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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# **THE CAVE CAT**

by

**FORD AINSWORTH**



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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(THE CAVE CAT)

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**To David Wood Bozeman III**

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**THE CAVE CAT**  
*A Play In One Act*  
**For Four Men and Five Women**

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**CHARACTERS**

**THE CAVE CAT**

**MAMA LION**

**PAPA LION**

**LION CHICK**

**THE PRIEST CAT**

**ZELMA**

**ZULA**

**ZIGGY**

**THE LEOPARD CHICK**

**TIME:** *Now.*

**PLACE:** *The jungle.*

## THE CAVE CAT



**SCENE:** The stage is divided into three areas. The entire stage right area is for tigers. There is a simulated pool R. Stage center is the lions' domain. A bench sits DC and a T-shaped platform, with steps left and right, sits in front of double doors UC that, when open, reveal the cave. A jar of salve sits unnoticed on the steps. The leopards are stage left. There is a thorn tree cutout L. For a more detailed description of this set, please see Production Notes at back of playbook.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** The lights come up on THE CAVE CAT lying asleep on the bench DC. We can see, dimly, MAMA and PAPA LION asleep on the steps UC, the TIGERS, frozen before their pool UR, and the LEOPARDS, fixed in a motionless dance at the thorn tree UL. The double doors are closed. Slowly THE CAT raises his head, looks about him, and rises to address the audience.)

**THE CAT** (*sotto voce*). You'll have to pardon me if I whisper, but I can't run the risk of waking them up. (He indicates MAMA and PAPA.) They'd kill me for saying it! They'd probably kill me for even thinking it, but it's the truth. You don't have to take my word for it. I'll show you. All you have to do is look at me. Do I look like a lion? Those are lions right there, see?

(Indicates MAMA and PAPA.) They've got these bushy manes, so you can tell right away they're lions. Now do I have a bushy mane? Any fool can tell I'm not a lion, right? And look over there! (He indicates the TIGERS UR.) Those are tigers! (The TIGERS cross and prance out DL as he continues his speech.) You can see their striped coats as clear as I can. You can also see I'm not a tiger. And I'm not one of those either. (He indicates the LEOPARDS UL. The LEOPARDS begin gyrating, dancing out DR.) Those are leopards . . . spotted leopards. Now look! (He turns around slowly.) Anybody see any spots? Any stripes? (MAMA sits up.) Any bushy mane? I'm not a lion, see? (MAMA moves toward him, alarmed.) I'm not a tiger, either, and I'm not a leopard! So that's the truth, and why not just admit it? I'm a cave cat! Is that so awful? (He sits down on bench.) I'm a cave cat . . .

MAMA (clapping her hand over THE CAT's mouth).

Hush! Do you want to wake your father? What on earth do you think you're doing?

THE CAT (pulling MAMA's hand away). I'm telling the truth, Mama! Anyone can see I'm a cave . . .

MAMA (clapping her hand over THE CAT's mouth).

Hush! That's all your imagination.

THE CAT (yanking MAMA's hand away). It's not imagination! All you have to do is look at me. You can see, can't you? Look at me!

MAMA. You don't look at all well to me! (She sits on bench.) Can't you tell your own mother?

THE CAT (warily, sitting beside MAMA). Tell you what?

MAMA. Where it hurts! (THE CAT turns from her.)

I nursed you through the measles, didn't I?

THE CAT. Yes, Mama.

MAMA. And the chicken pox!

THE CAT. Yes.

MAMA. But I can't help you if you won't tell me.  
What is it? Does it itch?

THE CAT. No!

MAMA. Does it ache?

THE CAT (exasperated). There's nothing wrong with me! I'm perfectly all right! I'm a normal, healthy, cave cat!

MAMA. Hush! (She claps her hand over THE CAT's mouth.)

THE CAT (yanking MAMA's hand away). Don't do that, Mama! I'll bite your finger. I swear I will!

MAMA (rising). Your father will hear you! He takes these things so seriously. Why can't you just tell me your symptoms, so I can . . . (PAPA is stirring. He sits up.)

THE CAT. All right, Mama! I'll tell you, if you really want to know.

MAMA (eagerly). All you have to do is whisper in Mama's ear!

