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Dramatic Publishing

HUCKLEBEE AND THE RHYMING MOUNTAIN

by

WIL DENSON



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(HUCKLEBEE AND THE RHYMING MOUNTAIN)

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ABOUT THE SETTING:

Long, gracefully curving ramps, mysterious mossy steps, beckoning glades. Sheer cliffs and ponderous boulders. Shimmering trees, bleak peaks, high swaying bridges over impossible precipices. Everything in short for an adventure-journey of the first magnitude. *Or*. Wooden planks and plywood cubes. Or scaffolding. Or sawhorses and old doors. Or logs and stumps. Or *anything*. As long as the mountain becomes a mountain when treated like a mountain. A series of locations and the opportunity for *movement*.

Anything can happen on a rhyming mountain.

Set apart, isolated and perhaps slightly elevated, is a small platform-cube. It might be covered in black to allow greater separation. Ideally, it should appear to float in space.

HUCKLEBEE AND THE RHYMING MOUNTAIN

A Play in One Act
For Ten Actors

CHARACTERS

A VOICE the voice of Time
HUCKLEBEE every boy who has ever been
STUFFY STEADFAST . . . an ultra-conservative stonepile
TAUNTER EASY a jeering mountain vulture
SCOFFER EASY a sneering mountain buzzard
MOCKER EASY a leering mountain magpie
LIMBER WILLOW an easily-swayed young sapling
JOY DANCER BREEZY . . . a hedonistic meadow flower
SIR PONDER DEEPLY . . a self-important mountain gnome
BUSY DOES-IT a no-nonsense burrower
THE WISE RHYMER a pleasant old gardener

TIME: A short while after the beginning of it all,
but long before now.

PLACE: On and at the foot of a wonderfully intriguing,
dazzlingly shining, Rhyming Mountain.

For kindergarten through 3rd grade.

HUCKLEBEE AND THE RHYMING MOUNTAIN

AT RISE: A totally darkened stage. Silence. Then an awesomely engulfing, surely not-to-be-questioned, probably male VOICE. The VOICE is somewhat irritating in its self-importance. Somehow it comes from absolutely everywhere, filling every sinus and cavity, every mind and imagination. Its power stems not really from mere volume but rather its omnipresence. In the darkness:

VOICE (pleasant enough at first; too hearty?). Hucklebee. Hucklebee, wake up! It's time! (The light tinkling of WIND CHIMES.)

(A piercing sharp-edged white spot comes up to reveal HUCKLEBEE lying curled comfortably on the cube. HUCKLEBEE is every boy. Freckles, baseball cap, shorts, pullover, "tennies." Until this instant HUCKLEBEE has been forever asleep and is not anxious to leave his blissful state. He moves slightly, protestingly, in his sleep.)

VOICE. Hucklebee, wake up. You heard the chimes. It's time. (Without opening an eye, HUCKLEBEE reaches down and mimes pulling up a non-existent blanket, tucking it under his chin. More sternly:) Hucklebee. You must begin. The chimes of time have already sounded. (An invisible force pulls the invisible blan-

ket—and HUCKLEBEE's still-clutching hand—away. Eyes even more firmly closed, HUCKLEBEE reaches down with his other hand and pulls the blanket back up. Losing a little patience:) Hucklebee, let go of the blanket. *(Again the blanket is pulled away, with HUCKLEBEE still holding firm. Again HUCKLEBEE pulls it back. It is immediately tugged away—and back. A warning; clearly irritated now:)* Hucklebee—*(A brief tug-of-war quickly builds with HUCKLEBEE soon sitting and then kneeling, braced full-strength against the invisible inevitable. HUCKLEBEE struggles desperately, completely out-manned and with no chance of winning, hoping at best to just hold on.)* Very well, if you want the blanket so badly, you may—have it. *(HUCKLEBEE is sent flying as the “force” lets go of its end of the blanket. When HUCKLEBEE has come to a stop:)* There. You have it. Now what will you do with it? *(A slight pause.)* Hucklebee? *(HUCKLEBEE, somewhat stunned, remains unmoving where he has fallen.)* Hucklebee? *(Reluctant and slightly wary, HUCKLEBEE sits up.)* Good. I didn't mean to hurt you, but you are a very stubborn boy. *(HUCKLEBEE looks around cautiously, trying to locate the source of the VOICE.)* You must learn to listen when someone is trying to help you. You have a great many things to learn in fact. *(HUCKLEBEE shrugs, knowing the VOICE is probably right, but finding it difficult to admit it.)* I know it's not easy, but I'm sure you'll do well. Are you ready to begin? *(HUCKLEBEE looks up, surprised. A brief pause.)* I asked if you are ready. *(HUCKLEBEE mimes that he is unable to speak.)* Oh, yes. That's right, I forgot. You can't talk, can you? You haven't learned that yet. Well, that's easily taken care of. Now then—*(Some*

unseen but clearly potent lightning-like force is hurled at HUCKLEBEE turning him upside-down, completely around, and slamming him to the ground. The suddenness of it leaves him huddled and frightened, not daring to move. With some pride:) There. That should do it. Now try. *(At first HUCKLEBEE shakes his head slowly, wary lest the force strike again.)* Come, Hucklebee, don't be afraid. You are now able to talk.

