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Family Plays

THE MEDICINE MAN

Comedy by David Grote

**Loosely based on Molière's
*The Doctor in Spite of Himself***



THE MEDICINE MAN

“The comment I heard most was that this was one of the best plays we have done in the 10 years of our department.”
(Reginald Russell, Judson High School, San Antonio, Texas).

“We closed with a sell out and rave reviews.”
(Murray Barks, Lake Country Playhouse, Mineola, Texas)

Comedy. By David Grote. Loosely based on Molière’s *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*. *Cast: 6m., 6w.* “A miserable, worthless piece of desert driftwood, a fork-tongued, lily-livered, puffed-up popinjay—snake-oil salesman, card sharp, pick-pocket, claim jumper, medicine show man, con man and a number-one coward.” Those are a few of the terms that Aggie uses to describe Sagamore, the hero of our play. It appears that she doesn’t think very highly of him—you can’t much blame her. Sagamore walked out 10 years ago to get a drink and didn’t bother to come back, leaving his wife and 4-year-old daughter, Louise, to shift for each other. Now, by one of those sheer coincidences that you find only in carefree, happy farces (like those by Shakespeare and Molière), Sagamore strolls into a desert hotel owned and operated by Aggie. After a hilarious broom-swatting fight, Aggie has just about persuaded Sagamore that he’s not welcome. Louise—now in her early teens—begs him to stay. In the meantime, Senor Vega, the richest man in the valley, brings his daughter to the hotel in search of a doctor to cure the strange malady which has caused her to lose her voice. The old doctor has just died, and Sagamore decides to use the doctor’s bag of tools to cure the girl and gain the reward. Vega, who is nobody’s fool, suspects that Sagamore is not the skilled doctor he pretends to be; he tells Sagamore to cure his daughter or hang from the nearest tree. This plot should sound vaguely familiar, for it is loosely based on possibly the funniest play ever written—Molière’s *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*. Molière would undoubtedly be delighted to see his play transferred to the American Wild West because it fits as comfortably as a pair of faded blue jeans. *The Medicine Man* is recommended for all groups. Community theatres, universities and high schools have found this to be a well-plotted, hilarious play. *Simple int. set.* *Costumes: Western. Approximate running time: 70 to 90 minutes. Code: ML9.*

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The Medicine Man

THE MEDICINE MAN

A Farce in Two Acts

by

DAVID G. GROTE

(Suggested by Moliere's 'The Doctor in Spite of Himself')

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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DAVID G. GROTE

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(THE MEDICINE MAN)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

THE MEDICINE MAN

*a farce in two acts
for 6 men and 6 women*

CAST

AGNES, a strong-willed woman in her 30s

LOUISE, her daughter, age 13 to 15

VAL, a cowboy

LUKE, his sidekick, the quiet type

SAGAMORE, a down-on-his-luck traveling con-man

SHERIFF, bluff, blustering, not too bright

LILY, the Sheriff's sister, energetic and frustrated

VEGA, a rancher, the richest man in the valley

CLARA, his wife

ISABEL, his daughter, temporarily dumb, about 18

INEZ, her chaperone, a battle-ax

LONNIE, a young cowboy



SETTING: The lobby of a hotel in California, in the time of the Old West.

ABOUT THE PLAY.

"A miserable, worthless piece of desert driftwood, a fork-tongued, lily-livered, puffed-up popinjay—snake-oil salesman, card sharp, pick-pocket, claim jumper, medicine show man, con man, and A-number-one coward."

Those are a few of the terms that Aggie uses to describe Sagamore, the hero of our play. It appears that she doesn't think very highly of him. And you can't much blame her. Sagamore walked out 10 years ago to get a drink and didn't bother to come back, leaving his wife and four-year-old daughter Louise to shift for themselves.

And now, by one of those sheer coincidences that you find only in carefree, happy farces (like those by Shakespeare and Moliere), Sagamore strolls into a desert hotel owned and operated by Aggie.

After a hilarious broom-swatting fight, Aggie has just about persuaded Sagamore that he's not welcome. Louise—now in her early teens—begs him to stay.