THE CAT. All right! (He throws back his head and yells.) I'm a cave cat! (MAMA bursts into tears.)

PAPA. Mildred! For heaven's sake! (He charges down to bench.) You're disturbing the entire neighborhood! (MAMA weeps louder. PAPA, to THE CAT: ) What's going on here? Look at that! Aren't you ashamed to see your mother crying? What have you been doing to her?

THE CAT. Telling her the truth!

PAPA (threateningly). The same old nonsense, I suppose?

THE CAT (defiantly). It isn't nonsense!

MAMA (rising and rushing between them). Herbert! He's ill!

THE CAT. I'm not ill! I'm a . . .

MAMA (clapping her hand over his mouth). Hush!  
He's seriously ill, Herbert! (THE CAT pulls away from her.) I know you'll say it's nonsense, but he's not physically well! I think it's his liver, but he won't tell me his symptoms! He is exactly like you! When your indigestion is acting up, you won't tell me!

PAPA. I never had indigestion in my life!

MAMA (to THE CAT). You see how it is? Don't be stubborn like your father! Just tell me . . .

THE CAT (yelling). I'm a cave cat!

PAPA (charging THE CAT). Shut up! I won't have it!

MAMA (catching PAPA's arm, restraining him).

Herbert, he's ill!

PAPA. He's a mule-headed, ungrateful . . .

MAMA. Herbert!

PAPA (giving up, going to bench). What have I done to deserve this, Mildred? (He sits.) What has either of us done?

MAMA. It's not our fault, Herbert. We did the best we could.

PAPA (waxing melodramatic). No, Mildred, we've got to face up to it. We are lions, after all. We can't shirk our duties or deny our responsibilities. (He rises.) As lions, we are responsible! I realize now that I should have spent more time with him in those crucial years, those formative years -- been a pal to him!

THE CAT. Aw, Papa . . .

PAPA (to THE CAT). Shut up! (To MAMA.) That was my responsibility! If only you had told me when he first started sneaking up in those hills!

MAMA. But, Herbert, I didn't know! I thought he was out playing "Lions and Tigers" with the others. I had no idea he was exploring those dingy caves!

THE CAT (going to MAMA). Mama, please, it's not your fault.

MAMA (patting THE CAT's cheek). Hush, darling. Your father is right. (She begins to sniffle and sits on bench. To PAPA.) He had so many colds, remember, Herbert? I should have known it wasn't normal. I just never dreamed his sniffles came from playing in those damp, smelly caves!

THE CAT. They're not damp and smelly! The air is clean up there! You can stretch out on the ledge in front of my cave and fairly roast in the sunshine . . .

MAMA (horrified). Your cave?

THE CAT. I've got it fixed up nice, Mama. Why don't you come let me show you? (MAMA erupts in a fresh geyser of tears.)

PAPA. Shut up! (THE CAT retreats. To MAMA:) You mustn't blame yourself, Mildred! I should have realized that something was wrong when his mane didn't grow properly. Now, of course, it's obvious that he picked up some sort of mangle in that poisonous atmosphere!

MAMA (seeing a great light). Herbert!

THE CAT. I don't have mangle!

MAMA. Herbert, that's it! (She rises and runs to THE CAT.) Why didn't you tell Mama? No wonder he's been acting like a little demon! How would you feel without your mane? Why, it's enough to drive the poor child distracted!

THE CAT (embarrassed). Mama!

MAMA. I've got just the remedy! (She goes to steps and picks up a jar of salve.) A wonderful tar soap and ointment shampoo! (She begins to dab the salve in THE CAT's hair.) It will clear that mangle up in no time. You'll be even bushier than your father!

THE CAT. Stop it! Stop it! I do not have mangle! I don't want to be bushy! I don't want to be a lion!

(MAMA hastily puts away salve.)

PAPA. Don't want to be a lion? Don't want to be . . . Mildred!

MAMA (rushing to PAPA). He's teasing you, Herbert. Of course he wants to be a lion. All cats want to be lions. (She crosses to THE CAT.) You mustn't tease your father. He doesn't understand.

PAPA (sitting on bench dejectedly). I certainly don't!

THE CAT. I'm not teasing, Mama.

