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SF PERUSALS

The Calico Tiger

by Christian B. Garrison

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THE CALICO TIGER
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THE CALICO TIGER

A One-Act Children's Play

For a Flexible Cast of Eight
and Extras as Desired

CHARACTERS

THE WISEONE

JEROME TIGER

BIG MONKEY

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 2

ELEPHANT

RHINOCEROS

KING COBRA

BIRD OF PARADISE

A HUNTER

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Somewhere in the jungle.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The basic staging requires only several stepladders, a number of large paper cut-out leaves, sufficient light to illuminate the actors and simple costumes. These may be pajamas dyed and decorated to resemble animal skins, and paper bag or papier-mache half-masks, which cover the eyes and the top of the head with an animal face and ears, but which leave the lower part of the actor's face exposed.

The cut-out leaves should be easily attached to the step-ladders; early in the play the cast 'assembles' the forest before the audience. If the cast is small, this operation can be done energetically by the principal characters. If a sort of 'chorus' is desired, additional actors may be used to constitute the forest. In this case, they should also be costumed as animals. When they assemble the forest, they hold the leaves and branches in their hands rather than fastening them permanently to the ladders, and these actors remain on the ladders for the duration of the show. From here they can wave the branches to suit the action, simulating rain, wind, sunshine, covering over principal actors who wish to 'hide,' and so forth. They may even provide additional shouting in crowd scenes, sound effects for the weather. In any case, they should watch the action of the play intently, as its outcome affects their lives in the forest as well.

Additional variations, more elaborate costuming [always leaving the actors free for athletic movement], light and sound effects may be added at the director's discretion. If desired, ELEPHANT may even be a two-man costume, chinese-dragon style.

THE CALICO TIGER

SCENE: The stage is bathed in subdued twilight. We hear a melodic, Indian raga played on a sitar. It is slow, enchanting and lyrical.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: Enter WISEONE. He is old and bent with age. His hair is long and snow-white, as is his beard. He supports himself in his slow, gingerly walk with a long staff. He wears a long, white Indian robe, and is truly the epitome of a wiseman. He crosses downstage and studies various members in the audience intently. OPTIONAL: He waves his staff and there is a sudden flash and puff of smoke from a flashpot secreted onstage. He addresses the audience.

WISEONE. Do you know who I am? Do you? [Wait for audience reaction. If desired, he may play with some simple magic effect, such as a color-changing handkerchief, as he speaks.] I am the **Wiseone!** Some call me a wizard, a magician, and a conjurer. I travel about the countryside dispensing wisdom and advice. I can do magic when I **want** to, but what I like most of all is telling stories. Do you want to hear a story? Good. For I am about to tell you one. [Raising his arms majestically] Many years ago, deep in the jungle . . Oops, that reminds me! We need a **jungle.** [Waving his staff] Let there be a jungle!

[Enter the jungle in the form of many children, each carrying some type of foliage, all yammering and screeching like jungle animals. Some scramble upstage to climb

the ladders. They hold up their tree limbs and other foliage and are the trees for our jungle. Several others, with huge, plastic elephant-ear leaves, cross right center, left center and down left to position themselves. Then, all become still and quiet.]

No tropical jungle is complete without a bright, bright sun to make everything hot and steamy.

[A child enters carrying a large sun cutout from up-left and crosses to exit up right, as the lights dim up to a very bright full. The animals stretch and yawn in the sun.]

That's magic . . . Where were we? I keep forgetting! Oh, yes, our story! Many years ago, deep in the jungle, there lived a **Tiger.**

[Enter JEROME TIGER. He bows profusely to the audience and struts around the stage as the WISEONE narrates.]

His name was Jerome.

JEROME. That's me!

WISEONE. At least, that's what **he** called himself. Nobody else called him anything except **Tiger.** They did not ever get close enough to him to learn his name, because all the other animals were **afraid** of him. Jerome Tiger would stand in the middle of the jungle and **roar.** [Lights dim down on the WISEONE as JEROME lets out a tremendous roar.]

JEROME. [Roaring] Jerome's the name, scaring people's my game! Watch **this!**

[He runs downstage and roars at the audience, beating his chest, then giggles and hides by the proscenium

arch. The other characters enter from all directions at a run. Two LITTLE MONKEYS scamper on followed by BIG MONKEY. KING COBRA slithers on in a hurry. RHINOCEROS scoots onstage followed by ELEPHANT who squeals in a high pitch. BIRD OF PARADISE enters slapping and squawking. They all run about making their own particular cries and bump into each other in the pandemonium of trying to find places to hide. RHINO and ELEPHANT keep bumping into each other.]

RHINO. Get out of my way, fatty!

