

A CAT'S TALE

An Adaptation by Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The English have many stories and legends about Dick Whittington (1358?-1423) who truly did exist and did serve as Lord Mayor of London for an unprecedented three terms. He was a merchant of some great wealth and renown, but as legend has it, of extremely humble beginnings and had to really work his way to his august position.

Well, if young Dick had known things were going to turn out even half as well for him as they did, he might not have felt so miserable. Orphaned and begging his way across England, Dick is ignored or abused by many mean-spirited people. It is only the kindness shown to him by Mrs. Magpie, Mr. Fitzwarren, and his daughter Alice that keeps him from total despair.

A kind boy himself, he saves a cat beset by a vicious dog. The cat later returns the favor by saving him from a band of bold rats and later earns him a fortune in gold and jewels from a grateful sultan.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 M, 12 F, 18 Flexible)

TROUBADOUR - The Narrator
DICK WHITTINGTON - The hero of the story
MILLER'S WIFE - Cynical passerby
LADY PEARL - Wealthy woman who enjoys cruel tricks
GWENDOLYN - Her daughter and just as cruel
MRS. MAGPIE - A kindly farmer's widow
DOG - An angry, grouchy dog with hayfever
WHISKERS - Mighty mouser who earns Dick a fortune
FRUIT SELLER - Suspicious shopkeeper
BAKER - Pessimistic shopkeeper
FLOWER SELLER - Pessimistic shopkeeper
MR. FITZWARREN - Generous merchant
MRS. FITZWARREN - His untrusting wife
ALICE FITZWARREN - Kind and gentle daughter
MRS. DRIBBLER - Nasty, lazy cook
BUCKET - Nasty, lazy cook in training
RAT QUEEN - Night time ruler of the kitchen
RATS 1-4 - Her minions
CAPTAIN LEGOFF - Captain of the Fitzwarren's ships
CLEGHORN - The first mate
SULTAN - Ruler of a far away sultanate plagued by mice
SULTAN'S WIFE - His loving and doting wife
COOK - Their cook, constantly beset by mice
MOUSE QUEEN - Gluttonous grabber of food
MOUSE 1-4 - Her gluttonous subjects
MINISTER - The Sultan's minister
GUARD LEADER - Sultan's guards
GUARD 1-4
COOK'S HELPER 1 & 2

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: A country road north of London

Scene 2: London

ACT II

Scene 1: The Sultan's palace

Scene 2: Fitzwarren's kitchen

SETTING

A single representational set is used.

ACT I, Scene 1: A tree or two placed randomly on stage would be nice along with a sign that reads "To London" placed at SL. House flat stands USC. Stump or small bench near the house.

Scene 2: House still stands USC. "Big Ben" and several other "buildings" flats stand SR and SL. Trees are gone, as is sign. As indicated in script, turn house around so audience sees an interior kitchen. Benches are brought in SR and SL. London "buildings" still stand. A small table, SC, might also be useful. The kitchen "scene" is largely a fireplace, with a blazing fire and hanging pots painted under a mantle decorated with plates, mugs, and bowls.

ACT II, Scene 1: During intermission, remove London "buildings" and kitchen. Replace with a pair of pillars and an exotic design on center wall or curtain. A couple of large palms or ferns would be nice USR and USL. Low table sits SC. Two "thrones" (which can be chairs covered with fabric) sit USC. Cushions can lie on stage floor near table.

Scene 2: London "buildings" return along with kitchen scene.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Country road north of London. TROUBADOUR appears from behind a single tree that stands at CS.)

TROUBADOUR: Welcome, fair ladies and gentle knights.
Though outside the wind bites,
Be warm inside and of good cheer.
For by your leave you soon shall hear,
The long-ago tale of a hapless lad.
Whose end should have been quite bad
Except for luck and a wondrous cat—
But soon enough we'll get to that!
For now we set the scene of our play;
North of London, a rutted roadway.
(DICK, dressed in rags, enters SL.)
And behold, our hungry hero on foot
The bulk of his weight ashes and soot.

DICK: A penny, sir? Have you a spare penny?

TROUBADOUR: Dear boy, if I save your neck now, it would
cheat the crowd. After all, there's a good story in you!

DICK: What do I care for a story, sir? I haven't eaten in
days!

TROUBADOUR: On your way, lad. See who comes here.

(TROUBADOUR points off SR, then exits SL. MILLER'S wife enters SR carrying a sack.)

DICK: Excuse me, ma'am.

MILLER'S WIFE: Get out of my way, urchin! Can't you see
my load is very heavy?

DICK: For a penny I'll carry it as far as you want to go!

MILLER'S WIFE: And why should I pay you a penny to do
what I can do myself?

DICK: Because my stomach's empty as a beggar's purse.

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MILLER'S WIFE: Here you go, then. One penny! And mind you, move quickly! *(WIFE gives DICK a penny. She drops sack and exits SL.)*

DICK: A whole penny! What shall I buy first? A plum tart? An apple? A chunk of cheese? Why not have all of 'em?!

(WIFE enters SL.)

MILLER'S WIFE: I need the flour TODAY, Master Beggar!

DICK: Coming right up, ma'am!

(WIFE exits SL. DICK grabs the sack, attempting to pick it up. He struggles with its weight. He finally falls under it and can't get up. WIFE enters SL.)

MILLER'S WIFE: No good, lazy weakling! What's happened to you?

DICK: Help!

MILLER'S WIFE: This is what comes of trying to do a good turn! *(SHE grabs sack and carries it off SL. DICK slowly sits up.)*

DICK: At least I've still got the penny!

(WIFE enters SL with sack, swipes penny, and exits SL. LADY PEARL and her daughter GWENDOLYN enter SR.)

GWENDOLYN: Mummy, I say, this jelly tart is spoiled!

LADY PEARL: Spoiled? Gracious! Don't eat it or you'll be up all night with a tortured tummy!

GWENDOLYN: I could cry just thinking about it!

LADY PEARL: Toss it on the ground and we'll buy you another tart when we reach the next village.

GWENDOLYN: Oh, Mummy, look! A beggar boy!

LADY PEARL: What a filthy little wretch!

GWENDOLYN: Mummy, can I—*(SHE whispers in her MOTHER's ear.)*

LADY PEARL: Oh, you are so naughty, Gwendolyn!

GWENDOLYN: Can I? Can I? Ha? Ha? Ha?

LADY PEARL: All right!

End of Freeview

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