In the meantime, Senor Vega, the richest man in the valley, brings his daughter to the hotel in search of a doctor to cure the strange malady which has caused her to lose her voice. The old doc has just died, and Sagamore decides to use the doctor's bag of tools to cure the girl and gain the reward. Vega, who is nobody's fool, suspects that Sagamore is not the skilled doctor he pretends to be; he tells Sagamore to cure his daughter or hang from the nearest tree.

This plot should sound vaguely familiar, for it is loosely based on possibly the funniest play ever written—Moliere's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*. Moliere would undoubtedly be delighted to see his play transferred to the American Wild West, because it fits as comfortably as a pair of faded blue jeans.

Recommended for all groups.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Act I

Soap, rags—Agnes
 Feather duster—Louise
 Dust rag—Agnes
 Room keys—on key rack
 Broom and dustpan—behind desk
 Carpetbag—Sagamore
 Desk bell—on desk
 Bed sheet—Louise
 Hotel register and writing pen—on desk
 Doctor's bag containing stethoscope, rubber mallet, hack saw, very large syringe, etc.—brought on by Luke
 Golf club—inside of or tied to medicine bag
 Trunk—Luke
 Guns in holsters—Sheriff, Luke, Val

Act II

Handkerchief—Sagamore
 Bottles filled with liquid—in Sagamore's carpetbag
 Large water glass—on desk
 Pistol—under desk
 Rope—behind desk
 Roll of paper money—Vega

Characters and Costumes

This play may be staged in any time period from about 1850 to very near the present. You may be historically accurate, or you may choose to work in the fairy-tale world of the "Old West," which has no true period or place, except in bad movies. Either approach has its advantages.

Whichever approach you use, the following points should be kept in mind:

1) The hotel and its clients at least try to be respectable. This is not a saloon or a cantina. There are no unpainted walls, no signs with lettering formed backward, no saloon girls, no drunken brawls, and no plunging necklines.

2) **Vega** and his family are rich, respectable persons, representatives of one of the pioneer cultures in the new America. Vega in particular may be pompous, stubborn, and unfeeling, but he is a reputable man, the upholder of old Spanish landowners and their traditions. All attempts to make him a comic-opera Mexican or the clichéd Mexican bandito should be resisted.

The family may (and should) be dressed in the Spanish fashion of old California. However, the most formal, imposing, and blackest of these costumes should be that of **Inez**. **Isabel** should be more "American," more frilly, and in brighter colors than the rest of the family. **Clara** should dress somewhere between Inez and Isabel. Do not put Isabel in the movies' "Mexican girl blouse," gathered so as to give a plunging neckline or off-the-shoulder effect. Dress the character, not the cliché; that she happens to be ethnically Latin is the least important factor in her character. A shawl in her early scenes, worn over her head to show how demure she is, may be sufficient to tie her to the rest of the family.

3) In the matter of accents, less is more. The Vegas are an intelligent family, well educated. The script tries to indicate that English is not Vega's first language by a precision and a formality the other characters lack. He should be played as if he has to consider and choose his words carefully, not as if he can't pronounce them. Isabel, of course, is most fluent in American, when she finally does talk.

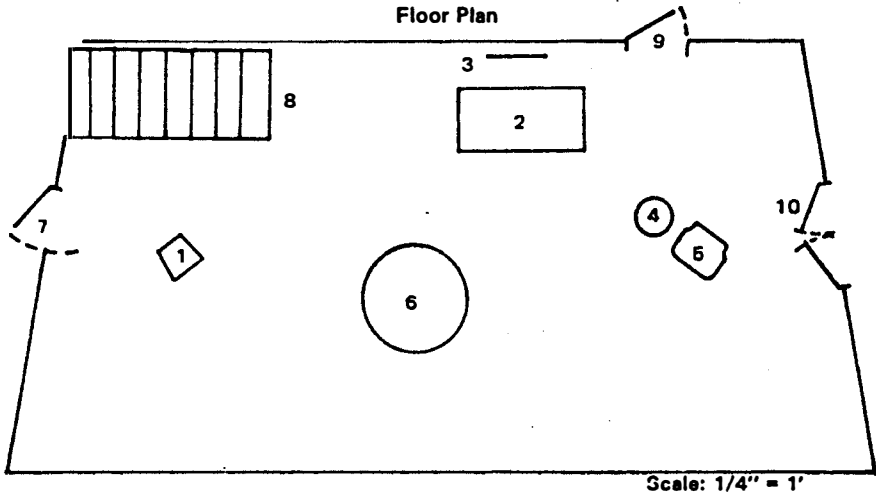
4) **Sagamore** should be dressed rather formally, if somewhat down on his luck. The clothes should suggest better times in the past. They should be a little flashy, but not gaudy. He would lose his trustworthiness if he were too flamboyant.