ELEPHANT. [Squealing] I'm scared! Tiger is coming to eat me up for sure! [The others have taken refuge. RHINO hides behind a tree, leaving only a small clump of elephant ears for ELEPHANT to hide behind, but ELEPHANT wants the tree to hide behind.]

RHINO. **I've** got this hiding place! Go find your own!

ELEPHANT. But I'm bigger than you, and I need a big hiding place!

RHINO. Go away! Hide over there. [Reluctantly ELEPHANT darts to the clump of elephant ears, not very well hidden at all. She hops up and down in fear. JEROME roars again, ELEPHANT shrieks and crouches, completely undone.]

ELEPHANT. Tiger will catch me for sure!

[JEROME enters with a roar.]

JEROME. I'm the **fiercest** one around! [To audience, pointing a thumb over his shoulder] They're all hiding from me. I am rather **mean** and **fierce** and **frightening.** Right? [Roar] Right? Now, where could they all be hiding? Let's see: Big Monkey and all of the little monkeys are hiding high in the trees. Rhinoceros went crashing through the tall grass to get away. King Cobra must have curled up into a ball to hide, and Bird of Paradise is somewhere with her feathers all ruffled and trembling. All of them scared, heh, heh! [Some-

thing occurs to him; he speaks more confidentially] Being mean and fierce is fun for me, but I just realized: I don't have any **friends!** Why doesn't anyone like me? I mean, I never **gobble up** any of the others like most tigers would do. [Shadow-boxing] I just punch 'em around a bit . . . [His fake punches provoke new squeals of fear from ELEPHANT. JEROME crouches suddenly and listens.] What's that I hear? Sounds like Elephant whining away. [Crossing to clump of foliage.] The sounds are coming from over there! [He darts to the foliage where ELEPHANT is hiding. Frantic, ELEPHANT tries to make herself very small. JEROME stands and strolls **very** casually around the foliage, whistling. ELEPHANT hugs the floor, circling the foliage on the opposite side to stay hidden. JEROME speaks for ELEPHANT's benefit **very** casually.] Oh, if I catch that ponderous pachyderm, I'm going to tear her to bits with my razor sharp claws. I'll bite her trunk with my needle sharp teeth. [Suddenly charging straight at her] I'll tear her limb from limb! [At that, ELEPHANT lets out a frightened shriek and squeal. JEROME chases and teases her.] Booga-booga-booga! [He chases her about the stage as the others ad. lib. words of encouragement to the fleeing ELEPHANT.

She finally exits squealing with JEROME roaring right behind. BIG MONKEY comes down out of his tree. He signals all-clear to the others, who come out cautiously.]

BIRD OF PARADISE. What are we going to do?

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. I'm scared!

KING COBRA. **You're** scared?! What about me? At least you can hide in the trees. I can't even get a good night's rest for fear Tiger will be out walking and **step** on me while I'm asleep.

BIG MONKEY. [Pacing back and forth] We've got to have a plan.

BIRD OF PARADISE. Well, **my** plan is to move to another jungle. I'm so nervous now my feathers are falling out!

RHINO. At least you can **fly**. I have to stay on the ground all the time, and you know I don't **see** too well. I might walk right into **Tiger** one day, and he would like nothing better than to beat me up and even knock my beautiful **horn** off my nose!

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 2. I'm with Bird of Paradise. I say we move to another jungle.

BIG MONKEY. [Pacing and thinking] We need a plan.

OTHERS. [In unison] You've said that already!

BIG MONKEY. **Quiet!** I need to think.

RHINO. I'm too **scared** to be quiet.

LITTLE MONKEYS. We need something so we won't be afraid to come down out of the trees.

BIRD OF PARADISE. And so I won't get nervous and my feathers all fall out.

KING COBRA. And so I won't be stepped on in my sleep.

RHINO. And so I won't have to worry about bumping into Tiger. [They all burst into loud chatter, ad libbing their fears and concern.]

BIG MONKEY. Quiet! QUIET! Now just calm down and let's **think** of something. [All the animals take thinking postures for a moment, obviously working very hard.]

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. I wish I were a **wizard** and knew magic. I could turn Tiger into a banana. [He thinks again.]

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 2. Then **I** could **peel** him and **chew him up.** [Thinks again.]

RHINO. Or turn him into a **bush**, and I could **run over** him. [Thinks again.]

BIRD OF PARADISE. Or turn him into a **worm**, and I could **peck** him. [Thinks again.]

KING COBRA. Or turn him into a **mouse**, and I could **eat** him. [Thinks again.]

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 2. [Jumping up and down] Oh, if, if, if . . .

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. [Jumping up and down too] Yes, if, if, if I were a magician.

[ELEPHANT enters. She is covered with large band-aids. Her trunk is in a sling and she is simpering and moaning.]

