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## **Family Plays**

# ONCE UPON A BROOMSTICK

A Halloween Happening by  
Sylvia Ashby



# ONCE UPON A BROOMSTICK

The director of a high-school production described the script as “the most entertaining children’s play I’ve ever worked with. The actors loved it. Audiences were intrigued from beginning to end. A simple but clever plot—all in 30 minutes! Even our assistant principal was chanting the caterpillar’s refrain the next morning.”

A production of the play in Albuquerque, New Mexico, received “an overwhelmingly positive response from elementary school children and teachers.”

According to the headmaster, the play “received marvelous reviews from parents, students, faculty, special friends ... and enhanced our Halloween celebration in such a wholesome, dramatic and fun-filled fashion!”

**Comedy. By Sylvia Ashby.** *Cast: 6+ actors, flexible.* Sylvia Ashby, whose exciting *Professor Zuccini’s Traveling Tales* and *Shining Princess of the Slender Bamboo* are universally popular, turns her talents to Halloween in this script. It’s just scary enough to keep kids fascinated without giving them nightmares. Performers may be adults or children. Malvolia, as mean as witches ought to be, shows a soft heart when handsome young Tobias appears. But Tobias falls for Belinda, the pretty young house maid. It’s Halloween, and Malvolia is determined to get revenge on Tobias and Belinda by casting a magic spell. The professor, who once practiced white magic, could help the young lovers if he could only remember how to make his incantations work ... and what the magic door can do. The script offers opportunities for using children from the audience in the apparition scenes. The play is funny enough to entertain adults and just scary enough to delight little children without frightening them. Though the play works wonderfully at Halloween, it has been performed successfully in February as well as October. During the Halloween season, encourage children to wear their own costumes to performances. *Except for a sliding magic door, very little scenery is necessary. For the apparition sequences, directors can use whatever talent and costumes are available. In a small cast, offstage actors double as apparitions. See the production notes for details. Set: a witch’s workshop. Time: Halloween. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: O92.*

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Once Upon a Broomstick

# ONCE UPON A BROOMSTICK

*A Halloween Happening  
in One Act*

by

**SYLVIA ASHBY**

*A 'Stage Magic' Play*

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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**For Suzanne**

## ONCE UPON A BROOMSTICK

### *Cast*

(6 minimum; no maximum)

**Malvolia, a witch**

**Vinegar Tom, her cat**

**Tobias, her apprentice**

**Belinda, her maid**

**Professor, her wizard brother**

**Caterpillar**

**Butterfly**

**Mouse**

**Apparitions: Variety Show and Parade of Monsters**

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**Place: Witch's workshop**

**Time: Halloween**

•Δ•

First produced in Lubbock, Texas, at All Saints Episcopal School under the direction of Barbara Blankenship and Suzanne Aker; and Monterey High School under the direction of Harlan Reddell.



## ABOUT THE PLAY

Sylvia Ashby, whose exciting **PROFESSOR ZUCCINI'S TRAVELING TALES** and **SHINING PRINCESS OF THE SLENDER BAMBOO** are universally popular, turns her talents to Halloween in this script.

Malvolia, as mean as witches ought to be, shows a soft heart when handsome young Tobias appears. But Tobias falls for Belinda, the pretty young house maid. It's Halloween, and Malvolia is determined to get revenge on Tobias and Belinda by casting a magic spell. The Professor, who once practiced white magic, could help the young lovers if he could only remember how to make his incantations work . . . and what the Magic Door can do.

The script offers opportunities for using children from the audience in the Apparition scenes. The play is funny enough to entertain adults and just scary enough to delight little children without frightening them. "It was scary—but fun!" one young viewer commented.

The director of a high school production described the script as "the most entertaining children's play I've ever worked with. The actors loved it. Audiences were intrigued from beginning to end. A simple but clever plot—all in thirty minutes! Even our Assistant Principal was chanting the Caterpillar's refrain the next morning."

An Albuquerque, New Mexico, production received "an overwhelmingly positive response from elementary school children and teachers."

Originally designed for a touring company of six, the first production involved a cast of 45—the entire fifth and sixth grade classes of a private school. According to the Headmaster, the play "received marvelous reviews from parents, students, faculty, special friends . . . and enhanced our Halloween celebration in such a wholesome, dramatic, and fun-filled fashion!"

