE disappears!)

EDWARD

(stops drumming).

Hello, did you hear...? Did you see?

Come on now, Cat!

Where are you at?

You must come out, or I'll flout a pout!

(Looks and looks.)

Hmphf.

(Music. He puts the drum on his head and sings. As he does, GRACE runs up and makes fun of him with the audience; he can't see her.)

EDWARD *(cont'd, sings).*

**AND HIS HAT WAS MADE OF GOOD CREAM CHEESE,
OF GOOD CREAM CHEESE, OF GOOD CREAM CHEESE,
AND HIS HAT WAS MADE OF GOOD CREAM CHEESE
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM.**

(He takes off the drum, and GRACE hides behind him. He goes to the trunk and picks up a stuffed fish and plays the drum with it.)

EDWARD *(cont'd).*

**AND HE PLAYED UPON A HALIBUT,
A HISHY-MISH, A STINKY FISH!
AND HE PLAYED UPON A SCALY-SKISH,
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM.**

(He throws the fish over his shoulder; GRACE sniffs it and nibbles on it. He picks up the papier-mâché turkey leg and plays the drum with it.)

EDWARD (*cont'd*).

**AND HE PLAYED UPON A TURKEY LEG,
A BIRDIE-PEG, A TASTIE DREG,
AND HE PLAYED UPON A WHIRLY-BEG,
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM!**

(He throws the turkey leg over his shoulder. GRACE dodges it and kicks it. He picks up a child's pink piggy bank and plays the drum with it.)

EDWARD (*cont'd*).

**AND HE PLAYED UPON A PIGGY-BANK
AN OINKY-DOINK, A CLINKY-CLOINK
AND HE PLAYED UPON A SWINE-LINE
AND HIS NAME WAS EDWARD DRUM!**

(He throws the piggy bank. GRACE catches it and puts it back in the trunk, all the while sneaking around behind ED. ED speaks.)

All right! Just fine! You tricky feline!
You sneaker, you hunter, you puss!
All I can say, heck-mareck, hey de hey,
If you don't come out soon, I will fuss!

GRACE

(popping out from behind him).

Hello, boy named Ed.
I heard all you said.
Do you think I am some kind of fool?

EDWARD

What? What was that?
You're talking, my cat?

GRACE

The exception that proves the rule.

EDWARD

(putting away drum).

I'm not sure I'm up
For this rubadubdub .
I'm thinking that you should just purr
And meow and scratch.
And play in a patch
Of catnip to tipple your fur...

GRACE

I'm done with all that.
I am no ordinary cat.

EDWARD

Yes you are. Quite ordinary, practically schmordinary, I'd say!

GRACE

That's what you think,
I'm no rinky-dink.
I come from a faraway nation.
You can see from my coat.
I be long on a boat.
I'm ready for some celebration!

EDWARD

That coat's all in patches—none of it matches.

GRACE

This fabric retains my life!
I am no play toy—
I'll tell you, young boy,
Your insults are causing me strife!

EDWARD

Come now. Come behave. (*Jumping on bed.*)
To my bed-blanket cave.
You'll be safe and warm here, I know...

GRACE

But what if I'm not? (*She climbs in.*)
It seems rather hot.
In fact, I think I'd rather go. (*Gets up.*)

EDWARD

Go? Go where?

GRACE

To Calcutta, where they make Calico. I was there, quite a long time ago...

EDWARD

I'll bet.

GRACE

What?

EDWARD

Beware. Is it much better there?
I won't hear a word more, except bye-de-ya-yea.

In fact, I demand that you stay.
Relax. Take a moment to think. That's it. Sit. (*Pats the bed.*)

GRACE

All right.

EDWARD

No, no—lie down. (*Stands up, pushes her backwards.*)

GRACE

Why, that's very nice of you.

EDWARD

Here's a pillow.

GRACE

Mmm. Purr ...

EDWARD

(*pushing her over.*)
Now, come on, roll over!

GRACE

(*jumping out of the bed.*)
What do I look like, a mutt?

EDWARD

Be a good cat... Roll over! Roll over!

GRACE

Cat's don't fall for that silly rut.

EDWARD

Fine. Go ahead. Be a flumpety head. Leave. Run away. I don't care.

GRACE

If that's how you want it,
I will!

EDWARD

You're a strumpet!
You won't get far, like you are...

GRACE

You are so mean and sour!

EDWARD

You're not exactly a spring kitten, you know...

GRACE

How dare you? Too much! I won't stand to be treated such. I'm royalty in Egypt. I'm precious in Persia. I've no twin in Siam. I am gone.

(GRACE exits out the door, in a flurry. As she does, the room begins to change: the gray backdrop of Edward's room gives way to an ocean with a large, round, yellow sun. The objects begin to change: either by themselves, or perhaps EDWARD during his next speech even helps them move. The bed and dresser are taken off stage. The coat tree becomes another kind of tree: a Calico Tree, in orange and black and white, colors similar to GRACE's coat. The trunk becomes a treasure chest, with chains of

gold hanging over its edges. We are now at the sea-shore.)

EDWARD

What have I done?
Set the kitty to run?
I must find a way
To un-plunder this day.
With whom shall I play
If she stays away?
It's purifically bleak—
It must be a whole week
She's been gone. I may
Find a sneat for her tray
A bird...a mouse...
That could smell up the house...
Ah, the sea, what a place to be!
Right beside the Calico Tree!
(He sees the treasure chest.)
And just what I need! A chest for my greed...
Let's see what's inside...
A fly...a pie. A Calico Pie!
Just the thing to catch a Calico Cat!
(He pulls out a Calico Pie.)
Here kitty, kitty...here, my little Grace...
Here, itty-bitty...here my slinky-bunko...
I've got some gobblety goo...

(BLUEBIRD enters, a little road weary, with a Brooklyn accent.)