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The Secret of Courage

Adapted by
LAURIE BROOKS

Based on the short story *Imaginary Friends* by
TERRY BROOKS

Dramatic Publishing Company
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Based on the short story *Imaginary Friends* by

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(THE SECRET OF COURAGE)

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“Adapted by Laurie Brooks.

Based on the short story *Imaginary Friends* by Terry Brooks.”

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The Secret of Courage was commissioned and premiered by The Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, Mo. This play was a co-production with University of Missouri, Kansas City. It received its equity premiere on Jan. 16, 2018.

CAST:

Jack McCall Jay Love
Waddy Roan Ricker
Mom Amy Billroth-MacLurg
Dr. Claudia Mueller Megan Sells
Uncle Frank Charlie Spillers
Deirdre the Owl Heather Michelle Lawler
Pick Duncan McIntyre
Wartag Ken Sandberg
Warrior Spirit Rafael Toribio
The Demon Ensemble

PRODUCTION:

Producing Artistic Director Jeff Church
Executive Director Joette Pelster
Director Graham Whitehead
Stage Managers William J. Christie, Danielle Walsh
Set Designer Mark A. Exline
Lighting Designers Bryce Foster, Shane Rowse
Costume Designer L.A. Clevenson
Projections Designer Jeffery Cady
Associate Projections Designer Shannon Barondeau
UMKC Technical Director Hunter Andrews
Properties Sandra Lopez, Selena Gonzales-Lopez
UMKC Production Assistant Kate Hershberger
Coterie Production Assistant Elizabeth Sampley
Content Editor (*coterie.edublogs.org*) Amanda Kibler
House Managers Martin Buchanan, Michael James,
Alex Walters, Matthew Schmidli

The Secret of Courage

CHARACTERS

JACK: 14 years old.

WADDY: 14 years old.

MOM (Amanda): Early 40s.

DR. MUELLER: Early 40s.

UNCLE FRANK: Late 40s.

DEIRDRE: Female barn owl.

PICK: An elf.

WARTAG: A troll.

WARRIOR SPIRIT: A ghost.

THE DEMON: Created by members of the ensemble.

For Terry
brother, friend, inspiration

The Secret of Courage

(The setting is in and around Sinnissippi Park. The entire space is transformed into the park, using lights, sound and set pieces. The audience feels as if they are surrounded by the flora and fauna of the woods. In the space is a massive tree that later will become THE DEMON, its branches mottled white as bone, crooked, seemingly dead.

Ideally, the action of the play takes place in and around the audience. Throughout the performance, the low sounds of the park—birds, insects, the wind in the trees—are heard.

All nine characters are embedded in the forest, incorporated and partially hidden in the foliage. If we look closely, we see figures among the trees. Characters appear from the forest when they are needed for the action of the play. Interior scenes are played downstage. Set pieces for these scenes are unnecessary. The action of the play is seamless from one scene to another with light changes helping to set the location and mood.

(Lights shift.

In the daylight, JACK is sleeping. The doorbell rings. JACK wakes and ignores it; he does not see WADDY sneak in. WADDY grins and sneaks over to JACK.)

WADDY. Aaaaarrrrggggghhhh!

JACK. Waddy!

WADDY. Gotcha.

JACK. When you go to someone's house, and they don't answer the door, you come back later.

WADDY. Normal people do that.

JACK. But you, no, you sneak in here like a ... a ...

WADDY. Master criminal?

JACK. You've been watching too many police procedurals.

WADDY. Look who's talking. *Shadow of Darkness* himself. I rang the doorbell. You could have let me in.

JACK. Just ... don't sneak up on me.

WADDY. You should see what's going on at my house if you want to know the truly terrifying.

JACK. No, thanks.

WADDY. Mom's having some kind of bizarro women's meeting. It involves cooking, which I thought might be a good thing until I smelled it.

JACK. But, you're going to tell me anyway.

WADDY. Mom insisted I "say hello" to her friends. I told her I had a stomachache, but she saw right through it.