Except for a sliding "Magic Door," very little scenery is necessary. For the Apparition sequences, directors can use whatever talent and costumes are available. In a small cast, offstage actors double as Apparitions. See Production Notes at the back of this script.

Though the play works wonderfully at Halloween, it has been performed successfully in February as well as October. At Halloween time, encourage little folk to wear their own costumes to performances.

**PRODUCTION NOTES***Properties*

Large cauldron

Frilly apron, feather duster—Belinda

Long red apple peel—on table

Book—Tobias

Bottles and vials of magic powders, potions, etc.—on table

Broom—against wall

Silver wand—Professor (later used to stir contents of cauldron)

Large glass measuring cup, mug, pitcher of cider—on table

Small chest of jewels

Golden locket—Malvolia

Magic powder (gold glitter)—inside Malvolia's golden locket

*Costumes*

Typical Halloween costumes are appropriate for most of the characters. **Malvolia** also wears a golden cord around her waist. The **Professor** dons a peaked hat and a bright cape trimmed with moons and stars. **Tobias** is a country bumpkin. **Belinda** can wear a peasant skirt or cute maid's outfit.

### *General Suggestions*

**APPARITIONS:** Variety show and Phantom sections can be treated as musical production numbers, especially with a large cast. To involve a very large and youthful cast, begin with a costume parade which develops into more ambitious entertainment. During this scene, the Magic Door can remain open; or the Door can open and close depending on the business. For example the Door opens and closes for Ballerina, stays open while various Apparitions arrive, closes and reopens for Harem Dancer. With a small cast actors can react to scary Apparitions without the Phantoms actually being present.

**ACTING:** *Malvolia* is a mixture of classic crone and lovesick vamp. *Tobias* is kin to the likable bumpkin of Toby shows. *Belinda* is charming yet insolent. *Vinegar Tom (Cat)* is a blend of naughty child and trickster. His words should sound cat-like but be understandable. Because the role is basically physical, the script emphasizes his actions. **Professor** should point up his "Spoonerisms" rather than glossing over them. Youngsters enjoy the *Caterpillar's* refrain (and chant her lines after the show).

**DIRECTING:** Actors can carry some business into audience; e.g., Cat chasing Mouse or Caterpillar, and Butterfly dancing. The entrance of scary Phantoms through aisles is particularly effective. Butterfly can be a dance role.

**DOUBLING** for a cast of six: Caterpillar plays Mouse; Belinda plays Butterfly. Six actors allow for five Entertainers and four Phantoms. The Butterfly/Belinda transformation requires a quick change: lengthen chant as needed.

### *Special Effects*

Try a mixture of dry ice plus hot water for smoke effect in cauldron and "foaming" mug of brew. Consider special lighting effects on drinking-of-potion business, Phantom sequence, and Magic Door.

Select a magical sound for the opening and closing of the Door—perhaps wind chime, timpani, wind or wave sounds on a synthesizer, or some combination. (The actor's gestures provide a visible cue for the Door sound, which supplies an audible cue for the crew member behind the Door.) Also select a special sound for the potion—gongs maybe. Some type of bell-tolling sound is needed at the end.

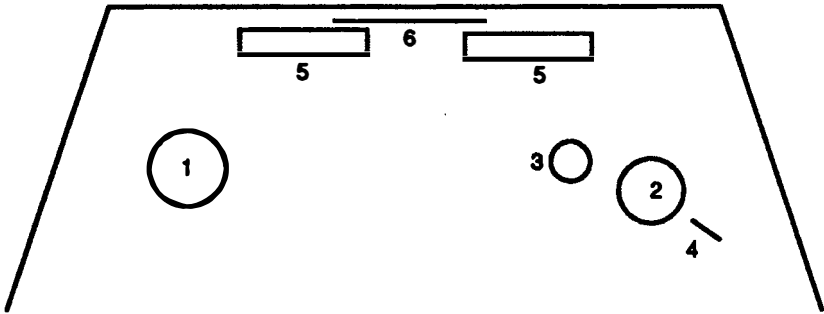
### *The Set*

Scenery can be elaborate or bare bones. A simple though very effective set involves a sliding Magic Door set into upstage curtains or flats. (Even tall bookcases can create a back wall.) Spider webs, owls, skeletons, Jack O'Lanterns add to the decor. A second, smaller table placed near the cauldron—for *Malvolia's* props—is convenient; also a nearby book stand for reading recipes.

