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Dramatic Publishing

Blackbirds and Dragons, Mermaids and Mice

Five Plays
for Young Audiences
by
SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(BLACKBIRDS AND DRAGONS,
MERMAIDS AND MICE)

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With love to “The Weller Street Gang”—
Pyles, Cramers, Homs, Nelmses, Reicherts, and Vises

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BLACKBIRDS AND DRAGONS, MERMAIDS AND MICE

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A Song of Sixpence

CHARACTERS

CLAUDIUS (or CLAUDIA) BOPP, a villager

KING HEMPLEWORTH THE HOPEFUL

QUEEN MATHILDE

MARION MAYTAG, the maid

WEEDLING, m or f, the gardener

GALLOP, m or f, the groom

WHIZ, the wizard

SIR GALUPSHUS THE GROSS, a knight

I.C. FROST, m or f, resident of the Northern Border

SANDY CACTUS, m or f, resident of the Southern Border

BLACKBIRDS, as many as desired

For a smaller cast of 3m, 2f, 3m or f, the following may be doublecast as I.C. FROST, SANDY CACTUS and BLACKBIRDS: MARION, WEEDLING, GALLOP or WHIZ.

TIME: When the blackbirds nipped the maid's nose...

PLACE: The kingdom of King Hempleworth the Hopeful.
Throne room and other areas may be suggested by simple set pieces.

PLAYING TIME: about 55 minutes

NOTE: Entrances and exits through the audience, although not required, work well in this piece.

A Song of Sixpence

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. Spotlights pick up each character as needed, in and around the palace of King Hempleworth the Hopeful. CLAUDIUS enters accompanied by a shy and frightened BLACKBIRD.*

CLAUDIUS. Don't be afraid. No one is going to hurt you. *(Indicates audience.)* See? They just want to hear your story. *(To audience.)* Greetings! My name is Claudius Bopp. This, of course, is a blackbird. *(BLACKBIRD caws a shy hello to audience.)* She's a bit nervous. She had a terrible scare recently. She was baked into a pie! *(BLACKBIRD squawks and hides her head under her wing.)* She doesn't like to talk about it, but we both think it's important you know. It all began with a certain nursery rhyme. You've probably heard it: "Sing a Song of Sixpence"? Some of you may be a long way from your nursery rhyme days, though, so I'll refresh your memory. Sing along, if you like, but when I raise my hand like this— *(raises one hand over his head, puts finger of other hand to his lips to indicate "quiet")* please stop. Watch my hand, all right? Here we go! *(Singing.)*

Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye—

(BLACKBIRD quickly covers her ears. CLAUDIUS raises his hand to stop singing.)

CLAUDIUS. This next part isn't her favorite. Let's get through it as quickly as we can. *(Lowers his hand and sings, quickly.)*

Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.

(Raises his hand. LIGHTS come up to reveal KING on his throne with BLACKBIRDS on the floor in a huddle before him, heads down. CLAUDIUS lowers his hand and resumes singing.)

CLAUDIUS.

When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing— *(Raises his hand.)*

BLACKBIRDS *(including one with CLAUDIUS, in a plaintive tone)*. CAW! CAW! CAW! CAW!

KING *(singing)*.

Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king?

(LIGHTS go down on KING. BLACKBIRDS exit, including the one with CLAUDIUS.)

CLAUDIUS *(to audience)*. Was it or was it not a dainty dish to set before the king? That depends on whether you're the king or the blackbirds!

(Lowers his hand and resumes singing as LIGHTS come up on KING, QUEEN and MAID, each in his/her own area. They pantomime action as it is sung.)

CLAUDIUS.

The king was in his counting house,
Counting out his money. *(Raises his hand.)*

KING. 1, 399, 217, 604. 1, 399, 217, 605. 1, 399, 217, 606.

Oh, my, I do have the most extraordinary penny collection!

CLAUDIUS *(lowers hand, sings)*.

The queen was in the parlor,
Eating bread and honey. *(Raises hand.)*

QUEEN. Ummmm-mmmmm, I love honey more than money 'cause it's so yummy in my tummy!

CLAUDIUS *(lowers hand, sings)*.

The maid was in the garden,
Hanging out the clothes— *(Raises hand.)*

MAID *(singing)*.

This is the way we dry our clothes,
Dry our clothes, dry our clothes.
This is the way, we dry our clothes—

(Speaking to audience.)

I had an amazing dream once. I dreamed there was a big white box. And I gathered up all the laundry and threw it into the big white box. And then the big white box made big, weird noises, and shook itself like this: *(shak-*

ing herself) thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka. (*Stands still.*) And then all the laundry came out of the big white box, perfectly clean and dry. It was such a wonderful dream! I wonder if it will ever come true? (*Sings and shakes.*)

Oh, this is the way we dry our clothes,
Thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka ...

