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Dramatic Publishing

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A Toby Show

By Aurand Harris

One-act Version

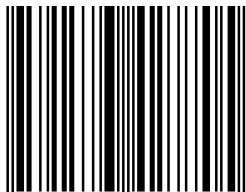
A Toby Show

Written under a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and premiered at The University of Texas at Austin. Toby is a great role for an energetic actor.

As the early posters advertised: A laugh a minute!
A cyclone of fun! Toby, a stick of dyna-mirth!

Comedy. By Aurand Harris. *Cast: 3m., 4w., plus extras for vaudeville entr'acts.* A Toby Show brings back to the stage an American folk character—Toby, the country bumpkin who through naivete, honesty, and homespun humor outwits the city slickers. This farce-melodrama recreates with traditional situations and stock characters—as well as jokes and stage business—a colorful segment of American drama: the traveling tent repertoire shows. Starring in the Cinderella story, Toby enacts a comic variation of the fairy godmother. With music and specialty numbers, the production excitingly evokes, for children of all ages, the joy of experiencing an authentic example of American folk theatre. *One interior set. 1915 American upper- to working-class costumes.* Code: TN9

ISBN-10 1-58342-770-8
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-770-5



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A Toby Show (1 act)



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ph: 800-448-7469

www.dramaticpublishing.com

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(One-act Version)

by

AURAND HARRIS



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(A TOBY SHOW – 1 ACT)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-770-5

Introduction

A Toby Show is a pastiche of a type of entertainment popular in a colorful era in American drama that began in the early years of the twentieth century and began a precipitous decline after the Great Depression. Before the development of radio, talking pictures, and television, troupes of traveling actors brought live entertainment into rural areas of the country—especially the mid-west and South. Playing in local opera houses and in tents, these repertoire companies performed three-act plays—a different bill each night of the week—supplemented by vaudeville between acts as well as orchestra or band. From this branch of the entertainment business—there were four hundred traveling companies at one time—emerged a truly American folk character named Toby.

Toby was a red-headed, freckle-faced country comedian, a country bumpkin who outsmarted the city slicker. Just as Harlequin in European drama became the stellar attraction in *Commedia dell'arte's* company of stock characters, Toby developed into the chief attraction of the rural Toby troupes. The plays they presented may have utilized familiar plots and drawn their stock characters in poster colors, but they entertained unsophisticated audiences and in many ways approximated America's version of the *Commedia dell'arte*. *A Toby Show* is a recreation of a classic form, now extinct, in a period of early American theatre.

It is impossible to document Toby's birth anymore than Paul Bunyan's or any other folk hero's. Some authorities try to link him to Greek or Shakespearean comedies; others, to the New England rube or the "silly kid" roles in early commercial plays. Whatever his origin, Toby finally emerged from the mists of mythology and moved into the theatrical spotlight somewhere in Louisiana, sometime in 1911 when Fred Wilson, the red-headed, freckled, leading comic on Murphy's Comedians appeared one night as Toby Haxton in *Clouds and Sunshine* and the next, as Toby Thompkins in *Out of the Fold*. On the third evening, his character was called another name, but the audience

dubbed him Toby. The name stuck and Toby was on its way to being born.

For many years Toby shows were only an arm of the repertoire theatre. Eventually, plays starring him filled the production schedule. It is estimated that in 1916 there were two hundred comedians calling themselves Toby—each a star in his territory.

Fittingly, *A Toby Show* retells the Cinderella story, one of the rep playwright's favorite plots, skillfully injecting Toby into the familiar story as a variation of the fairy godmother just as the "country playwrights" once did.

The play is a celebration of Toby. A SHOW starring TOBY, who, with his crown of red hair, was once King of the tent repertoire theatre in rural America.

CAST

TOBY
CINDY
MRS. VANUNDERSQUIRE
SOPHIA
MAUDERINA
BURTOCK
COLONEL

TIME: *A summer day, 1915*

SCENE: *The parlor of the Van Undersquire mansion.*

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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A Toby Show

(After a short overture by a small orchestra at the right side of the stage – traditionally a march and a popular song of the day, i.e. “O Susannah!” – the house lights dim as the footlights come up, and Toby steps out in front of the curtains lighted with a follow spot. His entrance music is “Turkey in the Straw.” Toby is a likeable, fun-loving, country rube comic with red freckles, red wig, and country clothes. He talks, jokes, and laughs freely with the audience.)

