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Dramatic Publishing

The Fabulous Fable Factory

A Play in One Act

Based on the musical version

by

JOSEPH ROBINETTE and THOMAS TIERNEY

Adapted by

JOSEPH ROBINETTE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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JOSEPH ROBINETTE
Based on the musical version by
JOSEPH ROBINETTE and THOMAS TIERNEY
Printed in the United States of America
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(THE FABULOUS FABLE FACTORY)

ISBN: 1-58342-216-1

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THE FABULOUS FABLE FACTORY

A Play in One Act
For 9 Actors (men and/or women),
plus extras, if desired*

CHARACTERS

MONROE (MARGO)
MR. AESOP (MRS. AESOP)
STRAUCEY (STUART)
PLUTO (POLLY)
CASSIE (CASEY)
WADSWORTH (WENDY)
GRETEL (GRADY)
FELIX (PHOEBE)
EMMA (EMMITT)

TIME: Now.

PLACE: Somewhere...new.

*See production notes for use of extras.

THE FABULOUS FABLE FACTORY

SETTING: *The interior of an old, seemingly abandoned, factory. Through high windows and a skylight, shafts of diffused light dimly illuminate the factory. Extending from one of the high windows to the stage level is a ladder. Barely visible are the parts of a “machine” which is actually seven actors dressed in similar attire (tights, jumpsuits, jeans, etc.). Each is frozen in a position which suggests he is a part of the whole, yet he assumes a different pose from the others. Scattered around the factory are various properties and costume pieces which will be used by the “machine” when the fables are enacted throughout the play. Also strewn about are old boxes and trunks, containing more props, sheets of paper resembling parchment and two-dimensional factory pieces such as cogs and gears. At L is an oversized lever which is used to activate the “machine.” At UR is a large, partially hidden, burlap blanket which appears to be covering an object.*

AT RISE: *The MACHINE parts make small, almost imperceptible, movements and occasionally emit low mechanical sounds, as though the factory is at rest, but not completely turned off. A few moments later, MONROE, a twelve-year-old, slowly opens the window above the lad-*

der and peeks inside. Immediately, the MACHINE parts cease their movements and sounds.

MONROE. Wow, look at this! *(He makes his way down the ladder and wanders around in wide-eyed amazement among the MACHINE parts and other factory fascinations.)* Where did this place come from?... I've walked in the woods behind my house lots of times, but I never saw this before. *(He carefully examines the MACHINE.)* These look like dummies. *(A low sound is emitted by one of the MACHINE parts, momentarily stopping MONROE.)* What was that?... Probably just my imagination... Maybe this is a storage place for those things you see in clothing-store windows. What are they called?... Mannequins—yeah, that's it. *(Almost daringly, he gives one of the MACHINE parts a gentle push. It slightly moves back and forth a couple of times, then is rigid again. He does the same to another MACHINE part.)* They even move when I touch them. *(Another MACHINE sound is heard, then another. MONROE becomes a bit frightened and backs away toward the lever which he doesn't notice.)* I—I think maybe I'd better be getting back home. *(He backs into the lever which he grabs to keep himself from falling. Doing so, he pulls the lever down, thus throwing the MACHINE into action.)*

(The stage lights come up to full as loud vocalized "industrial" sounds are heard from the MACHINE which begins an assembly line movement. Each part has its own individual mechanical movement, yet there is a definite wholeness about its operation.)

Terrified, MONROE rushes toward the ladder but cannot seem to get up. He hurriedly searches for another exit until he sees the burlap blanket begin to move. MONROE runs in the opposite direction and hides behind a box in a corner.)

AESOP. What's happening? What's going on here? Who turned on that machine? I have to stop it—no time to lose. *(As he shuts down the MACHINE the stage lights dim to half.)* There. Now, who's in here? Who turned on my machine?

MONROE *(meekly, from the corner where he is hiding)*.
Me, sir.

AESOP. Who are you?

MONROE. Just me, sir.

AESOP. *Where* are you?

MONROE. Here, sir.

AESOP *(spying MONROE, going to him)*. Ah, so there you are. How did you get in here?

MONROE. I'm afraid it's kind of hard to explain, sir.

AESOP. Well, I think you'd better *try* to explain.

MONROE. I'm not exactly sure how I got here or why.

AESOP. You must have *some* idea.

MONROE. Well, I...I guess it all started this morning when I was at home doing my chores.

AESOP. Chores?

MONROE. Yes, like...cleaning my room, raking the leaves, cutting the lawn—you know—chores.

AESOP. And?

MONROE. Well, I got tired of doing all those things. They get old. If you know what I mean, so I decided I'd try to find something...new for a change. I started walking

into the woods near my home. Then suddenly I was here. I don't really know how it happened.