5) **Luke** is a long-running gag. He must speak slowly, carefully, and with great thought. Each "yep" should have a careful buildup, as if he required long thought to commit himself. When he falls in love, he loses all control, but still can not get out more than a single word at a time.

6) The cowboys should look like cowboys. The closer you can come to Fred-eric Remington, the better. The dust needed for the sight gags may be chalk dust. It is very visible, and very easy to come by, as well as being easily applied and brushed off.

7) Lily is a frustrated spinster. In her middle twenties at a time when one was married by 17, she is beginning to think the world is passing her by, because Leroy keeps her hidden. Consequently, she comes on very strong when she gets the chance. But she is not a woman of easy virtue, and should not be dressed as one.

The Set
Floor Plan



- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1—Straight chair | 2—Hotel registration desk |
| 3—Room key rack | 4—Table |
| 5—Large armchair | 6—Large, low ottoman |
| 7—Door with "Saloon" sign | |
| 8—Stairway to bedrooms (a 2 or 3-step unit will do if a large stairway is impossible to obtain) | |
| 9—Door to owner's room | 10—Main entrance to lobby |
- Other furniture and set decorations may be added if desired.

THE MEDICINE MAN

By David G. Grote

ACT I

[SCENE: The lobby of the Mountain View Hotel in a small California town. The setting and the play itself have that Old West timelessness—the action could take place a few years after the Gold Rush fever was over, or a few years ago. The lobby is pleasant in its way, with pretensions to Eastern luxury, but on a very small scale. At Stage Left are double doors leading to the main street of the town. At Right another door is the private entrance to the saloon, which is next door, but which will not particularly concern us in this play. A sign on the door says “saloon.” Up Right is a stairway leading to the rooms upstairs, and next to that is the desk, with the usual paraphernalia. Behind the desk is a large board with a number of keys hanging from it. There is a small exit door behind the desk which leads to the owner’s rooms. There is a chair by the Right door, and an armchair to the left, above the door, with a table and lamp beside it. Down Center is an ottoman, large enough for at least two people to sit at the same time. The room should give the impression of an owner who, against almost insurmountable odds, is going to have something as nice as humanly possible, even if very few of the cowhands and drummers who use the hotel will ever appreciate it. Maintaining this niceness, however, is a real struggle, especially against the constant dust. In fact, as the curtain opens we see AGNES, the proprietor, engaged in another battle against the elements, trying to remove a spot from the ottoman. LOUISE, her daughter, is dusting the room with a feather duster. She is 14 or 15, still open and naive—traits her mother has long since outgrown]

LOUISE. Mama?

AGNES. What?

LOUISE. I was thinking, when I got up this morning I felt different. Something’s going to happen, something special. Something different.

AGNES. The only thing different that’s likely to happen here is, some cowhand’s gonna come through that door and be even dirtier than normal. Then he’ll sit down and we’ll never get the dirt out of the furniture again.

LOUISE. No, Mama. I mean something really special. I just know it.

AGNES. *[Not listening]* Well, that’s about as good as I’m ever gonna get this, I guess.

LOUISE. Maybe it'll be the day Papa comes back.

AGNES. I thought I told you never to mention that name again.

LOUISE. But, Mama—

AGNES. Don't you "but mama" me. [*Crosses to desk and puts soap and rags away*] You forget him. He's forgotten you, and you know it. Besides, if he did ever come back, I'd throw him right back out on his ear.