TOBY: Howdy, folks. Glad to see you. *(To front row.)* Glad you got here early and got a front row seat. *(To back row.)* And howdy do to you, way back there. Lady, will you please remove – *(Grins.)* Will all the ladies, and gentlemen, too, please remove their hats. No hats, no smoking, and if the baby cries, please take it out. *(Lively.)* Today Toby comes to town! If you don’t know Toby, I’ll tell you who he is. He’s a country fellow. Some folks call him a hayseed, but you can bet your bottom dollar he can outsmart any city slicker. He’s got red hair on his head and red freckles on his nose. And he’s about as high as a chicken sitting on a roosting-pole. *(Measures his own height with his hand.)* Proudly I present America’s own favorite, funny fellow – Toby! *(Spotlight moves to side of proscenium arch. No one enters. Spotlight moves back to Toby, who grins and waves.)* He’s standing right in front of you. Yup, I’m Toby! You’re dang tootin’ I’m Toby. And we’re going to give you a humdinger of a rip-snorting Toby Show! *(Closer.)* In this play, you’re going to see, there is a girl who has a step-mother – Oh, hoity-toity! *(Poses comically and wiggles hips.)* And she makes the girl do all the work while her own two daughters primp and get ready for a party. And at the ball that night there’s a Prince who – I ain’t going to tell no more. I have to lickity-split now, because I’m on my way to this swell-elegant house. I’ve come to the big city – all dressed up in my best bib and tucker – to get me a job. And here it is. *(Takes newspaper clipping from pocket.)* “Rich lady wants handyman for light work.” I’m handy and a man and the lighter the work the better! *(Laughs.)* This is the place where it’s all going to happen. Pull the curtains and let the show begin!

(Music for the opening of the curtain. SCENE: elegant drawing room, 1915. Ornate double doorway, D.R. Smaller doorway D.L. Three open French doors, or open archways, at back, elevated on a one-step platform. Terrace exterior backing. Ornate fireplace with large portrait above it on left wall. Ornate mirror with console table beneath on the right wall. Sofa with table behind it at R. Chair by fireplace at L. Toby is awed by the grandness.)

TOBY: Take a look at that. Swell-elegant! I'll bet she's so rich she has four cars, one to drive in each direction. *(Laughs. Telephone rings.)* Something is ringing. Cowbell! Church bell? Fire bell! Oh, it's one of them new tel-E-phones. *(Rings.)*

CINDY: *(Off.)* I'm coming. I'm coming. Just a minute. I'm coming.

TOBY: *(By proscenium arch.)* Somebody's coming. *(Rings. CINDY enters L, running and carrying a dress. She is young, pretty, and is dressed plainly. Although she is treated like a servant, she is always vital, cheerful, and sometimes spunky. She speaks into the telephone.)*

CINDY: Hello. The VanUndersquire residence. Who is calling, please? The Society editor of the *News!* She'll be here. She's coming. She's here. Mrs. VanUndersquire. *(MRS. VANUNDERSQUIRE enters L. She is elegantly dressed, haughty, commanding, and comically affected in her speech and manner.)*

TOBY: Hoity-TOITY! I'll bet she's so rich she has a different dentist for every tooth! *(Laughs.)*

MRS. V.: *(Stands, holding the telephone.)* Mrs. VanUndersquire? Yes, Mrs. VanUndersquire is speaking.

TOBY: It's Mrs. VanUnderSKIRT.

MRS. V.: Oh, the society editor! Yes, I am giving a dance tonight—a masquerade ball—in honor of his Royal Highness Prince Burtock. *(Laughs affectedly.)* He's a real live prince. *(To Cindy.)* Hurry and finish my dress. *(Into telephone.)* His mother was a friend of my late second husband. She married a Balkan prince, and now her son—no throne of course—is honoring us with a visit. *(To Cindy.)* Hang the lanterns in the garden, get the chairs for the orchestra, and, *(CINDY starts to R, then L, drops dress.)* My dress! Oh, you nitwit! *(Into telephone.)* No, no, not you—not you! *(Glares at Cindy.)* My step-daughter.

CINDY: I can't do everything at once.

MRS. V.: Well, someone do something!

TOBY: Hold the horses! I'm a-coming! (*Exits at side.*)

MRS. V.: Yes, the Prince is young, handsome, and very rich. I haven't seen him, but he is arriving today. We are expecting him at any minute, expecting the bell to ring at any moment. (*Doorbell rings.*) Oh, the bell! He's here. The prince is here! (*To Cindy.*) Put on the apron and cap. (*Points to them on table.*)

CINDY: Apron and cap?

MRS. V.: The maid's apron and cap.

CINDY: But I'm not the maid.

