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Dramatic Publishing



RIVER RAT AND CAT

(50-minute touring manuscript version)

By
Y YORK



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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River Rat and Cat premiered at Childplay’s Tempe Performing Arts Center, Tempe, Arizona, May 2007. The production was directed by Mark Lutwak and included the following artistic team:

CAST

River Rat Juliet Drake
Cat Justin Krueger
Dale Beaver Ricardo D. Araiza

PRODUCTION STAFF

Set Design Kimb Williamson
Lighting Design Anthony Runfola
Sound Design Mark Lutwak
Costumes Kish Finnegan
Stage Manager Gretchen Schaefer

PERFORMANCE NOTE

The characters in this play are determined—not desperate, but extremely focused, very in-the-moment, and a bit fixated. To them, the seemingly small issues of the next Cheese Sandwich or a missing Worry Stone loom as life and death. To them, every scheme is heroic, clever and historic, even if the rest of us see them as transparent and goofy. Please resist the inclination to “play” the humor. It will come as these roles are approached with honesty, utmost fervor and determination. Play the actions and let the language guide you. The characters have moments when they get tangled up in their schemes, when their actions trip, stumble and run headlong into brick walls, and their language reflects and reveals such moments.

The performance style is unique and particular; it is heightened and precise. It’s closer to playing the comedies of Beckett or Coward than, say, Neil Simon. Many items and concepts appear as capitalized words in the text. Such words are not necessarily stressed or punched, but they do carry extra weight. These items and concepts are precious to these characters. They are important, and perhaps, recently learned.

These characters function according to the principles of lower-elementary-school students. Their world is only just beginning to expand beyond the immediate family. They are exploring and understanding friendship for the first time. They only know a few things, so those things are important. And when they learn and embrace something new, such as “a Promise,” it holds deep resonant meaning for them.

Although adults and older children will find great enjoyment in this play, it is those between the ages of 4 and 7 years of age who will really follow, track and understand the drama of what ensues among River Rat, Cat and Beaver. This must be respected and honored.

RIVER RAT AND CAT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RIVER RAT a River rat. A collector of Items

CAT an escapee house cat. Grand, pampered, cowardly

DALE BEAVER a beaver. A general in his own mind

RIVER RAT AND CAT

(A riverbank on which is a cave entrance; farther from the river, a tree and some holes in the ground. Enter DALE BEAVER, marching and reciting in cadence. DALE BEAVER drags three enormous tires roped together.)

DALE BEAVER

Left
Left
I left my Dam with a mighty good Plan
Because I thought it was right
Right
Right by the laws of jiminy jim
I left my Dam with a mighty good Plan
Because I thought it was right
Right

(DALE BEAVER marches and recites and carefully stashes the items so that they are partially visible.)

Fight
Fight
When Cat sees this junk and Rat takes it in
They'll fight
Fight
They'll fight through the night and I'll get this Tree
And no one will get it but me
But me
Tree
Tree

(DALE BEAVER takes out a measuring tape and measures a branch of the Tree.)

DALE BEAVER

I'll toss this Tree on top of the Dam
The Dam so high to reach the sky
Raise it up to higher than high
Sky

Sky
 The highest Dam that's in the land
 If I can't do it no one can
 I'll get this Tree and that's my Plan
 Plan
 Plan

CAT (from off)

“Roar!”

DALE BEAVER

Present arms!

CAT (from off)

“Roar!”

DALE BEAVER

I, Dale Beaver (salutes Tree), shall return for this Tree. 'Bout face. (Quickly marches off double time.) Hut hut hut hut hut hut—

CAT (from off)

“Roar!”

(Enter RIVER RAT.)

RIVER RAT

“Oh dear, oh no, oh dear oh no. Will I never be safe from the mighty ferocious beast? Must I always fear for my life from the Cat-Who-Shows-No-Mercy”?

CAT (enters)

“Roar.”

RIVER RAT

“Shake shake, tremble tremble. I should have known, that I, I, pitiful cowardly River Rat could never outrun—outhide—outsmart—outside—the amazing, the terrible, Cat-in-Arms.”

CAT

“Roar roar.”

RIVER RAT

“Oh, spare me, amazing Cat, spare me.”

