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Dramatic Publishing

THE LABORS OF HERCULES FITCH

A Play

by

MARK D. KAUFMANN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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THE LABORS OF HERCULES FITCH

A Play in One Act
For 6m. and 4w.

(Cast may be expanded to 9m., 6w.)

CHARACTERS

At the Fitch home:

HERCULES a young man, eighteen
MARGO his teenage sister
STEPHEN his little brother
SHIRLEY their mother

Elsewhere:

MR. FREATH
ALICIA
BRAD CHANG
NICOLE
CAPTAIN ADAM
ALEX and EAMONN
TOM APPLE
PATRICIA PLESKER
PAETRA PLESKER
DARREN

This play takes place in numerous locations. The only permanent set piece is a home/kitchen, stage center with a work counter, a table and a couple chairs. The other, more exotic locations alternate stage left and right. Set pieces and props should be limited to the evocative essentials which can be quickly placed and struck without stopping the action of the play. As our hero HERCULES, an 18-year-old with tremendous energy and drive, goes from one scene to the next, light cues should do the work; the action zipping continuously, uninterrupted by black outs.

THE LABORS OF HERCULES FITCH

BEFORE RISE *we hear pulsing James Bond-like music come up for about fifteen seconds to set the mood. It fades as:*

LIGHTS COME UP *on HERCULES, his back toward us. He's looking at another man who is sitting in an arm-chair on a platform upstage, MR. FREATH. FREATH is dressed in black and harshly lit from a single source over his head, so his features are difficult to make out. FREATH speaks in a commanding voice.*

MR. FREATH ...We have long sought the identity of "X," Mr. Fitch. My superiors have grown tired of our fruitless chase, and have charged me with finding and unmasking this man who has caused the CIA so much frustration; whose very purpose, it seems, is to choke the life out of anyone in his sphere of influence. I choose you, Mr. Fitch, to track him down.

(HERCULES turns toward the audience for the first time; a light hits him. He certainly doesn't look like a CIA agent. He is dressed in cargo slacks, an open shirt

over a T-shirt, and sneakers; his hair is messed. No James Bond here.)

HERCULES (*to audience*). I was *not* expecting this. When I was called up to Mr. Freath's office, I thought he wanted me to pull some files on the new recruits—that's what I usually do. —No, *I am* a CIA agent, I was recruited right out of high school—but I've been doing clerical stuff; I haven't gotten to the surveillance, espionage, or even combat training. Although I've got a few moves: a punch here, a karate chop there... I've seen a lot of movies. But I was surprised to be given a "track down" assignment. —One that was this important, no less. I had to ask him... (*To FREATH.*) ...Mr. Freath, I'm honored by your confidence in me, but aren't there more experienced agents who should do this?

MR. FREATH. The "more experienced agents," as you put it, have all failed. I've decided a fresh perspective is called for: an agent who hasn't "seen it all," who might bring new insight to the table. Don't tell me you're not up to the job.

HERCULES. No, no—I'm anxious to get an assignment, are you kidding? I've been champing at the bit...

MR. FREATH. I was told you were an eager one. Your first name is Hercules, after all. Zeus' son by a mortal woman, if I recall my mythology. It's a name that promises heroics and valor. And great deeds. Your parents must have had great expectations for you.

HERCULES. We've...never had that conversation.

MR. FREATH. Fulfill the promise of your name, Hercules Fitch. Honor it and discover Mr. "X's" identity.

HERCULES. You have my full commitment, Mr. Freath.

MR. FREATH. Good. Find a man named Mr. Chang. He's a former operative for the other side who we think had an association with "X." He's your best lead.

HERCULES. Mr. Chang. —Thank you, sir. (*MR. FREATH exits. HERCULES turns back to the audience:*) ...So suddenly I'm an agent—a *real* agent! I dug up every bit of information on this "Chang" character, and tracked him down to a hilltop retreat on the far side of the city. I didn't call to make an appointment—CIA guys don't do that. Security on the house was strangely minimal—not even a fence. As I crept in I wondered if this was the right place. My question was soon answered...

(Lights come up on another part of the stage, yellow and red with deep shadows. Soft Chinese music underscores the scene. HERCULES creeps into the area and discovers a woman, ALICIA, kneeling on the floor, staring off. She speaks with a thick, fake Chinese accent; she does not look at him.)

ALICIA. Welcome, Mr. Fitch. You been expected.

HERCULES. How do you know me?

ALICIA. Chang see all. Chang know all.

HERCULES. *You're* Chang?

(BRAD CHANG suddenly appears from a shadow. He, too, puts on a Chinese accent and manner, but it's clearly put on.)

BRAD. I Chang. Brad Chang.