The **Magic Door** can be made of framed masonite which slides in a narrow wooden slot (a 1x4 base with 1x2 sides; soap the bottom of the slot). With the aid of a handle, an unseen crew member can move the Door. The area behind the Door, masked in black, can sparkle mysteriously with glitter, gold foil—even aluminum foil—or maybe tiny flickering Christmas lights.

More elaborate scenery might include a flight of stairs going up the side of the room and across the top of the back wall.

*(See Floor Plan next page)*

*Floor Plan*

- 1—Table piled with books, bottles, weird objects (perhaps a skull, stuffed owl, crystal ball)
- 2—Cauldron
- 3—Small table
- 4—Book stand
- 5—Bookcases
- 6—Sliding "Magic Door"

Add other set decorations and trim props suggesting a witch's workshop on Halloween.

## ONCE UPON A BROOMSTICK

*[The cob-webbed workshop of the witch, Malvolia. Stage Right reveals an old table piled with books, bottles, peculiar objects. Stage Left, a large cauldron, with a smaller table nearby. Upstage, bookcases crammed with musty volumes. Along the back wall, a "Magic Door" painted with mystic signs.]*

*AT RISE: with a frilly apron and feather duster, BELINDA, a pert and saucy young maid, cautiously peers into room, then enters. She looks around]*

BELINDA. A fine mess! But Mistress never wants me in here! *[Mocking]* "This room is private!" *[Spying a long red apple peel on table, BELINDA picks up and dangles the peel]* They say it always works on Halloween: First, you pare the apple in one long peel. Then—with your eyes closed—swing it overhead: *[She swings the peel as she chants:]*

By this peel let me discover  
The initial of my true lover.

*[She hurls peel across the room, hurries over and looks at it]* T!!!! For Tobias! The handsome new student! *[Gathers peel, enthralled]*

*[With a shock of bright red hair and freckles, TOBIAS enters, totally absorbed in his book]*

TOBIAS. Well, I'll be a monkey's grandmother! "Abracadabra . . . cadeebra . . . cadoo—"

BELINDA. *[Trying to gain his attention]* Good evening, Tobias!

TOBIAS. "Three pickled worms . . . powdered snake skin . . . chopped snails." Don't that beat all!

BELINDA. *[Trying harder]* Happy Halloween, Tobias!

TOBIAS. *[Checks table]* Belinda—please—I'm studying for my lesson with Mistress Malvolia. *[Examines bottle]* "Flying ointment"! What's that? *[Studies label]* "Boiled blackbird . . . baked bluebird . . ."

BELINDA. *[Nuzzling]* They say anything can happen on Halloween. But I'm not afraid.

TOBIAS. *[Amazed]* "Frog spit!"

BELINDA. *[Crushed]* Tobias!

TOBIAS. Belinda—please—I'm busy—*[Indicates bottle]*

BELINDA. *[Marches away in disgust]* He hardly knows I exist!

TOBIAS. *[Shudders, tasting from another jar]* Ugh! Bear blubber!

BELINDA. All he cares about is— *[as TOBIAS sniffs bottle]* smelly bottles— *[as TOBIAS lifts long ugly worm]* slimy creatures— *[as TOBIAS dangles giant spider]* creepy crawlies!

TOBIAS. “Minced magpie”. . . “vampire venom”! Hope they’re not hornswagging me! *[Exits reading]*

BELINDA. The initial of my true lover: T—for Tobias! *[Tosses peel into cauldron]* That charm is worthless!

*[Witch’s mischievous cat, VINEGAR TOM, enters yowling, bounds about. CAT speaks clearly, in me-owing whines and growls]*

VINEGAR TOM. Bel-in-da! *[Hisses]* Ouuu-t! Ouuu-t!