HUCKLEBEE *(at first testing, cautiously)*. I don't have anything—to say.

VOICE *(a bark of booming laughter)*. My-my-my! Thank you, Hucklebee! That's very good! You have already learned the first rule of speaking, in order to talk you must have something to say! Most people never do learn that rule. Very good. Now. Are you ready to begin?

HUCKLEBEE *(still wary)*. To—begin?

VOICE. Yes. Of course. You must begin. Go forth. *(Becoming just a little too self-important.)* You must go forth and see. Go forth and hear. Go forth and taste. Go forth and learn. *(A ringing pronouncement.)* You must go forth and begin—to rhyme!

HUCKLEBEE. To rhyme...?

VOICE *(prone to insufferability)*. Yes, rhyme. Rhyme-rhyme-rhyme!

Everyone must rhyme, it's so;

As well as ever he can you know!

And it's *your* duty as well, Hucklebee. It's what you must do. You must learn to rhyme.

HUCKLEBEE. What? What do you—? I don't know *how* to rhyme. *(Brightening at the solution.)* You haven't showed me. *(HUCKLEBEE braces himself for another wrenching gift-giving. But none comes.)*

the audience's focus swings sharply back to the stage.] In a more elaborate production, Rhyming Mountain is wonderful! Backed by the bluest of skies and lit by the brightest of suns, it draws HUCKLEBEE like a moth to flame, like a player to game, like an actor to fame. He is drawn to the "Mountain" and onto the stage irresistibly, almost in a trance. HUCKLEBEE arrives awe-struck at the foot of the Mountain and is standing gazing up in silent wonder when we hear, seemingly from nowhere:)

STUFFY STEADFAST (*sharp, grumpy*). Keep off the stones!

HUCKLEBEE. What...?! (*Startled, HUCKLEBEE spins in the direction of the voice but sees nothing. Warily he looks in another direction.*)

STUFFY STEADFAST. I said keep off the stones!

HUCKLEBEE (*looking around nervously*). Who said that?

STUFFY STEADFAST. Keep off the stones! Keep off the stones! Who do you *think* said it?

(HUCKLEBEE meets his first denizen of Rhyming Mountain, STUFFY STEADFAST. It is small wonder HUCKLEBEE missed STUFFY at first, for he blends almost totally into his surroundings. Instead of a being, MR. STEADFAST is a pile, a stone pile to be exact. Topped apparently by one more round stone—actually his head—he has become part of the topography. One would be hard pressed to spot STUFFY unless he spoke.)

STUFFY (*sarcastic; one long word*). Around-the-rugged-rock-the-ragged-rascal-ran-keep-off-the-stones!

HUCKLEBEE (*considerably behind*). What...?

STUFFY STEADFAST. The stones! The stones! Keep off the—I don't step on *your* stones, do I?

HUCKLEBEE. I don't—have any stones.

STUFFY STEADFAST. Well, your whatchama-call-'ems. I don't step on *them*, do I?

HUCKLEBEE (*looking down*). My—feet?

STUFFY STEADFAST. Feet? Feet? Well, whatever. I don't step on *them*, do I? So keep off the stones!

HUCKLEBEE (*moving back quickly*). I'm sorry. I didn't know.

STUFFY STEADFAST. Huh! Your kind never do! Come prancing around on my tender gravel. Never think about anyone but yourself, *your* kind!

HUCKLEBEE. I said I was sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm—new. (*Realizing what is so different.*) You're—made out of rock.

STUFFY STEADFAST (*huh! What does he know?*). Am not!

HUCKLEBEE (*coming closer again*). Yes. You are. You're a rock—*pile!*

STUFFY STEADFAST. Careful! (*HUCKLEBEE realizes and stops quickly. STUFFY becomes somewhat vain in the case of rock versus stone. Clearly there is a hierarchy involved here unknowable by mere mortals.*) Not rock! *Stone!* Shows how much you know! Can't you see how smooth I am? Ever see a smooth *rock?* (*A quick warning to an encroaching HUCKLEBEE.*) *Don't touch!* I'm stone. Rocks are big and jagged and stupid. And clumsy. Go around falling on things. On highways and things. "Watch out for falling rock." "Rock"! Not "Watch out for falling stone." Stones don't fall. (*Summing up.*) Never call a stone a rock.