HERCULES. *Brad* Chang? Seriously? ...Look...Brad...if you see everything, then you know what I'm here for.

BRAD. Foolish words, Mr. Hercules. But I expect nothing less from a canary sent to do the work of a hawk.

HERCULES. I don't know about birds, Chang; let's talk Mr. "X."

BRAD. You see, Alicia, our innocent friend has not yet learned the virtues of patience.

ALICIA. "Patience" is a piece of marinated meat, served unhurried and savory.

BRAD. She refers to my prowess in the kitchen; culinary skills are among my finest talents.

HERCULES. I didn't come for dinner; stop stalling.

ALICIA. Ah! Mr. Hercules is yummy forceful!

BRAD. Such courage. If a kitten wishes to grow up to be a tiger, Mr. Hercules, it is best he were born with stripes.

HERCULES. Enough with the animals! (*To audience.*) I'd about had it with these two. Their act was as phony as their accents. I mean, how many natively Chinese "Brads" and "Alicias" are there?

(As BRAD continues, ALICIA does inauthentic Chinese dance movement around HERCULES.)

BRAD. I will tell you what you want to know...but only after you prove yourself worthy. Prove you have the understanding of patience, and I shall give you what you desire. But be aware, Mr. Hercules, patience is not won without sacrifice.

HERCULES. What do you want me to do?

BRAD. There is a cave, forty miles to the east, where the coyote broods, and the lizard waits...

HERCULES (*to audience*). More animals...

BRAD. ...Inside the cave you will be tested. But it will not be your greatest test. Luck alone will not help you, my young seeker... (*BRAD bows and backs off stage. ALICIA strikes a pose and lets loose with loud, off-key singing on Chinese syllables.*)

ALICIA. Chow—fan—goo—ding—choi! He, he, he, he... (*She breaks into some “he-he” giggling, and runs off following BRAD.*)

HERCULES. CIA agents are trained to expect the unexpected, the confusing, the strange. Now I knew they weren't kidding. My next move was to head for the cave...but there was other business I had to attend to first...

(HERCULES goes to the home/kitchen area. Food items are laid out on the counter. Lights come up on HERCULES' younger brother, STEPHEN, dressed for school. He's whining, trying to tie his shoe. HERCULES goes to the counter and quickly makes a couple of peanut butter sandwiches.)

STEPHEN. My laces are all messed! —Untangle it for me!

HERCULES. Don't yank at them, they won't tangle. (*Calling off.*) Margo: let's go, you're gonna be late!

STEPHEN. Hey—Mom always puts on more peanut butter. —And where's the jelly—Mom puts on grape jelly.

HERCULES. Well, Mom's been at work for two hours already, so take what you get and be happy.

(MARGO enters with a purse and notebook. At fifteen she wears too much makeup and a stomach-exposing shirt. And she has a sullen attitude.)

MARGO. I don't need your yelling for me every morning, Herc. I'm ready when I'm ready.

HERCULES. Yeah, well, you're not ready yet. Go change that shirt. You know Mom won't let you wear that stuff. (*She Ignores him. HERCULES finishes with the sandwiches, tosses them with a couple of apples in brown bags, then goes to STEPHEN to untangle the shoelaces.*) I'll pick you up at 3:00 sharp today, Stephen. (*To MARGO.*) And you at 3:15.

MARGO. Lindy Sneedon's older sister is picking us up. We're going shopping.

HERCULES. Did Mom give you money? I know I didn't.

MARGO. I have my own money.

HERCULES. From where? You can't just be spending money; this house runs on a tight budget now.

MARGO. I don't answer to you; get off my back.

HERCULES. Correction: whether you like it or not—and I'll tell you I *don't*, so we're in agreement on that point—you *do* answer to me when Mom's not here.

MARGO. Well, Mom said I could go, okay? Does that make it all better?

HERCULES. I don't like you hanging out with Lindy Sneedon. I don't trust her—or her sister. Okay, roll your eyes, but I don't like their attitude. Don't you have other friends?

MARGO. Yeah, I got lots of other friends. I'll write a complete report on every one of 'em.

STEPHEN. Lindy Sneedon smells funny.

MARGO. Who asked you? (*MARGO grabs her things and starts to leave.*)

HERCULES. —Change the shirt, Margo. And wipe the crap off your face.

(MARGO stomps off to her bedroom and slams the door.)

STEPHEN *(simply)*. We're gonna be late. *(HERCULES nods, sighs, then turns back to the audience. STEPHEN grabs his sack lunch and exits. The lights on the home fade.)*

HERCULES. Did I mention I have a little brother and sister? *(HERCULES takes a breath, lets go of the tension. As with all his monologues, he mimes the actions as he describes them.)* Well. I got them to school, then headed East in search of a “wait ing liz ard” and a “brood ing coy ote.” Good luck, right? But way down a dusty side road I saw an abandoned, ramshackle building. The faded paint on the side announced, “The Brooding Coyote.” Near it was a rock formation: a lizard with its nose pointing toward a hillside. I grabbed my flashlight and made my way over to a gap in the rocks...