MRS. V.: You will be the maid while the Prince is here. The cap—the apron—ON! (*Doorbell rings. CINDY gets apron and cap.*) He's waiting. You half-wit! (*Into telephone.*) No, no, no, not you!

TOBY: (*Enters R, and shouts happily.*) Howdy, folks. The door was open and here I am!

MRS. V.: (*Freezes, her back to Toby.*) He's here. (*Puts telephone down, CINDY freezes, cap over eyes. MRS. V. regains her composure, turns slowly and speaks with great affection, and curtsies.*) How do you do. I am Lizzenna—(*Swallows.*)—Lizzenna Smythers VanUndersquire.

TOBY: (*Shakes her hand vigorously.*) Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Lizzie.

MRS. V.: (*Gasps in astonishment.*) We have been waiting—to see your countenance.

TOBY: See my what? (*Alarmed.*) Is it showing?

MRS. V.: We are honored that you will inhabit our unostentatious domicile.

TOBY: You want to trade that big word for two little ones?

MRS. V.: (*Surprised, then laughs with forced affectation.*) Oh-oh-oh, What a royal sense of humor. You do understand English?

TOBY: Sure. If you can speak it.

MRS. V.: I shall call my daughters. (*To Cindy.*) Tell Sophia and Mauderina to come at once. Hurry. (*CINDY exits R.*) If I may take the liberty, I have something to whisper in your ear.

TOBY: (*Quickly cleans out ear with finger and tilts head.*) Let her whisp.

MRS. V.: My daughters in YOUR presence may be a bit shy—overcome with modesty.

TOBY: Aw, shucks, fetch 'em in. My sister, she's modest, too. Yessirree. My sister is so modest that she blindfolds herself when she takes a bath. (*Laughs. MRS. V. is startled, then affectedly joins the laughing. They build the laughing, each topping the other. CINDY enters R.*)

CINDY: The girls are ready. (*CINDY exits R.*)

MRS. V.: Entrez-vous. (*SOPHIA enters R and stands. She is comically overdressed, imitates her mother's affectation.*) May I present my older daughter, Sophia.

TOBY: Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Soffee. (*Shakes hands vigorously.*)

SOPHIA: (*She ALWAYS speaks musically, up and down the scales, holding certain notes with melodic tremors.*) How do you do. How do you do.

TOBY: Listen at her talk. She sounds prettier than the church organ.

MRS. V.: Sophia is precociously musical.

SOPHIA: (*Speaking very very musically.*) Be at home here—now, please do-oo-oo-oo. How do you do. How do you do.

TOBY: (*Imitates her comically, with the same musical rhythm and notes.*) I'm at home when I hear a cow—moo-oo-oo-oo. (*Laughs.*)

MRS. V.: And now may I present my second daughter. (*Waves.*) Entrez-vous-hoo. (*MAUDERINA enters R, and stands. She is also comi-*

cally overdressed, but the two daughters look nothing alike. She is also comically affected.) My younger daughter, Mauderina.

TOBY: Howdy do. Glad to meet you, Maud. (*Shakes hands vigorously.*)

MAUDERINA: (*She ALWAYS speaks in verse, stressing clearly and loudly each rhyming word.*) A welcome BOUQUET of words we SAY, and wish you MAY enjoy your STAY.

TOBY: Listen at her talk! Fancy words that rhyme like a book.

MRS. V.: Mauderina is lyrical, versical and poetical. Come, girls. Show him to the garden and do take a peep at my gazebo.

TOBY: Peep? (*Aside.*) I'll take a goldarn good look.

SOPHIA: A summer house is a place for a rendezvous. (*SOPHIA exits L.*)

TOBY: For who?

MAUDERINA: Turtle doves FLY—BY— and bill and COO.

(*MAUDERINA exits L.*)

TOBY: They do? (*Looks after girls and shouts.*) Hot diggitty-dog! Hold the horses! I am a-coming! (*Makes a fast funny exit, stops, waves.*) Tootle-doo. (*Exits. CINDY enters R. There is a loud sound offstage of a flying machine.*)

CINDY: What is that? It sounds like a machine in the air. (*Runs to French doors at back. Points in air, excitedly.*) It is. It's a flying machine. He's circling around.

MRS. V.: Tell him to fly away.

CINDY: (*Motions.*) Go away. He's waving back. (*Waves.*) Hello.

MRS. V.: Tell him to GO AWAY.

CINDY: Go away. Away. He's coming back.

MRS. V.: I will tell him to leave. (*MRS. V. goes to French doors.*) Go away! Away! And stay away! (*Sounds dim out quickly.*) There. (*Romantically*) Tonight—in the moonlight, the Prince will dance with Sophia and Mauderina.