LOUISE. No! Mama!

AGNES. Yes, Louise. He's a two-bit swindler and a good-for-nothing scoundrel, and we're both better off without him. So you just quit thinking about it. I mean it.

LOUISE. Yes, Mama.

[LOUISE goes back to dusting, and AGNES polishes desk. VAL and LUKE enter Left. They are cowboys who have just come off the trail, as is evident from the dustiness of their clothes. They slap themselves with their hats, and clouds of dust billow up. AGNES looks at Louise with a sigh]

AGNES. What'd I tell you? [*VAL and LUKE start toward desk. LUKE spots door to saloon and turns toward it. VAL grabs him and pulls him back to desk*]

VAL. Business first.

LUKE. O.K.

AGNES. Can I help you, gents?

VAL. Yes, ma'am. If this is the best hotel in town.

AGNES. It's the only hotel in town. But, even so, we try.

VAL. Yes, ma'am, I can see that. It is right nice.

AGNES. I thank you. Now, will that be a room for the two of you?

VAL. Actually, ma'am, we'll be needing three rooms.

AGNES. What's the matter? Walk in your sleep?

VAL. Say, that's good. [*Laughs*] Walk in your sleep. [*LUKE laughs; VAL stops*] No, ma'am, you see, we don't want them for us. Leastways, not all of them. Senor Vega and his family are behind us in the coach, and we're supposed to see that everything is ready before they get here.

LUKE. Yep.

AGNES. Not *the* Senor Vega?

VAL. Yes, ma'am. That's the one. The biggest spread in the whole valley.

AGNES. Louise!

LOUISE. Yes, Mama?

AGNES. Louise, we have very important guests coming. I want you to go up to rooms 4 and 5 and clean them up real good.

LOUISE. But I was dusting the lobby.

AGNES. That can wait. Now, make sure everything is spotless in those rooms, and change the sheets.

LOUISE. Change the sheets? It's only Thursday.

AGNES. I don't care. Change them again. You heard me, now git.

LOUISE. Yes, Mama. *[Exit up stairs. AGNES yells after her]*

AGNES. And sweep up number 6, too, for these nice cowboys.

VAL. Why, thank you, ma'am.

AGNES. My pleasure. It isn't every day the richest man in the valley comes to stay at my hotel.

VAL. No, ma'am, I don't suppose it is.

AGNES. What brings him to town now, if you don't mind my asking?

VAL. Personal problems, ma'am. Family matters.

LUKE. Yep.

AGNES. Oh, well, I won't meddle, then. Here's your key, gents. I'll keep these others until Senor Vega arrives, of course.

VAL. Certainly. *[Pause]* Say, ma'am, there is one more thing you could help us on.

AGNES. We aim to please.

VAL. Could you direct us to the town doctor?

AGNES. I'm afraid you just missed him, gents.

VAL. Where could we find him, do you think?

AGNES. Don't think. I know. He's out to the cemetery. You probably passed him when you rode in.

VAL. You mean he was with that funeral procession?

AGNES. I'm sure he was.

VAL. When you figure he'll be back?

AGNES. Don't imagine he will. He's the one they're burying.

VAL. The doc's dead?

AGNES. As your friend so eloquently puts it—yep.

VAL. *[Staggering to ottoman and sinking down]* That's just terrible.

LUKE. *[Sinking beside him]* Yep.

AGNES. *[Crossing to them]* No need to take on so, fellows. Doc was a nice enough old coot, but there's no need to take it so hard. You weren't relatives of his, were you?

VAL. Worse.

LUKE. Yep.

VAL. What're we gonna do? *[They both put their heads in their hands]*

AGNES. Say, listen, gents, it ain't that bad. Whatever it is.

VAL. You don't know Senor Vega.

LUKE. Nope.

VAL. He sent us to find a doctor, and we'd better find a doctor, or else.

LUKE. Yep.

VAL. His daughter is powerful sick, and he's getting desperate. The doc here was the only doctor 'tween here and San Francisco. Now we are really in for it!