MAMA. Of course you are! If you don't want to be a lion, what do you want to be? What could you want to be?

THE CAT. I only want to be . . .

PAPA (threateningly, crossing to THE CAT). What? What do you want to be?

THE CAT. What I am! A cave cat.

PAPA. Ahhh! (He raises his hand to strike THE CAT, but MAMA catches his arm with one hand and presses the other to her forehead.)

MAMA. I'm getting one of my headaches, Herbert. We will simply have to discuss this some other time. I'm getting one of my awful sick headaches.

PAPA. Go lie down for a while, Mildred.

MAMA. We'll just forget the whole thing.

PAPA. Go lie down. Take a B. C. powder and lie down.

MAMA. But, Herbert . . .

PAPA (shouting). Lie down!

MAMA (lying on steps). Oh, all right, Herbert. But I still don't think he means it.

PAPA (crossing to THE CAT). So! So you want to be a cave cat?

THE CAT. I am a cave cat, Papa.

PAPA. Let's make one thing perfectly clear. There is no such thing as a cave cat!

THE CAT. But, Papa . . .

PAPA. There is no such thing! They don't exist.

THE CAT. I exist, Papa! Look at me! How can you say I don't exist when I'm standing right here in front of you?

PAPA (tragically). Why? I simply can't understand why! (He crosses to sit on bench.) With all your advantages, all your opportunities, all your mother and I have done for you, why did you decide to . . .

THE CAT. No, Papa! (Pleading.) I didn't decide anything! It's not that I just want to be a cave cat. It isn't what I want at all. It's what I am.

PAPA (leaping up). Aha! That's it!

THE CAT. What's it?

PAPA. You don't actually want to be a cave cat!

THE CAT (rising). I mean I'm not a cave cat because I want to be one. I want to be a cave cat because that's what I really am! What else could I be? Don't you see?

PAPA. Yes! My boy, why didn't you tell me? It's going to be all right! Mildred! Mildred! (MAMA runs to him.) Mildred, it's all right! You misunderstood the problem entirely, Mildred. He doesn't want to be a cave cat.

THE CAT. Now wait a minute, Papa . . .

PAPA. That's what you said! You said you didn't actually want to be a cave cat! Isn't that what you said?

THE CAT. That's the way you said it, Papa. I just said . . .

MAMA (hugging THE CAT). I told you he was teasing, Herbert. I told you all along he was only . . .

THE CAT. I wasn't teasing! I . . . Papa, you twist everything I say! (He crosses UC to sit despairingly on steps.)

PAPA. We will have to tell him the truth, Mildred.

THE CAT. The truth? (During the next three speeches he rises slowly, watching his parents with great interest.)

MAMA. Oh, Herbert, I don't know! He's still so young. . . .

PAPA. He will have to know, sooner or later. Eventually he will guess.

MAMA. I suppose so. But it's so hard for the young ones to understand. . . .

PAPA. Come here, son. Sit down. (They sit on the bench.) Sit down, Mildred.

MAMA. I'd rather stand, Herbert. I still have just a suspicion of that headache.

PAPA. Well, son, this is not something a lion would ever mention unless it was absolutely necessary. Certainly it's not something to publicize. It would ruin our image completely.

THE CAT. Our image?

PAPA. Our image as lions! Now! You think you are not a lion because you don't have the mark of a lion. You don't fit the image.

THE CAT. I don't have a long fuzzy mane. I never will have, Papa. I've tried combing it out and fuzzing it up, but it just lies down again. It's no use.

MAMA. Think of that, Herbert! He was trying to be a lion all the time! Why didn't you tell Mama?

PAPA (exasperated). Never mind that now, Mildred. (To THE CAT.) The truth is, son, that your . . . uh . . . predicament is not . . . well, it's not exactly unusual among us lions. Fact is -- a great many young lions have the same difficulty.

THE CAT (interested). They do? I'm not the only one?

PAPA. Far from it, son, far from it!

THE CAT (rising, excited). You know I suspected that. I knew I couldn't be the only cave cat. (At the words "Cave Cat," MAMA and PAPA react

simultaneously.)

MAMA. } My head is splitting!