CINDY: I hope he will ask me to dance.

MRS. V.: You to dance?

CINDY: I like to dance.

MRS. V.: You are plain with no beauty or proper clothes.

CINDY: But I—

MRS. V.: You will stay in the kitchen. (*Points. CINDY starts.*) You and the Prince. (*Laughs.*) For you it is pots and pans.

(*MRS. V. exits R.*)

CINDY: Pots and pans . . . apron and cap . . . press her dress . . . (*Angrily throws dress on chair, then with spunk puts her chin up.*) If my real mother were here . . . (*Looks at portrait over mantel.*) If my father . . . if you were still alive . . . I'd go to the ball. I would wear . . . (*Grabs the dress.*) . . . a beautiful dress. (*Holds dress up in front of her.*) and the Prince would look right at ME. I'd be—a razzle-dazzle. (*Sings and dances a fast fox-trot. Stops and then pantomimes talking to Prince.*) Oh, I would be charmed to dance, your highness—if you can tango. (*She sings and does a funny tango. BURTOCK enters at back at French doors. He is young, handsome, and a Prince. He wears coveralls, helmet with goggles which are pushed up. His face is smeared with dirt and there is a small cut on his forehead. CINDY ends her dance, curtsies and smiles at imaginary partner.*) Thank you, your highness. You dance very well.

BURTOCK: So do you.

CINDY: (*Does a double take.*) What? Who? (*Sees Burtock.*) Where did you come from?

BURTOCK: I—I fell out of the sky. (*Takes off helmet and comes into room.*)

CINDY: It's you! In the aeroplane!

BURTOCK: (*Nods and smiles.*) Yes.

CINDY: You're bleeding!

BURTOCK: I bounced a little as I landed on the drive.

CINDY: I'm very good at first aid. Hold still. (*Wipes his face with apron.*)

BURTOCK: It's nothing.

CINDY: You can't bleed to death. Besides your face is dirty. (*Wipes it vigorously.*)

BURTOCK: (*Face to face. He smiles.*) Your face is— very pretty.

CINDY: (*Resigned, states facts cheerfully.*) No. I am plain and have no beauty. The Prince will never dance with me.

BURTOCK: The Prince?

CINDY: Tonight.

BURTOCK: I think he would.

CINDY: I'll be in the kitchen. Miss Pots and Pans, that's me.

BURTOCK: You are expecting a Prince?

CINDY: He just arrived. The Prince is in the garden.

BURTOCK: (*To audience.*) He is?

CINDY: But he— he isn't like my prince.

BURTOCK: Your prince?

CINDY: My prince is dressed in shining armour and he will come riding on his white horse to rescue me.

BURTOCK: That's quite a prince.

CINDY: When you're an orphan you make things up—use your imagination.

BURTOCK: Are you an orphan? I am, too.

CINDY: No mother? No father?

BURTOCK: Just a grandfather.

CINDY: Just a step mother.

BURTOCK: Then that makes us—well, we're a-a-a-a—

CINDY: Yes, we are! We're both a-a-a-a—Shake!

BURTOCK: Shake! (*They shake hands. MRS. V. is heard singing loudly off R.*)

CINDY: Here she comes. You have to go! She TOLD you to go away.

(*MRS. V. enters singing loudly and comically.*)

MRS. V.: “Here comes the bride. Here comes Sophia—or Mauderina—” (*Sees Cindy.*) You still here! Off to the kitchen! and who—who is this?

BURTOCK: I am—(*MRS. V. looks him over with her lorgnette.*)

MRS. V.: I can see. You are the new handyman.

BURTOCK: I—

MRS. V.: Never mind your name. You look strong—if untidy. Take him to the kitchen.

BURTOCK: But—

MRS. V.: Both of you—out, out, out!

CINDY: Come on. I'll wash your face. (*She starts to pull him toward the kitchen.*)

BURTOCK: (*Amused, smiles to audience.*) All right. (*Doorbell rings.*)

MRS. V.: The doorbell! Answer the door. (*CINDY holding Burtock's arm starts R.*) No, no, take him out. (*CINDY starts L.*) Hang the lanterns. Dump the garbage! (*Doorbell rings.*) I'm coming. (*Hurries Cindy off.*) Out! Out! Out! (*CINDY and BURTOCK exit L. COLONEL enters R. He is a comic old man—“G-string Man”—with a white beard and he is hard of hearing. He uses a cane. MRS. V. turns and sees him.*) Who are you?