(Odd colored lights come dimly up in an area that gives the impression of a cave. The sound of dripping water and strange, faint echoes comes up. HERCULES turns on his flashlight and carefully comes into the area.)

HERCULES *(cont'd)*. Ahead I could see a large, square-cut boulder. It had to be some kind of a door. In front of it on the ground were foot-square slates, each inscribed with a letter of the al pha bet on it. I'd found my test.

(A woman, NICOLE, dressed like an adventurer, leaps up behind him, and grabs him in a headlock. HERCULES can't move.)

NICOLE. Now you just take it easy, and maybe you'll walk outta this cave.

HERCULES. Who are you?

NICOLE. Let's try that the other way around.

HERCULES. My name's Fitch. Look—we don't have to do it like this, I came alone.

NICOLE (*considering*). You armed?

HERCULES (*holds up the flashlight*). You're looking at it.

NICOLE. Listen up, Fitch: I don't give second chances. (*NICOLE takes his flashlight, and pushes him away, releasing him. HERCULES massages his neck; NICOLE runs him up and down with the flashlight, getting a good look at him.*) You're a nice drink o' good-lookin', aren't ya?

HERCULES. This where you come for a date?

NICOLE. Just give me your story while I'm willing to hear it.

HERCULES. I don't think I need to say any more to someone I don't know, in a cave I know she doesn't own.

(NICOLE slowly walks around HERCULES, keeping the flashlight on him.)

NICOLE. I don't know how you found your way here, but all things being equal, I was here first. So why not turn yourself around and forget you ever stumbled across this forgettable cave, and we'll call it square.

HERCULES (*to audience*). Despite her attitude, I was having a hard time disliking her. She had spirit. (*To NICOLE.*) I'll go if you want. But I've got a feeling you'd rather get past that boulder and claim your prize. Which you'd already have done if you could.

NICOLE (*considering again*). I don't do partnerships.
HERCULES. Not suggesting one. Like I said I only want one thing. I open it up and you get everything else.

(*NICOLE shines the flashlight above the boulder door.*)

NICOLE. What do you make of that?
HERCULES (*reading*). "The means of entry holds water."
(*To himself.*) The means of entry holds water. (*Looking at the alphabet slates on the floor.*) Have you tried stepping on the letters to spell "water"?
NICOLE. In twenty languages.

(*HERCULES takes the flashlight and goes up the written phrase over the boulder. He picks at something embedded in the rock.*)

HERCULES. What's that? ...Got a knife?
NICOLE. Not giving it to you.
HERCULES. Just...come over here; dig this out...
(*NICOLE goes to the boulder and works briefly at picking a small object out of it, which HERCULES takes and studies under the light.*) ...It's a...looks like a metal bolt fitting. These are used on ships—or they used to be.
NICOLE. Right. This is just where I'd dock a boat.
HERCULES. There are letters on it: "A-S-K." —I've got an idea—I'll be back.
NICOLE. If I get it opened, Fitch, I'm not waiting for you.
HERCULES. I know. And my name's Hercules.
NICOLE. Nicole. (*Beat.*) Before you go, one more thing.

HERCULES. What? (*NICOLE grabs the front of his shirt, pulls him toward her and kisses him.*) What was that for?

NICOLE. I wanted it.

(*HERCULES makes a quick exit as the lights go down on the cave.*)

HERCULES (*to audience*). Okay, James Bond would have gotten more, but I'm not used to women throwing themselves at me—I think that comes later in the training. Back at HQ I pulled up files on naval personnel of the last fifty years with the initials "A.S.K." And got a match: Captain Adam Smith Kaplan. Currently serving on the submarine *U.S.S. Eagle*. ...But he had to wait...

(*Lights up on the home/kitchen. STEPHEN is in the kitchen, awkwardly tossing a salad at the counter. MARGO marches in, angry and defiant. HERCULES right behind her.*)

HERCULES. No—you are *not* going to your room. Sit down. (*MARGO stands, arms crossed.*) What did you tell the police.

MARGO. I didn't tell them anything, hotshot. Okay?

HERCULES. Cut the attitude, Margo. Now. This isn't stupid fun with your friends. Shoplifting is serious.

STEPHEN. Herc, this salad doesn't look so good.

MARGO. OKAY. I'm sorry. I'm so, so, SO sorry. Happy?

HERCULES. Margo, listen to yourself: what world are you living in?