CLAUDIUS (*lowers hand, sings*).

When along came a blackbird
And nipped her on the nose.

(CLAUDIUS raises his hand to stop the singing as BLACKBIRDS swoop onto the stage, possibly through audience. One "nips" MAID on the nose. ALL except CLAUDIUS freeze.)

CLAUDIUS. We all know the story up to this point. But what happened next?

(CLAUDIUS waves his arm toward the others as full LIGHTS up and MAID clutches the tip of her nose and yells:)

MAID. AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!

(CLAUDIUS and BLACKBIRD exit.)

QUEEN (*stops eating*). Goodness gracious, what was that?

KING (*stops counting*). We're under attack. Load up the drawbridge. Draw up the cannons. I mean, draw up the load. Load up the draw! I mean...what do I mean? Somebody do something. Do anything! But do it now!

QUEEN (*leaves her area to approach KING*). Hempleworth! Pull yourself together. This may be a national emergency. How would it look to our citizens if the king went completely to pieces every time there was a national emergency?

KING. How does it look now?

QUEEN. As if they had a fool for a king.

KING. There's your answer.

QUEEN. Hempleworth, you cannot run a kingdom by acting like a perfect fool.

KING. Nobody's perfect, Mathilde, dear.

QUEEN. Oh, Hempleworth, what am I going to do with you.

MAID. Your attention, please! I just said AAAAAAAA-AAAAAAGH! Isn't anyone going to help me?

KING (*mimes looking out a window*). It's one of the maids. The one who does the laundry.

QUEEN. Dear Marion Maytag! Don't know what I'd do without her.

MAID. Guess I'll have to help myself. (*Bandages her nose with a rag from the laundry.*)

KING. She's the one who screamed. Perhaps it isn't a national emergency. Perhaps she's just pricked her finger.

QUEEN. Pricked her finger? On wet laundry?

KING. Well, got a splinter then. From a clothespin. That's possible, isn't it? I can't bear national emergencies. Why, in Kingship school, I flunked every one of them: war, famine, draught, infestation, plague. Whenever the teacher asked me what I would do, I'd burst into tears. (*Bursts into tears.*)

QUEEN. Hard to imagine.

MAID (*leaves her area to approach KING and QUEEN*).

Your Majesties, may I have a word with you?

QUEEN. Marion Maytag, whatever happened to your nose?

KING. A splinter, perhaps?

MAID. In my nose? What do you think I am, a woodpecker?

KING. No, no, I just meant...I hope it isn't serious.

MAID. Well, it is serious. A blackbird nipped my nose.

KING (*shocked*). Again?

QUEEN (*shocked that he knows it's not the first time*).
Again?

MAID. And again! Third time this week. I've had it. I quit.

QUEEN. But where will you go? What will you do?

MAID. I've got it all worked out. I'm going to be an inventor.

KING. What are you going to invent?

MAID. A big white box.

KING & QUEEN. What?

MAID. A big white box. I'm going to put all my laundry in it and it's going to make weird noises and shake like this: thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka.

KING. How odd!

MAID. And then all the laundry will come out perfectly clean and dry.

QUEEN. How wonderful!

MAID. Wish me luck! (*Exits, shaking.*) Thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka, thumpa-clunka...

QUEEN. Good luck, Marion! (*Beat.*) I wonder if that blackbird loosened something in her head.

KING. This isn't a national emergency, is it?

QUEEN. No, I suppose not. I don't mind doing the laundry. It won't be the first time.

KING. That's one of the many reasons I love you, Mathilde.

QUEEN. Because I've done the laundry?

KING. Because you're so *capable*. There's nothing you can't handle, be it the laundry or—

QUEEN. National emergencies?

KING (*with a sheepish grin*). Precisely.

(GALLOP and WEEDLING enter noisily.)

GALLOP (*his voice a horse's whinny*). S-a-a-a-y, Your Majesties. O-o-o-o-h, my goodness. Teh-eh-eh-ehrrrible new! Tell them, We-e-e-e-edding!

WEEDLING (*comforting GALLOP, but his tone is more wheedling than gentle*). Whoa there, Gallop. Take it easy.

KING. Why it's Gallop, the horses' groom.

QUEEN. And Weedling, the gardener. What can we do for you two?

KING. Nothing important, I hope.

GALLOP. It's the bla-a-a-a-ackbirds, Your Majesty. Flah-ah-ah-ahcks of them everywhere!

WEEDLING. Diving straight at us and ZAP! right on the nose!

GALLOP. It's hah-ah-ah-ah-ah-rible!

WEEDLING. Whoa, Gallop! Have some respect for the Royal Ears. The point is, Your Majesties, the servants are all running away. They say it's too dangerous to stay here. We've been under attack for nearly a week.