BELINDA. I’m going. I’m going. *[Curtsey]* To gather herbs—for the Mistress— *[Aside:]* I’m a dog lover myself. *[Exits]*

*[Discovering broomstick, CAT rides in wild cowboy style. MALVOLIA, a middle-aged witch, enters—laughing at Cat’s antics]*

MALVOLIA. What would I do without my own dear Vinegar Tom!

VINEGAR TOM. Broo-mm-stick.

MALVOLIA. Oh, you clever cat! You always know when it’s Halloween. *[CAT fiendishly rides broom]* Yes. Yes. Later. We’ll ride together in the moonlight. *[CAT eagerly hands her bottle]*

VINEGAR TOM. Oint-ment!

MALVOLIA. No. No. Not my flying ointment! That’s for later, silly. *[CAT circles room on broomstick, scrambling over chairs]* Later. Later. First there’s work to do. A very important potion! *[CAT snatches curious jars from table]* Ohhh—buzzard blood. Thank you, Vinegar. *[They chortle as CAT hands Malvolia ingredients for cauldron]* Five toadstools. Excellent. You clever cat. How did you know we’re making— *[CAT hugs himself]* Exactly! My love potion! Your mistress has fallen in love. That young man has bewitched me. I admit it.

VINEGAR TOM. *[Surlly]* To-bi-as?

MALVOLIA. *[Thrilled]* Yes, Tobias! My new pupil—

VINEGAR TOM. *[Furious]* To-bi-as!

MALVOLIA. My handsome new apprentice! *[CAT snarls, showing claws]* Jealous as you are, I’m surprised you don’t turn bright green!

*[CAT growls]* Listen to me, Vinegar Tom: You will always be my favorite—could I run this School of Black Magic without old Vinegar Tom? Never! *[CAT swats, knocking over objects on table]* Vinegar! Do you want to go riding tonight? *[CAT begs]* Then mind your manners! Are you going to misbehave again? *[CAT shakes head no]* Promise? *[CAT nods yes]* That's better. *[CAT grins devilishly to audience]*

BELINDA. *[Enters, curtsies]* Good evening, Mistress. Here's your dandelion and saffras. *[Teasing]* Do I clean up now?

MALVOLIA. *[Snatching herbs]* Of course not, stupid girl. This room is private.

BELINDA. If you say so— *[pointedly]* Malvolia.

MALVOLIA. Mistress Malvolia! Go at once and find seven yellow spiders and a bat's wing.

BELINDA. *[Obliging smile]* Yellow spiders. And a cat's wing.

MALVOLIA. I said *bat's wing*, dummy!

BELINDA. *[Curtsy]* Yes, Mistress. *[Aside:]* I just like to get her goat! *[Turns]* Did you say *rat's wing*?

MALVOLIA. *[Screaming]* I said *bat's wing*, pinhead! Now get out of here!

BELINDA. *[Impudent]* Each to his own taste.

MALVOLIA. Out! Out! *[CAT pushes her to doorway]* That new maid is useless—hasn't got the brains of a pumpkin!

*[A flustered, somewhat addled, white-bearded wizard (PROFESSOR) rushes on, bumping into Belinda. PROFESSOR is outfitted as an astrologer: silver wand, peaked hat, bright cape trimmed with moons and stars]*

BELINDA. *[Curtsies]* Oh, Professor! *[Exits promptly]*

MALVOLIA. *[Stomps, enraged]* RATCHAFRATCH!

PROFESSOR. *[Desperate]* Malvolia! Do you realize this is All Hallow's Eve! In short—a—

MALVOLIA. *[Sarcastic]* Halloween?

PROFESSOR. Of course! Halloween! Halloween!

MALVOLIA. Even Vinegar Tom knows that!. *[CAT struts smugly]*

PROFESSOR. *[Pleading]* I am your brother. Help me. Please, Malvolia! On Halloween people expect miracles from me. Magic—mystery—etcetera—etcetera— Malvolia, I am in deep trouble.

MALVOLIA. *[Sneering]* You? Professor Know-it-all!

PROFESSOR. Alas, they expect wonders—changing brass into gold, turning small gems into large ones— All I can do is remove a few warts!

MALVOLIA. So the Marvelous Magician isn't marvelous any more? The Wonderful Wizard isn't wonderful any more?