COLONEL: (*Speaks in a funny squeaky voice—it sounds like a G-string of the violin.*) I know who I am. Who are you?

MRS. V.: I am Lizzenna Smythers VanUndersquire.

COLONEL: Eh?

MRS. V.: (*Louder.*) I am Lizzenna Smythers VanUndersquire.

COLONEL: I am pleased to meet you. Mrs. VanUnderWATER.

MRS. V.: Undersquire. Squire!

COLONEL: Fire? Fire!

MRS. V.: No, no!

COLONEL: Please don't shout. You will frighten Ulysses. (*To imaginary dog to whom he speaks throughout the play.*) Quiet, Ulysses. That's a good boy—good boy. We have found the right house—Mrs. Van UnderSHIRT. (*Pets imaginary dog.*)

MRS. V.: Ulysses? You mean, there is a dog in my house?

COLONEL: Eh?

MRS. V.: A dog! Dog! DOG!

COLONEL: Three dogs? No just one. Ulysses. Happy, happy boy. That's right, wag your tail, waggy waggy.

MRS. V.: Dogs, I do not perMIT.

COLONEL: Eh?

MRS. V.: Do not perMIT.

COLONEL: Sit? Thank you. (*COLONEL sits.*)

MRS. V.: You do not underSTAND.

COLONEL: Stand? (*COLONEL stands. MRS. V. draws herself up to full height.*)

MRS. V.: I am Mrs. VanUndersquire and I do not—

COLONEL: I AM pleased to meet you, Mrs. VanUnderGROUND.

MRS. V.: Take your dog out, out, out! (*There are three loud long dog barks. She gasps.*)

COLONEL: Good boy. (*Pets dog.*) Now that Ulysses has said hello, I will tell you why I am here. I am here because of my grandson, Prince Burtock.

MRS. V.: Prince Burtock! Your grandson!

COLONEL: It was a long march, but I made it . . . made it . . . made it. (*He goes to sleep standing up.*)

MRS. V.: You are here because—(*COLONEL snores and whistles.*) He's gone to sleep standing up! Colonel, wake up! (*Stomps her feet. There are long and loud dog barks. She jumps.*) Oh! Oh! Oh!

COLONEL: (*Opens his eyes and points.*) You stepped on Ulysses' paw.

MRS. V.: (*Looks about confused.*) Oh, excuse me. Excuse me, Ulysses.

COLONEL: My grandson, Prince Burtock—is here for a special reason. He is to choose a wife. His mother, my daughter, married a foreign title—

MRS. V.: Yes, I know.

COLONEL: And when she died she left a will.

MRS. V.: A will?

COLONEL: The Prince to inherit his fortune must marry . . . must marry . . . (*Goes to sleep. Snores loudly.*)

MRS. V.: Yes, marry . . . marry? (*COLONEL snores and whistles.*) Oh, he's snoring again. Colonel, wake up. Oh, Ulysses, Ulysses, where are you? (*Whistles and gives a heavy stomp. There is a loud and long barking of a dog.*)

COLONEL: (*Points.*) You stepped on Ulysses' tail. The Prince, to inherit his fortune, must marry a daughter of his mother's friend, Mr. Charles VanUndersquire.

MRS. V.: Yes, I am MRS. Van Undersquire.

COLONEL: I am glad to meet you, Mrs. VanUnderTAKER.

MRS. V.: I have two daughters.

COLONEL: Eh?

MRS. V.: Daughters. I have TWO.

COLONEL: A FEW? No, he can only marry one. I am here to see that he marries and inherits his fortune.

MRS. V.: And I will see that you are victorious!

COLONEL: (*Salutes.*) Good soldier.

MRS. V.: The Prince is already here.

COLONEL: Here?

MRS. V.: In the gazebo.

COLONEL: Come on a zebra?

MRS. V.: No, no. He— look. Oh, he is hidden by the SHRUB.

COLONEL: In the bathTUB.

MRS. V.: He is with my two daughters.

COLONEL: Three of them—in the bathTUB.

MRS. V.: In the garden!

COLONEL: He got here first. Oh, shooty-tooty. In the war I was first . . . first . . . (*COLONEL sleeps, snores and whistles.*)

MRS. V.: (*Elated.*) The Prince must marry a VanUndersquire daughter. (*MRS. V. talks to portrait on wall.*) Oh, Mr. VanUndersquire, how fortunate that I made you adopt my two daughters. Now one of them will be a Princess. I must alert them. (*Goes to L, waves, calls sweetly.*) Sophia . . . Mauderina. Of course there is his daughter, Cindy. But the