AESOP. Hummm. You say you were looking for something new?

MONROE. Yes, sir.

AESOP. Well, I'm afraid you'll have to look elsewhere. This place is very old.

MONROE. But it's new to me.

AESOP. Are you sure you weren't just snooping around—trying to cause trouble?

MONROE. Oh, no, sir. Honest.

AESOP. Then why did you turn on that machine?

MONROE. It was an accident. Really it was.

AESOP (*after a moment*). Oh, very well. I suppose you're telling the truth. But you should be more careful in strange places.

MONROE. Yes, sir.

AESOP (*moving to the MACHINE*). This old machine is in pretty good condition, but it's a mite stubborn. It doesn't want anyone else working it except me. That's why it made such a racket when you turned it on.

MONROE (*examining the MACHINE*). Gosh. It really is a fascinating machine. It looks almost...alive. What does it do?

AESOP. Nothing now. A long time ago it made stories.

MONROE. Stories?

AESOP. Well, not just ordinary stories, but special stories—with morals.

MONROE. What are morals?

AESOP. That's not easy to answer. Actually, you need to hear a moral to really know what it is.

MONROE. Why doesn't the machine make stories any-more?

AESOP. Can't.

MONROE. Why not?

AESOP. It's missing a very important part. Fits right over there.

MONROE. Can't you buy a new part?

AESOP. I ordered one, but it hasn't come yet. Don't know what could be holding it up.

MONROE. When did you order it?

AESOP. Let's see. Come November, it'll be exactly two thousand years ago.

MONROE (*incredulously*). What?

AESOP. Maybe I forgot the zip code. You know how the post office is about that.

MONROE. Excuse me for asking, sir. But how old are you?

AESOP. Two thousand four hundred and thirty-nine.

MONROE. Two thousand four hundred—wow! That's a lot of birthday parties.

AESOP. Truth to tell, birthday parties aren't as important to me now that I'm reaching middle age.

MONROE. Are you really two thousand four hundred and thirty-nine years old?

AESOP. Do I look it?

MONROE. Oh, no, sir. You don't look a day over...a thousand.

AESOP (*flattered*). Nice of you to say so. Well, I've enjoyed our little chat, but now I'm afraid it's time for you to go.

MONROE. Can't I stay a little longer?

AESOP. I'm surprised I let you remain this long. We don't ordinarily allow visitors here. Well, goodbye...uh...uh... did you tell me your name?

MONROE. It's Monroe.

AESOP. Monroe. A pleasure meeting you, Monroe.

MONROE. And it was a pleasure meeting you, Mr....uh... Mr....uh...

AESOP. Aesop. Aloysius A. Aesop.

MONROE. Goodbye, Mr. Aesop. *(They shake hands.)* And I'm sorry I came here without being invited.

AESOP. It was an honest mistake, I'm sure.

MONROE. Well—it's easy to make an honest mistake, but it's not a mistake being honest. *(He turns to go.)* Goodbye. *(AESOP waves as MONROE begins climbing the ladder. Two or three sounds are heard from the MACHINE, prompting AESOP to do a double-take.)*

AESOP. Uh, Monroe, just a minute.

MONROE. Yes, Mr. Aesop?

AESOP. Would you say that again?

MONROE. You mean, "goodbye"?

AESOP. No, no. The part about being honest.

MONROE. Let's see. *(He tries to recall.)* It's easy to make an honest mistake, but it isn't a mistake being honest.

AESOP. Where did you hear that before?

MONROE. Nowhere. I just made it up.

AESOP. That, Monroe, is a moral.

MONROE. It is?

AESOP. It is—and a pretty good one at that. Tell me, do you know any other morals?

MONROE. I'm not sure. I still don't understand what a moral is.

AESOP. If you listened closely to a narrative, do you suppose you could illustrate its intent?

MONROE (*a bit puzzled*). Do what to its what?

AESOP (*a little bigger*). If you were to hear a tale, do you think you could tag it with a truth?

MONROE (*very confused*). Do what with a what?

AESOP (*expansive*). If I tell *you* a story, can you tell *me* what it means?

MONROE. I...I guess I could try. (*AESOP takes him by the shoulders and pushes him toward the MACHINE.*)

AESOP. Stand right over here, my boy, and we'll put you to the test.

MONROE (*afraid*). But...but I...

AESOP. All parts in place.

MONROE. Mr. Aesop, I think I'd better...

AESOP (*going to the lever*). Turn on the machine. (*MONROE is firmly grasped in place by one of the "parts."*)

MONROE (*with great alarm*). I'll be electrocuted!