PROFESSOR. My confidence has vanished. Truth is, I am a failure.

MALVOLIA. Because you wasted your time on White Magic. Curing disease! Healing the sick!

PROFESSOR. Making crops grow . . . preparing medicine . . . maybe find a kissing me—er—a—missing key!

MALVOLIA. In the old days, you were the powerful one. Now I have the power! *[She rapidly performs a simple magic trick or two, perhaps producing a long-stemmed rose from sleeve:]*

I have poisons, powders—tricks galore.

I have charms and spells and more in store.

PROFESSOR. You have success—triumph! New pupils—new servants! Nothing I do seems to work any more. Please help me, Sister.

MALVOLIA. On Halloween? The night all witches gather under the twisted oaks! Professor, I don't have time for the likes of you.

PROFESSOR. Just one charm for old times' sake—or as we say in Latin—

MALVOLIA. No.

PROFESSOR. One teeny weeny little spell?

MALVOLIA. I said NO!

PROFESSOR. Perhaps a harmless love potion? *[Presenting]* Here: My silver wand!

MALVOLIA. Who needs your worthless wand? *[Tosses wand into cauldron]*

PROFESSOR. *[Another offer]* How about my Magic Cape? *[Panic]* Oh dear—my cape—where's my cape?

MALVOLIA. You're wearing it! Noodlehead!

PROFESSOR. Oh. *[Swirling cape with flourish]* Here: My amazing cape—

MALVOLIA. No thank you! *[Howling, CAT pushes Professor to doorway]*

PROFESSOR. Just one secret formula—

MALVOLIA. Nothing! *[CAT pushes Professor out]* Thought the old fool would never go. *[Quickly]* Now back to business. This love



potion only works on Halloween. And Toby will be here in a minute! *[CAT snarls]* Vinegar Tom, do you expect to go riding on my broomstick tonight? *[Kneeling, CAT begs]* Then I suggest you behave yourself! *[CAT promises, vigorously shaking head]* Good. Now fetch the book!

VINEGAR TOM. *[Offering large, ornate volume]* Shad-ows.

MALVOLIA. Exactly. My "Book of Shadows." *[Searching]* Legends . . . Lockets . . . Love potions! To win the heart of young Tobias! *[MALVOLIA studies recipe; CAT mixes brew]* One teaspoon left eye of horned toad. Only one, Vinegar. Otherwise it tastes bitter. *[Idea dawns on CAT. He wickedly spoons out jarful]* Three tablespoons lizard gizzard. Too much gives you a stomach ache. *[CAT merrily empties large bottle into cauldron]* Fourth-cup beetle juice. Careful. More could kill you. *[CAT pours correct amount into large glass measuring cup, proudly shows Malvolia]* Exactly. *[MALVOLIA turns; CAT gleefully fills cup, heaves it all in]* And a dash of cinnamon to spice things up. *[Adds spice, closes book]* Good work. Thank you, Vinegar. *[MALVOLIA ties knots in golden cord worn round her waist:]*

With these knots I do entwine—

Let Toby's heart be linked with mine!

VINEGAR TOM. *[Stirring with Professor's wand]* Po-tion.

MALVOLIA. Almost forgot. The apple cider! To sweeten our romance. *[CAT balks]* Vinegar! The cider! *[CAT only pours a drop]* Vinegar! The whole pitcher! *[She turns; CAT guzzles cider. TOBIAS enters]*

TOBIAS. Evening, Mistress Ma'am. Hope I'm in time for my lesson.

MALVOLIA. *[Putting on the charm]* Come right in, you darling boy.

TOBIAS. And a Happy Halloween to you, Mistress Malvolia.

MALVOLIA. Tobias, it is indeed a Happy Halloween. And I've just prepared some delicious cider in honor of the occasion. *[CAT gets mug]*

TOBIAS. No thanks, Ma'am. Not one for drinking.

MALVOLIA. *[Inventing]* But . . . fresh apple cider . . . on Halloween . . . always brings good luck!

TOBIAS. Do tell! *[CAT presents foaming mug. He drinks, grimacing]* Tastes kind of peculiar. *[LIGHTS flicker as GONG sounds. TOBIAS twitches and trembles in comic spasms]*