PAPA. } There is no such thing as a cave cat.  
They don't exist!

THE CAT (sitting down again). But, Papa . . .

PAPA. They don't exist! Now, there are certain lions, like yourself, who -- by some quirk of nature -- are not endowed with the outward manifestations of their essential inner nature. They are lions, of course -- lions born and bred . . .

THE CAT. And there are lots of them? I never saw any!

PAPA. Yes, you did. You just didn't know it when you saw them. Mildred, would you fetch me that box out of the back of my closet? (MAMA goes out UC.) Fortunately, this is a little defect . . .

THE CAT. A defect?

PAPA. Well, no, not exactly a defect. What would you call it?

THE CAT. Maybe it's just natural! Maybe . . .

PAPA (rising). Maybe what?

THE CAT. Look, Papa, if lots of lions don't naturally have long fuzzy manes . . . well . . . maybe it's the manes that aren't natural!

PAPA. There's nothing unnatural about long fuzzy manes!

THE CAT (pursuing PAPA). But if lions don't really have them, maybe it's the lions who don't really exist! Maybe lions are really only cave cats with . . .

PAPA (clapping his hand over THE CAT's mouth). Hush! You don't know what you're saying!

(MAMA enters from UC with a hat box.)

MAMA. Here it is, Herbert.

PAPA (taking box). Son, you are about to become a true lion. (He takes wig out of box.)

THE CAT. What's that?

PAPA. Your mane. (He hands wig to MAMA.)

Help him get it on straight, Mildred.

THE CAT. No. I'm not going to wear that thing!

PAPA. You want to be a lion, don't you?

THE CAT. I want to be what I am! I'd be a fake wearing that thing.

MAMA. I told you he was too young, Herbert!

THE CAT (taking wig). Are you wearing one of these, Papa?

MAMA (horrified). What a thing to ask your own father!

THE CAT. Are you, Papa? And you, Mama, is that real hair?

MAMA. I warned you, Herbert! I told you he wouldn't understand!

THE CAT (almost tenderly). But I do! At last I do, Mama! You're both like me, aren't you? Take them off! Let me see you! Let me really see you just once! Please! I've guessed it, haven't I? You are like me, aren't you? Aren't you, Mama?

MAMA. Herbert, I have to lie down. My head is fairly splitting!

THE CAT (running to MAMA). Please, Mama!

MAMA. I have to lie down. (She goes out R.)

PAPA. To please your mother -- if for no other reason -- will you please . . .

THE CAT. You actually want me to . . . wear this thing? You want me to pretend I'm a real lion?

PAPA. You are a lion! (Over his shoulder.) Did you find the B.C. powder, Mildred? (There is no answer. To THE CAT, pleading.) Put on the wig!

THE CAT. Papa, I can't! It would be . . .

PAPA. Look, I'm your father -- no -- I'm your friend. Think of me as a good friend, all right? Now, as your friend, I'd advise you to put on the wig.

THE CAT. But I don't see why!

PAPA. Because you're a lion!

THE CAT. But I'm not. . . . Papa, may I ask you a question?

PAPA (uncertainly). Well. . . .

THE CAT. As a friend. You did say you were my friend, didn't you?

PAPA. Well, yes. . . .

THE CAT. And friends can tell each other the truth, can't they?

PAPA. I. . . . uh. . . . yes, I suppose. . . .

THE CAT. Then tell me, just between friends, are you wearing one of these?

PAPA (sputtering). I'm not your friend! I'm your father! Now put on that wig! (He stalks out UC.)

(THE CAT comes to bench, sits down, considers putting on wig, and finally bows his head. The LION CHICK hurries in R. She notices THE CAT as she passes behind him and pauses.)

LION CHICK. Well, hello there!

THE CAT (raising his head). What?

LION CHICK (realizing THE CAT is not actually wearing his wig). Oh, for heaven's sake! Here! (She takes the wig and starts putting it on his head.) Let me help you with that before anyone else sees. Hold still for half a minute!

THE CAT (weakly). But I don't really want to. . . .

LION CHICK. I'm doing the best I can! There! That will do until after the celebration.

THE CAT (feeling his new hair). The celebration?

LION CHICK (sitting beside him). The sunrise