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*Dramatic Publishing*



# Clowns' Play

By  
REGINALD F. BAIN

A participation play for young people  
to be performed by adults



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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REGINALD F. BAIN

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(CLOWNS' PLAY)

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CLOWNS' PLAY was first presented under the title *Jack and the Beanstalk* by the Notre Dame-Saint Mary's Theatre in the Little Theatre (Moreau Hall) on the Saint Mary's College campus, Notre Dame, Indiana. The production was directed by Janet Wilson with the following cast:

Boffo . . . . . Terence Kennedy  
Mustard. . . . . Aubrey Payne  
Trinket . . . . . Kathrene Wales  
Ruffina . . . . . Nancy Syburg  
Musculo. . . . . Dan Daily  
Doxy . . . . . Katharine Burke  
Moxy . . . . . Kathryn Gaffney  
Scrappy. . . . . Dan Deziel

CLOWNS' PLAY  
*A Participation Play*  
For Four Men and Four Women

C H A R A C T E R S

BOFFO . . . . . the con man  
MUSTARD . . . . . narrator, Farmer Brown, golden hen  
TRINKET . . . . . con man's accomplice, singing harp  
RUFFINA . . . . . giant's wife  
MUSCULO. . . . . the giant  
DOXY. . . . . Bessie the cow  
MOXY . . . . . Jack's mother  
SCRAPPY . . . . . Jack

SCENE: A bare stage with cyclorama. There are two signs on easels placed at the proscenium. They read:  
"Show Today – Jack and the Beanstalk"

## CLOWNS' PLAY

BOFFO has been ushering with the other CLOWNS. When it is time for the play to begin, he makes his way to the stage and the other CLOWNS distribute themselves in the aisles of the theatre. As BOFFO reaches the stage he signals for the house lights to dim to half and the stage lights to be brought up. A fanfare is heard. BOFFO moves C to introduce the play.

BOFFO. Ladies and gentlemen! Young people of all ages! The — (Name of group.) — theatre is pleased to present an exciting new version of that age-old tale — *Jack and the Beanstalk*. (Other CLOWNS applaud.) We are most fortunate to have with us to play this wonderful story a troupe of actors from . . .

MUSTARD (interrupting from audience). Wait! Wait a minute! Stop!

BOFFO. What's the meaning of this? Who's interrupting our show? (He sees MUSTARD.) Oh, it's you. What do you think you're doing? (MUSTARD has climbed up onto the stage. BOFFO crosses to him angrily.) You boob! (He bops MUSTARD over the head and MUSTARD falls to the floor.)

MUSTARD. Wait! I've got something to tell you. We just —

BOFFO. No, we can't wait. These people want to see our show. (Back to audience.) Now, as I was saying . . .

MUSTARD. But, I must tell you . . .

BOFFO (bopping MUSTARD again). Silence! (Back to audience.) Please excuse this bumbling buzzard! Now, back to my introduction . . . (MUSTARD makes to say something but thinks better of it as BOFFO raises his hand to hit him again. Resigned, MUSTARD moves away

and sits on stage.)

MUSTARD. Okay! Go on . . . Dunderhead!

BOFFO. What! (He starts to go after MUSTARD but the other CLOWNS rush to stage and intervene.)

CLOWNS (general reaction). Stop it, both of you. Go on, introduce the show! (Etc.)

BOFFO (composing himself and returning to C). Well, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by that crass, crazy, crude . . . (His anger returns.)

CLOWNS (together). Introduce the show!

BOFFO (to audience). Sorry. (Back to introduction.) It is with great pride that we of the — (Name of group.) — theatre bring you a special performance of *Jack and the Beanstalk* performed by a traveling troupe of actors all the way from Bumble Bee, Arizona. We give you — The Bumblebee Barnstormers! (Fanfare. No one enters. BOFFO is confused. MUSTARD knowingly gloats. The other CLOWNS look at one another wondering what has happened. BOFFO decides to try again.) The Bumblebee Barnstormers! (Fanfare. Again no response. CLOWNS whisper to one another. BOFFO whispers to TRINKET to go off and see what's the matter. She does so. MUSTARD continues to be amused. BOFFO returns to the audience a bit shook.) Well . . . um . . . I can't imagine what's holding things up . . . um . . . (An idea.) Maybe, if we all introduce the actors together, they'd come out. All right, now everyone . . . let's try introducing them together. Ready. The Bumblebee Barnstormers! Again, louder — The Bumblebee Barnstormers!

(TRINKET returns, obviously disturbed. BOFFO runs to her.)

BOFFO. What's the matter? Where are they? Aren't they ready yet?

TRINKET (can hardly get it out). They . . . they . . . they aren't here!

CLOWNS (general reaction). What happened? I don't understand. (Etc.)

BOFFO (sitting on stage next to MUSTARD). What are we going to do?

MUSTARD (he now has the upper hand). That's what I was trying to tell you. But, of course, you wouldn't listen. Just as the house lights were going down to start the show, I got a phone call on the phone out in the lobby. The Barnstormer's van broke down on the highway and they're not going to be able to make it for this performance. (There is general dismay.)

MOXY. Oh, dear, we don't have a show!

MUSCULO. These people paid their money. We promised them *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

SCRAPPY. Maybe we'll have to return the money.

