

THE MOUSE and THE STORYTELLER

*Adapted by Burton Bumgarner
from short stories of H.H. Munro (Saki)*

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STORY OF THE PLAYS

The Mouse and **The Storyteller** are two hilarious tales by Hector Hugh Munro (Saki), updated and adapted for the stage. They take place aboard a train traveling from Philadelphia to Boston.

In Philadelphia two architects board the train and sit next to an elderly sleeping lady. They have checked out a dilapidated old building thought to have been a residence of Edgar Allan Poe. The building is full of mice, and the architects inadvertently bring one of the mice onboard the train, with uproarious results.

After they detrain in New York, a woman and her four horrible children share the car with a stuffy old bachelor. When the woman fails to control her children by telling them a wholesome story, the bachelor tell them a most hideous and pernicious tale, leaving the children delighted, and their mother outraged.

Easy staging and unlimited humor.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 male, 7 female, 3 either, extras, doubling possible)

THE MOUSE

JOE: An architect.

JIM: An architect, Joe's business associate.

MRS. STEELY: An elderly woman.

CONDUCTOR: Male or female.

THE STORYTELLER

MR. FIELDS: A bachelor.

MRS. CRESTON: Mother of four wild children.

MILES: The eldest child, around 12.

DELOIS: The second eldest, around 10.

JENNY: The third eldest, around 8.

SALLY: The youngest child, around 6.

WANDA: A character in Mrs. Creston's story.

CONDUCTOR: Male or female.

BORIS: Wanda's brother.

BERTHA: A character in Mr. Fields' story.

A WOLF: A character in both stories.

FRIENDS OF WANDA AND BORIS: Three or four actors who chase away the wolf.

SETTING: Both plays take place aboard a train which runs from Washington, DC to Boston. Center stage is a passenger car. As the characters for **The Mouse** leave the train in New York, the characters for **The Storyteller** arrive and take the same seats. The set can be as simple or elaborate as the director wishes. The plays may be performed on a bare stage with benches as train seats. There are two rows of seats facing the audience. A bare downstage area should be available for the stories in **The Storyteller**.

The **Wolf** should be an actor with wolf ears on a headband, and whiskers painted on his/her face.

THE MOUSE

(During the BLACKOUT we hear THUNDER and RAIN. AT RISE: JOE is standing on the left apron waiting for the train. He whistles or hums "Three Blind Mice" and looks around, uneasy. JIM enters unseen, sneaks up on Joe, and slaps him on the back startling him. Both men wear trench coats, and hold umbrellas above their heads, and carry briefcases. Beneath the trench coats they wear dress shirts and comfortable slacks.)

JOE: *(Startled.)* Why'd you do that?

JIM: Because it looked like fun.

JOE: *(Anxious.)* Where is that train?

JIM: *(Looking at HIS watch.)* It's due any minute. What's your hurry? Do you have a date tonight?

JOE: No. I just want to go home and take a bath. That building was filthy.

JIM: That building was nasty.

JOE: I'm all for urban renewal, but I hate going into those dilapidated old buildings.

JIM: We're architects. Our firm specializes in historical restorations. We have to go into dilapidated old buildings and figure out how to make them nice again.

JOE: You could go and take photos and size the places up. I trust your judgment. I don't see why I have to go.

JIM: Because I don't want to go by myself.

JOE: Are you afraid of old buildings?

JIM: *(Shaking HIS head no.)* Yes.

JOE: *(Surprised.)* You are?

JIM: Sometimes I am.

JOE: Those places give me nightmares. This one today was really bad.

JIM: But it's historic. A five-story town house where Edgar Allan Poe spent one night a hundred and sixty years ago ... they think. And that makes it historical ... maybe. I wonder if he really DID spend the night there?

JOE: It looked like the setting for a lot of his stories.

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JIM: You think his ghost was wandering around in there?

JOE: Something was. I couldn't wait to get out.

JIM: Me, too. I was really spooked.

JOE: Really?

JIM: Really. I didn't want to go in that place at all.

JOE: I thought you didn't want to go because you were lazy.

JIM: Well, that too.

JOE: I don't worry about ghosts. I think what bothers me are the living things in those old buildings.

JIM: You mean the homeless people?

JOE: There weren't any homeless people in that place. Isn't that kind of strange? It was too creepy for even the poor people who live in abandoned buildings. When I was down in the basement trying to take measurements I could hear things scurrying across the floor. I looked around with my flashlight and there were mice everywhere. It was like I was the intruder and they were all ready to attack me. Man, was I ever glad to be out of there. Do you think they know?

JIM: Know what?

JOE: That we're going to destroy their home?

JIM: Mice don't know anything. Their brains are smaller than your fingernail. They survive by instinct.

JOE: Still, what if they knew? (*THUNDER. Both MEN look at each other.*)

JIM: You're getting weird, Joe. You need a break. What would you say if we assigned some junior partners to the next urban renewal project?

JOE: We can't do that. They'd mess it up.

JIM: I know. When I was on the top floor, I had the same experience.

JOE: Oh, yeah?

JIM: Yeah. I heard scampering. There was a big hole in ceiling and the rain was pouring in. I walked through it and almost went through a hole in the floor. (*Mysterious.*) It was kind of like they knew it was there and they wanted me to fall clear through to the basement.

JOE: They?

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JIM: The mice. They were in a corner of the room, crawling all over each other. When I shined my flashlight at them they froze for a moment, then it was like they started moving toward me. I ran to the steps and got out of there fast.

JOE: Really?

JIM: *(Sarcastic.)* No. I'm making it up.

JOE: There must be thousands of mice in that building.

JIM: Maybe millions. *(SOUND of a train whistle is heard.)* I can't wait to get back to New York.

JOE: Me, either. The first thing I'm going to do is take a bath.

(BLACKOUT.)

(LIGHTS up center. MRS. STEELY is sitting in the passenger compartment, leaning on her umbrella, asleep. A suitcase is on the seat beside her. A newspaper is on the seat opposite her. She yawns, rubs her eyes, shakes her head, and sneezes. A CONDUCTOR enters and approaches Mrs. Steely.)

MRS. STEELY: Conductor?

CONDUCTOR: Yes, ma'am?

MRS. STEELY: Where are we?

CONDUCTOR: Philadelphia, ma'am. May I bring you something?

MRS. STEELY: No, thank you. I've got a terrible cold. *(Sneezes.)*

CONDUCTOR: I'm sorry, ma'am.

MRS. STEELY: The doctor gave me this medication that makes me very sleepy. I'd like to take a little nap, but I'm afraid I won't wake up in time.

CONDUCTOR: We'll be in New York in fifty-five minutes. I'll make sure you're awake.

MRS. STEELY: You're very kind. *(SHE slowly leans back and goes to sleep.)*

End of Freeview

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