BIRD OF PARADISE. [Rushing to greet her] Oh, poor, poor Elephant. Did he hurt you?
KING COBRA. Why else would she be wearing all those bandages?
ELEPHANT. [Moaning] Oh, he hurt me . . .
LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. What did he do?
ELEPHANT. He did just what he said he would. First, he clawed me with those razor sharp claws of his [She makes a clawing gesture and sound] . . .
OTHERS. Yes? Then what?
ELEPHANT. Then he threw me on the ground . . . [She illustrates violently.]
OTHERS. And then?
ELEPHANT. And then he **bit** my trunk with his needle sharp teeth! [She chomps on her own trunk, then squeals and weeps. The others react with shudders and ooohs and aahhs.]
BIG MONKEY. You're a big, fat scaredy-cat, Elephant! [With that, ELEPHANT breaks into great gales of tears and loud sobbings.]
RHINO. Now you've done it, Big Monkey. You know how hard it is to get Elephant to stop crying once she's started.
BIG MONKEY. You're a big, fat scaredy-cat, too! [Now RHINO starts roaring. BIG MONKEY plugs his ears with his fingers.] Quiet! Both of you, **shut up!** [Their cries subside to a sniffling.] I think I've got a plan. [To LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1] What was it you said about magic?
LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. Uh . . . I don't remember.
LITTLE MONKEY NO. 2. You said you wish you were a wizard so you could make magic. [He bops MONKEY NO. 1

on the head.]

LITTLE MONKEY NO. 1. Oh! [The bop brought the idea back.] That's right. So I could turn Tiger into a banana!

RHINO. Or a bush!

BIRD OF PARADISE. Or a worm!

KING COBRA. Or a mouse!

BIG MONKEY. That's it! That's what we'll do. We'll make magic.

OTHERS. Yes! We'll make magic! [They dance about in glee, and in unison they freeze when they realize:]

ELEPHANT. **How?**

BIRD OF PARADISE. Big Monkey, how are we going to make magic? **We're** not wizards.

RHINO. We don't know any magic.

KING COBRA. That's right. All I know is how to stick out my tongue and eat mice. [He illustrates, gobbling.]

ELEPHANT. All **I** can do is eat peanuts, and I can't even do **that** now that my trunk is broken.

LITTLE MONKEYS. We don't know any magic.

BIG MONKEY. [Proudly] **I** know a wizard. [All spin around]

RHINO. You do?

ALL. Who?

BIG MONKEY. And he knows how to perform all kinds of magic!

BIRD OF PARADISE. Who is he?

BIG MONKEY. [Dramatically] People call him **the Wiseone.**

KING COBRA. Let's go fetch him.

BIG MONKEY. [Darkly] I don't know where he is. [ELEPHANT grabs BIG MONKEY and breaks into tears again.] Stop crying on me! You're getting my fur wet!

[Suddenly, from offstage, JEROME TIGER gives a great roar, and all of the animals freeze. JEROME enters roaring. They all begin running about to get away. JEROME gives chase, the chase being a stylized, slapstick ballet of sorts. The music comes up. JEROME almost

catches first one and then another of the animals. The number ends with all of the animals taking flight off-stage when Jerome trips and falls sprawling. He gets up slowly, dusts himself off and addresses audience.]

JEROME. Did you see them run? I told you I was the fiercest one around. [Strutting] I can frighten **anyone.** Man or beast. In fact, news of my fierceness has probably traveled the world over. I'll bet I can even frighten YOU!

[He roars at the audience and then laughs and is about to roar again when he notices the WISEONE entering upstage.]

What's this? A **person.** I'll frighten him out of his wits, heh, heh. Shhh! I'll hide behind this bush and jump out on him when he passes by. [He secrets himself behind a bush as the WISEONE crosses downstage, closer and closer. To audience:] Shhh! [The WISEONE reaches JEROME's position, and just as JEROME is about to pounce, the WISEONE turns around. JEROME quickly and quietly jumps behind the WISEONE, without being detected. As the WISEONE turns about to look, JEROME stays behind him.]

WISEONE. I thought I heard something. One must be careful when traveling through the jungle. [Listening, hearing nothing.] Must have been the wind in the trees. [He walks a few more steps, with JEROME right behind him.] I **know** I heard something creeping up on me. Did **you?** [When he turns around JEROME jumps up and roars. The WISEONE doesn't budge. JEROME roars again, this time right in the old man's face. The WISEONE holds his ground.]

JEROME. I am Jerome Tiger! The fiercest one around!

WISEONE. [Calmly] I am the Wiseone, the **smartest** one around. [JEROME roars again, jumping straight up in the air and beating his chest. No response.]

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