

A Clown's Tale

By Nelly E. Cuellar-Garcia

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Set in Madame Claudette's Shadow Circus of 1915, this stirring play follows the life of a foundling infant who grew up to be known as the "Prince of Clowns." Alfie's life is narrated by the Bearded Lady who offers us an insightful philosophy of life. Meet dynamic characters like the Fortune Teller, Madame Claudette herself, and the refined young woman, Nedda, who is running away from a dark past. Nedda and Alfie become a popular circus act and live peacefully. However, Alfie's family is threatened ten years later by a villainous Olympia. Nedda's past and future collide, and she must decide to return to the mob—in exchange for the safety of her daughter, Calliope. This tale provides powerful and dynamic acting roles for all actors. For the designer, there are a myriad of possibilities in creating a "shadow circus of freaks" from the early 20th century. Running Time: 50 minutes.

AWARDS

2023 Texas District 32-4A Advancing Play; Bi-District/Area Alternate; 6 Acting Awards including 2 Best Performer Awards

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 m, 6 w, ensemble of 15 or more actors)

BEARDED LADY: Virginia. Serves as our narrator.

MADAME CLAUDETTE: Owner of the circus; the ringmaster.

FORTUNE TELLER: Petra. Can become over-excited at times.

ALFIE: A hunchbacked clown.

NEDDA: A strong and refined young woman who is running from her past.

OLYMPIA: Mob boss' partner.

CALLIOPE: The 10-year-old daughter of Nedda and Alfie.

CIRCUS ENSEMBLE: Can include a variety of actors as musicians, monkey lady, Pietro the lion tamer, etc.

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SETTING

Madame Claudette's Shadow Circus; 1915.

Music may be created live on stage by a circus ensemble playing an accordion, organ, guitarist and violinist.

Prologue

(AT RISE: Circus MUSIC is heard; the ENSEMBLE moves to the rhythm creating circus tableau, as if they are presenting the introduction to a show. BEARDED LADY snaps her fan and draws attention to herself.)

BEARDED LADY: *(To audience.)* Our clown's story is not new to this world. In fact, it is as old as time: filled with slivers of rage and grief and dusted with shining wisps of love, and as is the case with tales such as these... it begins on a dark, lonely night with the wail of an abandoned child.

(SFX: A baby's cries. CLAUDETTE and the ENSEMBLE follow the cries to a chest and uncover it.)

CLAUDETTE: Where is that coming from? Search... *(Discovering the infant and quickly examining the child.)* The baby's spine is abnormally curved. He's a hunchback. Oh, and his jaw is broken; it's not going to heal properly. Poor little boy, you were born for misery. Don't worry, little soul, you are safe with us. We're just like you— oddities of humanity. Everyone, come and gaze at our newest addition to the family.

CIRCUS ENSEMBLE: *(A rising cacophony of voices.)* We welcome another freak into our midst. Who will raise him? I bet he'll make us a lot of money. Think of the crowds he'll draw...

CLAUDETTE: Silence! *(Letting out a hiss of air.)* Fate has sent us a gift. Look at him watching us with those big brown eyes. *(Speaking to the baby.)* What do you see, little one? *(Showing him one group.)* FREAKS ... *(Showing him another.)* misfits ... oh yes, yes, my little twisted oddity, you will make us a lot of money. I will adopt him and raise him in this circus to become... a harlequin, a clown, what a perfect fit. His name will be Alfie.

BEARDED LADY: *(To audience.)* The appearance of the deformed babe changed our luck. We grew prosperous and gained acclaim. Everywhere we travelled drew large audiences, all wanting to see the hunchback clown perform.

(ALFIE appears from within the ENSEMBLE.)

BEARDED LADY: *(Cont'd. To audience.)* Twenty years pass, and the little clown is now a man.

Scene 1

(ENSEMBLE begins to build the rest of the circus. NEDDA walks in with a suitcase and attempts to speak to several CIRCUS MEMBERS who brush her off or direct her somewhere else.)

NEDDA: Good afternoon, can you tell me where I might find the owner of the circus?

ALFIE: She's working with the horses. What do you want with her?

NEDDA: I'm looking for work.

ALFIE: Those fancy clothes of yours don't look like you're used to manual labor. You running away from home?

NEDDA: That's not your business. Now, are you going to tell me where to find the boss?

ALFIE: *(Yelling toward CLAUDETTE.)* Hey, momma! There's someone here looking for you.

(NEDDA is chagrined.)

CLAUDETTE: *(Moving to THEM.)* Well, well, well... what do we have here? Who is this pretty young thing, son?

ALFIE: She's looking for a job...

CLAUDETTE: Really? You a townie?

NEDDA: No ma'am. I just hopped off that bus over there and saw your tents going up ...

End of Freeview

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