TOBERMORY

A Comedy in One Act

by Burton Bumgarner

Adapted from a story
By Saki (H.H. Munro)

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Jake, a journalist, is assigned to the science page of a large metropolitan newspaper, even though he knows little about science and really wants to be a sports writer. When an old friend invites him to spend a weekend at a gathering of scientists, he sees a way to write an impressive article on a Nobel Prize winning scientist, and move on to the sports page.

At the gathering we meet a botanist, who has invented a rapidly growing vine that the Defense Department can use as a weapon of mass destruction; a systems engineer who has invented a new software language only engineers can learn; a physicist who has written a textbook that is a combination of quantum physics and a romance novel; and a zoologist who has learned to teach cats to speak English.

When challenged to prove her linguistic feat, the zoologist takes the house cat, Tobermory, and teaches him to speak. Unfortunately, the cat has overheard the disparaging and underhanded comments the scientists have made about each other, and he repeats them for all to hear. When they realize that Tobermory can teach other cats to speak, and that, much to their surprise, cats aren't very nice, the group decides to take desperate actions against the cat, and against Jake.

Running Time:

40 minutes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 6 w, 1 flexible)

JAKE: A reporter.

KELLY: A scientist's assistant.

DR. BLEMLEY: A scientist.

MRS. BLEMLEY: Dr. Blemley's wife.

DR. RESKER: A systems engineer.

MRS. RESKER: Dr. Resker's wife, an animal's rights activist.

DR. WILFRID: A botanist.

MRS. WILFRID: Dr. Wilfrid's wife, not too bright.

DR. CLOVIS: A physicist, female.

DR. APLIN: A zoologist, female.

TOBERMORY: A cat.

*The role of **Tobermory** could be played by a petite girl with a dancing background or smaller, athletic male. All that is needed to make the actor a cat would be a black leotard or warm-up suit, whiskers drawn on the face, and a headband with cat ears.*

PRODUCTION NOTES

The **setting** is the Blemleys' farm in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. A comfortable parlor of a gentleman's farm, with a window, two doorways – one to the outside, the other to the rest of the house. A sofa and end tables CS. On the left apron is a table or desk with a laptop computer and a single chair which is Jake's office. On the right apron is a table and two chairs, which is a coffee bar.

Props

Laptop computer with disk and envelope (pre-set for Jake)
Coffee mug (pre-set for Jake)
Newspaper (pre-set for Jake)
Coffee cup (pre-set for Kelly)
Newspaper (pre-set for Kelly)
Tray of hors d'oeuvres (Mrs. Blemley)
Pot of coffee and cups and saucers
Book (Dr. Clovis)
Flowers in vase (Mrs. Blemley)
Luggage and rain gear (Wilfrids)
Luggage (Kelly)
Note pad, pen and pocket tape recorder (Jake)
Kleeenx tissues (Mrs. Wilfrid)
Dish of milk (Mrs. Blemley)

The **costumes** are all contemporary.

The **time** is the late spring of next year.

TOBERMORY

(During the BLACKOUT the SOUND of a meowing cat and the following dialogue heard.)

MRS. BLEMLEY: Here, kitty, kitty! Where are you, Toby? I have a bowl of milk for you. Here, kitty! Time to come in!

(SOUNDS of thunder and rain. LIGHTS up DSL on Jake's office. On the table is a laptop, a coffee mug, and a newspaper. AT RISE: JAKE is pacing in a small circle. He takes a sip of coffee and looks at the audience as if looking out a window. With sudden resolve he crosses to the table and sits. He takes a cleansing breath and starts to key.)

JAKE: The story has to be told. I am a journalist and it is my job to report what I see, no matter how unbelievable. *(Pauses for a count.)* One year out of journalism school and I joined the staff of the *Times*. Quite an honor for a novice. I wanted to be a sports writer. I was born to be a sports writer! Being a sports writer had been my lifelong dream! Unfortunately, they put me on the science and technology column. The last time I took any science was in high school chemistry, where I learned how to make stink bombs. One day, I made the whole school smell like an open sewer. After a couple of weeks on the job, it was clear to everybody on the staff that I had about as much business writing the science and technology column as my ninety-year-old grandmother had in mud wrestling. I was about to throw in the towel, when luck intervened.

(LIGHTS up DSR on a coffee bar. KELLY is sitting at the table drinking coffee and reading a newspaper. JAKE stands and crosses to Kelly, talking as he walks.)

JAKE: I had spent a terrible day acting like I understood what my editors were talking about. So I stopped in a Starbucks for a triple latte, easy on the java, and there she sat ... my old high school girlfriend. Cindy?

KELLY: Uh ... my name is Kelly. *(Looking at JAKE.)*
JAKE: Right. Kelly. Don't you remember me?
KELLY: *(Looking closely.)* Well, the face is ... hmmm ... well ... I have no idea who you are.
JAKE: High school chemistry lab?
KELLY: *(Offers HER hand.)* Of, course. John, how are you?
JAKE: *(Shakes HER hand.)* I'm fine, but my name is Jake.
KELLY: Jake?
JAKE: Yes. We sort of went out a couple of times in high school. Remember?
KELLY: Vaguely. You're not John?
JAKE: No. I was John's friend.
KELLY: What happened to John? He was really cute.
JAKE: He's the president of his own motorcycle gang. Now he IS really cute, all covered in tattoos and body piercings.
KELLY: Uck.
JAKE: Are you waiting for someone? *(Sits beside KELLY.)*
KELLY: No. Just having a coffee and reading the paper. This science column is really a joke.
JAKE: Really? What's wrong with it?
KELLY: Well, the writer has misused AND misspelled the word "embryophyte," and he's misquoted a Nobel Prize winning scientist. Shows he doesn't have the slightest idea what he's writing about. How does an idiot like this end up writing the science column?
JAKE: Journalism school. How do you know about this stuff?
KELLY: I'm a scientist.
JAKE: *(Excited.)* Tell me, Cindy. Are you married?
KELLY: It's Kelly. And no, I'm not married.
JAKE: Do you have a boyfriend?
KELLY: Not at the moment.
JAKE: *(Taking HER hand.)* Well, you've got one now!
KELLY: *(Pulling HER hand back.)* I don't want one!
JAKE: Look, I'm kind of in a jam. I know you're a really good person. You can help me out.
KELLY: Are you sure we went to high school together?
JAKE: Remember the stink bombs in chemistry lab?

End of Freeview

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