AESOP. Let *The Fabulous Fable Factory* begin!

(AESOP pulls the lever and the MACHINE begins to move, making loud industrial sounds. The lights come up full as the factory is now in smooth operation. All the while, the trembling MONROE holds his hands over his face, afraid to look. Finally, as the movements and sounds fade, a single sheet of paper, which has been passed down the assembly line, is mechanically handed to MONROE who drops it to the floor. The MACHINE parts assume their original positions when they grind to a halt.)

AESOP (*going to MONROE, picking up the sheet of paper*). Ah, here we are. This looks like a good story. It needs only one thing to make it special. So, Monroe, all you have to do is... (*He looks at MONROE who is still holding his hands before his face.*) Monroe! What's the matter?

MONROE. You mean I wasn't electrocuted?

AESOP (*laughing*). Don't be silly! This factory was built twenty-three hundred years before electricity was discovered. Shocking, isn't it! (*A big laugh. MONROE doesn't understand. AESOP stops laughing and clears his throat.*) Now, Monroe, are you ready to hear the story?

MONROE. I...I guess so.

AESOP. Very well. Sit right over here. (*MONROE is led to the periphery of the downstage area, and he is positioned in a way so that he becomes the audience for the enactment of the story. AESOP then moves to the opposite side of the downstage area.*) Listen very carefully, Monroe, and hear what it has to say. I think you're going to like this one. It's all about "The Country Mouse and the City Mouse."

(The members of the factory hurriedly gather properties and don costume pieces as they set up for the first fable which requires: REGINALD—the city mouse; MILTY—the country mouse; a POSTMAN and two CATS. The remaining members are the TRAIN. [The POSTMAN and two CATS may also join the TRAIN by removing their "character" pieces.] Each MOUSE places a wooden box at LC and RC respectively. They sit at their "homes." The other characters remain upstage away

from the action until they are needed. [Note: As each fable is being set up for enactment, the MACHINE parts talk among themselves, offering encouragement, helping one another with costume pieces, etc., so that no long pauses occur during the preparation which should be quick, but appear unhurried, and effortless.]

AESOP (*reading from the paper as the action unfolds*). “A city mouse once received a letter from his cousin in the country.” (*The POSTMAN delivers a letter to REGINALD.*)

POSTMAN. Special delivery here for a Mr. Reginald L. Rodent the Third.

REGINALD (*a bit stuffy, but likable*). I am Reginald Rodent. (*He takes the letter.*) Thank you. (*The POSTMAN leaves as REGINALD reads the letter. MILTY’s voice is heard.*)

MILTY (*a heavy rural accent*). “Dear Cousin Reginald: Why don’t y’all jest pack up sometime and come on out here fer a visit in the country. We’d shore love to have you. Rurally yours, Milty.”

REGINALD. That’s very nice of him. The country isn’t always well educated, but it’s certainly well ventilated, and I can use some fresh air. Yes—I will visit my cousin Milty Mouse.

AESOP. “So Reginald packed his bag and went for a weekend in the country.” (*The TRAIN, making “chugging” noises and the sound of an occasional whistle, shuffles by Reginald’s house. He grabs onto the “caboose” as they head for the country, winding around the stage until they arrive at Milty’s. REGINALD knocks three times and MILTY mimes opening the door.*)

MILTY. Howdy, Reginald.

REGINALD. Good day, Milty.

MILTY. Awful nice to see ya.

REGINALD. The feeling is mutual, I'm sure.

MILTY. Huh?

REGINALD. It's good to see you, too.

MILTY. Oh. Set a spell? (*MILTY seats REGINALD on the box.*)

REGINALD. Thank you.

MILTY. Hungry?

REGINALD. Somewhat.

MILTY. Well then, I'll jest rustle up a tad of grub.

AESOP. "The country mouse had little to offer, but he gave freely of his meager food." (*MILTY offers REGINALD several dishes. These may be real or mimed.*)

REGINALD (*with reservation as he tastes a dish*). What's this?

MILTY. Buttermilk and turnip greens.

REGINALD (*tasting another dish, which he dislikes*).
What's this?

MILTY. Hominy grits and rutabaga jam.

REGINALD (*almost green as he samples another dish*).
What's this?

MILTY. Pig's feet and 'possum pie.

REGINALD (*verbalizing his distaste*). I do not wish to offend you, Cousin Milty, but how can you put up with such awful food as this... (*Looking around.*) ...and live in such a dilapidated house?

MILTY. Easy—it's all I got.

REGINALD. Come with me and I will show you how to live. When you've been in the city a week, you'll never want to return to the country again.