DOXY. Maybe they could come back another day.

MUSTARD. No. No. Wait, all of you. What's the matter with you? You're clowns, aren't you? We call ourselves the — (Name of group.) — theatre, don't we? We don't need to depend on another group to do the show. We can do it ourselves. (General reaction of doubt from the others.)

BOFFO. But you can't do a play you haven't rehearsed, you raspy rapsSCALLION. We were hired as ushers. We're clowns, not actors. Clowns do their bits of business and make people happy. (He demonstrates with a bit of business like jumping up, touching heels and falling on the floor.) But clowns don't act characters in plays. Besides, we don't have a script.

MUSTARD. That just shows what you know. You're new at being a clown. I've been around awhile and I can tell you that actors and clowns are very much alike. Look around you. Look at those faces. Each one is different. Each one



is a character – an individual, a person. Look at them. (He goes to each and introduces them.) Trinket and Scrapy – playful children ready to trick you without warning.

(TRINKET moves to BOFFO and distracts him while SCRAPPY moves around behind him. When SCRAPPY is down on his hands and knees behind BOFFO, TRINKET pushes BOFFO over SCRAPPY. BOFFO ends up on the floor.)

MUSTARD. And you, Boffo, always ready for a good fight.

(MUSTARD tosses BOFFO a stick which becomes a “sword.” They fight and MUSTARD disarms him. BOFFO again ends up on the floor.)

MUSTARD. Ah, yes, and then there’s Musculo, the magnificent would-be strongman – and his assistant Ruffina.

(RUFFINA hands MUSCULO a piece of “steel” to bend. He bends it after some great effort. He bows, accepts the applause of the group. As he hands the “steel” bar back to RUFFINA it flops over and we see that it was obviously a phony.)

MUSTARD. Look out there! Here come those two schemers – Moxy and Doxy. They’re liable to pull anything, watch out!

(One of the two girls brings out a hose from the wings and points it at the audience threateningly. The other brings out a wooden bucket to fill. They “fill” bucket, look at each other, and decide to throw contents at audience. They make a couple of false starts and finally throw

confetti-filled bucket at audience.)

MUSTARD. So, you see, Boffo, we all have our roles to play. We are actors, too.

BOFFO (not so sure). Okay . . . okay . . . But what about a script?

MUSCULO. Let's improvise. (General agreement from the others.)

BOFFO. That's a word I don't know. What's it mean?

MUSTARD. I bet our friends in the audience know that word. (To audience.) Does anyone out there know what "to improvise" means? (CLOWNS should help to solicit responses from audience until definition is obtained. Try to use audience's suggestions repeating them as they are brought up.) Right. That's it. To improvise means to make it up as you go along. We don't need a script. We all know the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

(MOXY runs offstage and comes back immediately with an over-sized book. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is clearly visible in large letters on the cover.)

MOXY. I've got the book. We can use this to follow the story.

MUSTARD. Good. And I bet all these young people know it well enough to help us – if we run into trouble. (To audience.) Will you help us? (Other CLOWNS ask also. Audience will say yes.) Good! Now, Actors . . . (He says "actors" with relish.) Let's improvise. (The CLOWNS gather around MUSTARD, who has opened the book and is kneeling over it.)

CLOWNS (general response). I'll play Jack . . . I want to be the giant . . . giant's wife . . . the cow . . . (Etc.)

MUSTARD (quieting them). Wait! Since I am your leader, I will decide who plays which role. It is difficult to

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improvise without a leader or director to make some decisions. Otherwise we'll have utter chaos and we won't entertain our friends out there. All right now, everybody line up. (The CLOWNS do so, fighting for spots.) Stop it! Let's see . . . (Thinking out loud.) We need a Jack . . . hmm . . . (To audience.) What do you think Jack should be like? (Solicits responses from audience.) Yes . . . young . . . oh, that's good . . . yes . . . (He uses the suggestions from audience. Things like "able to climb beanstalk," and "quick enough to run from giant" will do. While this is going on, other CLOWNS are "acting" the part of Jack.) Good. Good. Yes, Jack certainly must do that. Okay . . . now I would say . . . (Looking over line of CLOWNS.) I would say that . . . (Kidding them.) Musculo the Magnificent should play Jack. Don't you think he's just right? (The audience should obviously disagree.) No? Well, how about Scrappy? (The audience should agree.) Now, how about the giant? What should he be like? (Responding to audience as before.) Yes . . . yes . . . The giant should be the strongest person. Do you see anyone up here who could play the giant? Yes, of course – Musculo the Magnificent. (MUSCULO is quite pleased.) Now, what about Jack's mother? That's hard. We have four women here, each of whom could easily do it. (Thinking again.) I'll tell you what . . . I'll write their names on these pieces of paper and put them in this hat. One of you can pick out the name of the person who will play Jack's mother. (MUSTARD goes into the audience and selects someone to pick one piece of paper out of the hat. The child will pull out the name of "Moxy.") Moxy – it's you. Good, it is decided then that Moxy will play Jack's mother. Now, there is just one more character to be selected. Who's that, do you think? Yes . . . yes . . . the cow! We must choose Jack's cow – a most important character in the story. (Thinking again.)