JACK. Your life sucks.

WADDY. You haven't heard the worst. They were all over me. *(Imitating the women.)* Why Reynolds, you've grown so tall! I wouldn't have recognized you if I ran over you with my car! Reynolds, you remember my daughter, Molly? She's simply panting for you to call her. Let me give you her cell number. *(Normal voice.)* Have you seen that girl? She's all like ... *(He imitates her running to greet a friend, screaming with delight, arms waving, air kisses.)* Nightmare! *(Normal voice.)* I barely got out of there with my life.

JACK. Are you done?

WADDY. No. Every time they said Reynolds, it was like they were talking about somebody else. How could my parents have done it? Who names a baby Reynolds Lucius Wadsworth III? It's unparalleled cruelty!

(WADDY throws something at JACK.)

JACK. What?

WADDY. Can I stay here for the rest of my life? Who knows when it'll be safe to go home.

JACK. I'll call your mom and tell her you've been abducted.

WADDY. Good idea. Here. Use my phone. *(Pause.)* My life is over.

(WADDY gets that grin on his face.)

WADDY *(cont'd)*. Get down! Don't move!

(WADDY pushes JACK on the floor.)

WADDY *(cont'd)*. I think I hear them coming. The relentless sound of designer shoes beating a path to your door! Attack of the zombie women! AAAAHHHHHH!

(WADDY runs around the room, grabs JACK's warrior shield and tosses it to JACK.)

WADDY *(cont'd)*. Defend yourself! You cannot escape. They'll eat us alive!

(WADDY grabs JACK's writing award and holds it like a shield. WADDY brandishes JACK's baseball bat like a sword. An imaginary slaughter ensues.)

WADDY *(cont'd)*. Take that! And that! And that! Flesh-eating women! Aaaaggggh!

JACK. OK, OK, you're funny.

WADDY. I was beginning to think I'd lost my touch.

JACK. You're touched, all right. Give me my award before you break it.

WADDY. Let's go get something to eat. I'm starving. We gotta be there at seven.

JACK. I'm not going.

WADDY. The most exciting night of our lives and you're not going?

JACK. That's right.

WADDY. Let me jog your memory. Night walk in the park? Joanna Farrell will be there.

JACK. Don't rub it in.

WADDY. Hold up. Are you still sick?

JACK. Some stuff has happened. I don't know how to tell you.

WADDY (*German accent*). Very well. The doctor is in. Tell Herr Dr. Freud what's on your micro-mind.

(*WADDY waits.*)

WADDY (*cont'd, German accent*). Herr Dr. Freud does not have all day. (*Normal voice.*) Come on. It couldn't be any worse than attack of the zombie women.

JACK. Infinitely worse.

WADDY. Good. Maybe it'll make me feel better.

JACK. For once in your life, don't joke. This is serious. Doc Mueller was here last night.

WADDY. She came to your house?

JACK. Yeah. To talk about those tests I had. I overheard them talking. I'm really sick, Waddy.

(*Silence.*)

WADDY (*cont'd*). How sick?

JACK. I didn't hear everything she said, but she used a bunch of words about cells and stuff. Then she said the words leukemia and cancer.

WADDY. You have cancer?

JACK. Yeah. I have to go into the hospital on Monday for more tests. Doc Mueller couldn't say it and neither could Mom.

WADDY. Couldn't say what?

JACK. I'm dying.

WADDY. Wait a freakin' minute. You're not dying. You're sick. They'll make you better.

JACK. You weren't there. You didn't hear Doc Mueller. Mom was crying, Waddy.

WADDY. Well, I don't buy it. Doc didn't say you're dying because you're not.

JACK. Doctors don't come right out and say stuff like that, even when it's true.

WADDY. Well, you look OK to me. Except for your face.

JACK. Quit.

WADDY. Sorry. Force of habit.

JACK. This isn't the kind of thing you can see. It's inside.

WADDY. Does anything hurt?