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HUCKLEBEE (*it's all going pretty fast for him*). But you can talk.

STUFFY STEADFAST. Of course I can talk. I *am* talking, I'm not ignorant.

HUCKLEBEE. But you're made out of stone.

STUFFY STEADFAST. Yes. And proud of it. (*A quick bit of poetry.*)

You can give a foolish rock a toss;

But a rolling stone gathers no moss!

(*A trifle defensive.*)

I wasn't *always* stone, you know.

HUCKLEBEE. You weren't?

STUFFY STEADFAST. Of course not. I was—(*Becoming just a little regretful.*) like you. I came to Rhyming Mountain just like you, to learn. To find my own rhyme. Huh! (*Quoting—with more than a little bitterness.*)

Everyone must rhyme, it's so;

As well as ever he can, you know. Huh!

HUCKLEBEE. But what happened?

STUFFY STEADFAST. What do you *think* happened?

What do you *see*? I turned to stone!

HUCKLEBEE (*this hasn't answered his question*). To stone...

STUFFY STEADFAST. Yes! Stone! I turned to stone! So?! It's not *all* bad. You haven't tried it. Everyone thinks being stone is so terrible. But they haven't tried it. There are worse things. So I turned to stone, so what?

HUCKLEBEE. But—why?

STUFFY STEADFAST (*with surprising abruptness*).

Don't want to talk about it.

HUCKLEBEE. What...?

STUFFY STEADFAST. Don't want to talk about it!
 Don't want to talk about it! Go away!

HUCKLEBEE. But—

STUFFY STEADFAST. Goodbye. (*STUFFY abruptly slams his eyes shut and swivels his boulder-like head 180° to the rear, clearly not to be drawn into further conversation, leaving HUCKLEBEE high and dry.*)

(From somewhere, startlingly near on the Mountain, comes a very loud, perhaps even amplified, JEERING LAUGH. It is joined quickly by a SNEERING LAUGH. Then a LEERING LAUGH. And HUCKLEBEE meets TAUNTER EASY, SCOFFER EASY and MOCKER EASY. Perched motionless, with wings covering faces, they at first appeared to be rock formations or perhaps mountain gargoyles. We now see they are actually, if regrettably, alive. None have scored high on beauty pageant tours.)

MOCKER EASY. Don't want to talk about it! Don't want to talk about it! Baauak! (*He laughs. If, in fact, "he" is a "he" which he needn't be.*)

SCOFFER EASY (*beginning a rhymic chant*).

Stuffy Steadfast made of stone—

TAUNTER EASY (*correcting*). Baauak!

Stuffy Steadfast turned to stone!

THE EASIES (*laughing again*). Baauak! Baauuak!

Stuffy Steadfast turned to stone;

Stood so long that he can't go home;

Afraid to change his mind;

Afraid of what he'll find;

Now he stands here all alone! (*Convulsed by their wit*.)

Raauak-raauuak-raauak!

HUCKLEBEE (*bewildered and a little confused*). Who are you?!

STUFFY STEADFAST (*nervously swiveling to face front again*). Don't listen! Don't listen to them! They're the Easies!

MOCKER EASY. Baauuak! (*Changing.*)

Stuffy Steadfast he can't rhyme;
Won't take a chance a single time!

THE EASIES. Baaaauuak-baaauak-baaaauaak! (*The THREE laugh uproariously and begin to descend. They do a rhythmic clapping routine as they chant their way down, coming far too close for STUFFY's peace of mind.*)

Stuffy Steadfast he can't rhyme;
Won't take a chance a single time!

STUFFY STEADFAST (*becoming confused, upset; over the chant*). Keep off the stones! Keep away! Keep off the stones!

THE EASIES (*over him*).

Won't spend a nickel and won't spend a dime,
Can't go up the Mountain
'Cause he's scared to climb!

Baaaauuak-baaaaauak-baaaauuuak!

(*The EASIES are having a fine time as they move into high gear, circling STUFFY and taunting him mercilessly. STUFFY begins to sound rather pathetic in his disorientation; his head swivels madly around and around, trying to follow their darting movements in vain. The derision grows in speed and intensity. The EASIES pick up small stones and toss them casually about—to each other, over their shoulders, at STUFFY—anything to taunt him. The following by STUFFY and the EASIES overlaps.*)