AGNES. Ain't your fault Doc up and died.

VAL. That don't matter. We was s'posed to have a doctor waiting when he come into town, and we'd better have a doctor waiting. Or we'd best not be waiting either.

AGNES. It doesn't pay to get overwrought. Things can't be nearly as bad as you think. Something will happen.

VAL. Yeah. Maybe we can get a train to China.

AGNES. Why don't you go up to Doc's old room. His stuff's still there. Maybe something'll come to you.

VAL. No thanks, ma'am. Luke, I think your first idea was the best one. We need a spot of firewater.

AGNES. That won't solve anything.

VAL. We know, but it's better than going to China.

LUKE. Yep.

[VAL and LUKE exit Right. AGNES gets broom, sweeps up dust they knocked off at their entrance. As she is sweeping into dustpan, SAGAMORE opens door behind her at Left. She doesn't see him, takes dustpan behind desk and dumps it. Her back is to Sagamore throughout. SAGAMORE drops carpetbag where she was sweeping. A cloud of dust billows up. He crosses to desk and rings bell]

SAGAMORE. Service!

AGNES. Hold your horses.

SAGAMORE. Madam, I wish a place of repose for the evening.

AGNES. If you mean a bed, then this is the place. *[She turns and sees him]* You!

SAGAMORE. You!

AGNES. Sam?

SAGAMORE. Aggie?

AGNES. *[Coming around desk]* What are you doing here?

SAGAMORE. After all these years!

AGNES. *[Shouting]* Louise!

SAGAMORE. Louise is here, too?

AGNES. Of course Louise is here. I could hardly walk off and leave her someplace, could I? Unlike some people.

SAGAMORE. Now, Aggie, my dear, I can explain—

AGNES. Oh, I'm sure you can. You always were good at explaining. And don't you "Aggie my dear" me, you worm. Not after 10 years.

SAGAMORE. Ten long years, my darling. Don't I even get a little kiss of welcome?

AGNES. A kiss! You'll get more than a kiss in a minute. Louise!

LOUISE. [*Entering on stair with sheet*] Mama, I'm still making the bed like you told me.

AGNES. You can wait a minute for that. I've got something to show you, a surprise.

SAGAMORE. Is that really little Louise? She's changed.

AGNES. Kids have a way of doing that. Especially when you only see them once every ten years. [*LOUISE is now at base of stairs*] Louise, honey, you see that miserable, worthless piece of desert driftwood, that forked-tongue, lily-livered, puffed up popinjay?

LOUISE. Nobody but that old gentleman there, Mama.

AGNES. Gentleman, hah!

SAGAMORE. Aggie, restrain yourself.

AGNES. That's certainly no gentleman. That's a snake-oil salesman, a card sharp, a pickpocket, claim jumper, medicine show man, con man, and an A-number-one coward. And that was ten years ago. Lord only knows what he's been up to since. But, be that as it may, and as much as it pains me to say it, Louise honey, that thing there is your father.

LOUISE. Papa?

SAGAMORE. Louise! [*Holds out his arms*]

LOUISE. Oh, papa! [*She throws sheet in air and rushes to Sagamore, leaping into his arms and hugging his neck. He staggers a bit, then swings her around in a circle while she kisses him. They get down to the ottoman, where SAGAMORE collapses under the weight. LOUISE jumps into his lap, still hugging, and very excited. She speaks as fast as possible, without pause for breath*] Oh, Papa, I knew you'd come back, I knew you would, I dreamed of it all the time, I got up today and I knew something special was going to happen, I said so, didn't I, Mama, didn't I say so, and now you're here and I'm never gonna let you go again, and we'll have the best time—

AGNES. That's enough, Louise.

LOUISE. Oh, Mama, isn't it great to have Papa back again?

AGNES. Wonderful, just wonderful. [*Her heart's not in it*] Now let him up for air.

LOUISE. Oh, Papa, I missed you so.

SAGAMORE. And I missed you too, Louise.

AGNES. Like you missed me, too, I'm sure. [*Separating Louise*

from him; to Louise] Now you' vsee him, such as he is! I' d never deny my daughter the hand at least of her father. .