JACK. Just the headaches.

WADDY. You don't have them more often than you did a few months ago, do you?

JACK. No.

WADDY. Do they hurt more, last longer?

JACK. Your point is?

WADDY. If you don't look any worse or feel any worse then you're not dying. Maybe it'll just go on indefinitely. You know, chronic.

JACK. You are not helping.

WADDY. Well, maybe they'll find a cure for it. They're always finding miracle cures for stuff.

JACK. Maybe I'll go to a faith healer.

WADDY. I think Mueller made a mistake. She'll have to eat crow on Monday. You're jumping to conclusions without any real evidence, letting your wild-ass imagination run away with you, as usual. You don't know anything for sure.

(Silence.)

JACK. I don't want to know for sure.

WADDY. Me neither. *(Pause.)* You can't die. You're my best friend.

JACK. I'll try not to.

WADDY. It'll be all right. You'll see.

JACK. What if it isn't?

WADDY. Then we'll deal with it. In the meantime, let's focus on the important things in life—food, girls and *Shadow of Darkness*—in that order. Let's go to the park. *(Singsong.)*
Joanna Farrell.

JACK. Sure. Let's forget the whole thing like it's not happening.

WADDY. OK, listen. Remember my cousin, Allie, the one with the blue hair? She got in that nightmare car wreck and the docs told her she'd never walk again.

JACK. I remember.

WADDY. If Allie bought into that and sat around moping all the time, she'd still be in that wheelchair. Those docs didn't know Allie. Killer determination. Last year she ran a marathon. So much for predictions.

JACK. It's not the same thing.

WADDY. It's exactly the same thing. Nobody knows how tough you are but me. People get well all the time because they believe they can. Besides, no one dies in the eighth grade.

JACK. Yeah, I didn't get to drive a car yet. And I wanna go to comic-con and I've never seen the ocean.

WADDY. Now he gets it.

JACK. And I couldn't leave Joanna Farrell.

WADDY (*imitating Joanna*). I can't live without you. You're so hot. Let me show you how much I love you!

JACK. Yeah. That's another little thing I didn't get to do yet.

WADDY. Me neither. No way we could die without that life-altering experience.

(Silence.

Then laughter.)

WADDY (*cont'd*). Besides, the only people I know who died were old. Grandmas and grandpas.

JACK. Except Uncle Frank.

WADDY. Oh, yeah. I forgot about Uncle Frank.

JACK. I keep thinking that if I go into the hospital, it'll be like it was with Uncle Frank. I'll never get out. They'll blast me with chemo and radiation and all my hair will fall out and then I'll die. Doc used the word arduous. Vocab word, remember? It means hard, difficult. That's my future.

WADDY. OK. This is no time to panic. You're not going to end up like Uncle Frank. We just have to think this through.

JACK. Yeah. Make a plan.

WADDY. Let's develop a strategy.

(WADDY takes a candy bar out of his pocket, unwraps it and begins eating it.)

WADDY (*cont'd*). Well, don't look at me. You're the genius.

JACK. Right. I'm not sure, but I have an idea. I might know where I can get some help. (*Pause.*) I saw Uncle Frank today.

WADDY. What?

JACK. Stay with me here.

WADDY. OK. You saw Uncle Frank.

JACK. Yeah. And there's more. Remember the day Uncle Frank died?

WADDY. I remember I wanted to break things.

JACK. Something awesome happened to me in the park that day. The weirdest thing ever.

WADDY. Seriously?

JACK. I never told you about it.

WADDY. How come?

JACK. I thought you'd think I was crazy.

WADDY. I already think you're crazy.

JACK. Listen. I was in my room, and I heard something outside my window. It was this huge owl flying over the house. I'm not sure what happened next, but it was like I was flying, holding onto that owl and then ... I was in the park.

(Lights shift.

WADDY fades. The screech of an owl. The shadow of the owl flies. JACK finds himself in the magic of Sinnissippi Park.)