SAGAMORE. I'm not sure I like the one of that.

AGNES. Now, go get her here if you can.

LOUISE. What for, Mama? I want to stay with you and Papa.

AGNES. Your father and I have some things to discuss, and I have some business to see to. You will stay here for a minute or two and get the medicine I need for the child, all right?

LOUISE. All right, Mama. But I'll be right back. *[to Sagamore]* and then you can tell me all about what you' be doing all this time. OK?

SAGAMORE. Sure, darling. *LOUISE smiles, and runs out Left doors]* Well, now, my dear, what is it you wish to discuss?

AGNES. I don't wish to discuss anything. What could there possibly be to discuss with a man who goes out here to drink in St. Louis and shows up again in 10 years at the California That's a mighty long straw.

SAGAMORE. I admit I have been a weak member of my family ties.

AGNES. Remiss? You could say that. You could also say negligent, derelict, delinquent, and downright disgusting.

SAGAMORE. May I ask if you perhaps had heard of the sheriff in relation to myself?

AGNES. Yes.

SAGAMORE. This is a wonderful day for me, in my family problem.

AGNES. This one would let me know what you are doing with your money.

SAGAMORE. Aggie! How could you? After all we meant to each other.

AGNES. Meant to each other? How dare you? *[She crosses to desk, picks up register book and throws it at him]* Here's what you meant to me, you worm!

SAGAMORE. *[Dodging]* Now Aggie, a game call will be fine for you.

AGNES. *[Throwing keys]* You snare me.

SAGAMORE. Aggie, dear, you're a bit of a snare to me, aren't you?

AGNES. *[Throwing feather duster]* You bum!

SAGAMORE. *[Dodging]* You got to be a little more pliant.

AGNES. *[Throwing soap]* Card-sharp!

SAGAMORE. *[Dodging]* You're a patient, aren't you, dear?

AGNES. *[Throwing dustpan]* You're a snare!

SAGAMORE. *[Dodging]* I was a little bit of a snare to you, wasn't I?

AGNES. *[Charging him with broom]* Swindler!

SAGAMORE. *[Dodging around room, trying to block broom]* Desist, my sweet potato pie, desist!

AGNES. Villain!! *[He momentarily drops his guard and she hits him a good one]*

SAGAMORE. That's it! Now you've gone a bit too far, my little prairie dog.

AGNES. I've only just begun! *[She charges him again, but this time he grabs the broom. They wrestle around room until he wrests broom from her hand. She runs to desk, picks up pen and runs at him, with pen held as knife, trying to stab him. He notices at last moment, grabs her hand, and both fall over onto ottoman, AGNES on top, and him holding her hand up as pen moves closer to his throat]* I swore 10 years ago that, if I ever saw you again, someone was going to jail. It can be you, or it can be me, for killing you. Take your choice!

SAGAMORE. But I haven't done anything!

AGNES. Hah! *[She makes a desperate stabbing attempt, which he blocks. They wrestle a moment, then he twists her hand, throwing her over onto the floor and pulling pen from her hand. As he throws pen away, she leaps back on him, trying to scratch his eyes. He grabs both her hands, and pulls her down across his lap, beginning to spank her]*
QUIT THAT!

SAGAMORE. You brought it on yourself, my little apple core.

AGNES. When I get my hands on you, you'll beg for mercy.

SAGAMORE. *[Still spanking]* You forget, my dear, that I currently have the upper hand.

AGNES. Not for long.

SAGAMORE. Apologize?

AGNES. Never!

SAGAMORE. *[Spanking again]* Then I shall have to continue, I'm afraid.

[LOUISE and SHERIFF enter Left, and freeze at the tableau presented]

LOUISE. Mama!

SHERIFF. What's going on here?

AGNES. Nothing. Go away.

SHERIFF. But you sent for me.

AGNES. Well, now I'm sending you away!

SHERIFF. But he's trying to beat you. This is a civilized town, and we don't hold to men beating up on a lady, not as long as I'm the sheriff.

SAGAMORE. What lady's that?