CAT

“Roar.”

RIVER RAT (getting fed up)

“Spare me and I will rub your tired Cat feet.”

CAT

“Roar.”

RIVER RAT

Spare me and I will be your servant forever.”

CAT

“Roar.”

RIVER RAT

Caaaaat—.

CAT

“Roar?”

RIVER RAT

Would you please agree to spare me so that we can move on?

CAT (reminding)

Tasty Morsel.

RIVER RAT

“Spare me, and I will bring you a Tasty Morsel.”

CAT

Where is it?

RIVER RAT (checks pockets)

Strings, combs, wrappers—Cheese Sandwich, will that do?

CAT

“I spare your life, miserable creature! I will devour this Dead Enemy.”

RIVER RAT

Dead Cheese Sandwich. Come on now, Cat, you promised—.

CAT

“Into my Tree hollow, I drag my blood-dripping kill—”

RIVER RAT

Mayonnaise dripping.

CAT

“Slobber, devour—.”

RIVER RAT

Time for the Garden—.

(DALE BEAVER tosses a stone behind RIVER RAT, exits. Startled, RIVER RAT approaches the stone.)

CAT

“I am Cat, the hunter growler. What care I for a Garden?”

RIVER RAT

This is not about the Garden. This is something completely different from a Garden. I have found something. A fabulous found-something, already polished and shined.

CAT

“Growl roar slobber.”

RIVER RAT

It was right there, right on the ground. Don’t you think it will make a splendid Worry Stone?

CAT (chokes)

Worry Stone?

RIVER RAT

For my Collection.

CAT

Rivy. Is it not agreed that if you have a worry that I chase it away with my ferocious “Roar, roar, snarl”?

RIVER RAT

Well... Yes, it is agreed.

CAT

And do you not have many many useless Worry Stones already?

RIVER RAT

Not useless.

CAT

You do not need another Worry Stone.

RIVER RAT

Not just *any* another. A *splendid* another.

CAT (going into RIVER RAT's cave)

Oh, Rivy Rivy Rivy.

RIVER RAT

What—what are you doing in my Cave? Don't touch anything. Come out of there at once.

(CAT emerges with RIVER RAT's enormous jar of Worry Stones.)

CAT

Another Worry Stone? To put in your already overflowing jar of Worry Stones?

RIVER RAT

There's always room for one more.

(RIVER RAT puts it in, but it falls out of the jar. CAT snatches it.)

CAT

No room. Remember your promise?

RIVER RAT

No, I don't remember a promise.

CAT

Nothing, *nothing* goes into your Cave without something going out. You promised. Your Cave is stuffed to overflowing, just like this jar. If you are going to have a new Worry Stone, you must toss away an old one.

RIVER RAT (gasping)

Toss?

CAT

Never mind, I'll do it. Right into the river. (Begins to throw.)

RIVER RAT

No, no. Stop. Uh. Perhaps this new one doesn't have to go in the jar.

CAT

Perhaps it can stay right there on the ground where you found it.

RIVER RAT

No, I was thinking...perhaps it would be possible for you to carry it for me.

CAT (chokes)

Carry?

RIVER RAT

Yes, Cat, carry. That way it won't further overflow my jar, and it will always be nearby in case of an unplanned or emergency worry.

CAT

Carry? Did you say carry?

RIVER RAT

Yes, in one of your many many Pockets.

CAT

Carry it in one of your own Pockets.

RIVER RAT

You know very well my own Pockets are full. Come on, Cat. Carry my eensy weensy stone inside your Pocket.

CAT

I have no Pocket.

RIVER RAT

Why, yes. I'd say you have one two three four five six seven Pockets. You can carry this stone in one of your seven Pockets.

CAT

Actually, (idea) you wouldn't want me to drown, would you Rivy?

RIVER RAT

You never go in the river.

CAT

Be pulled down to the bottom of the river by a Pocket full of stones.

RIVER RAT

One weightless stone.

CAT

Never to be seen or heard from again. The cries of sadness can be heard from near and far: "Ooooooh. Dear Cat drowned, in the detested River water while trying to carry a stone for beloved friend, River Rat, poor Cat taken so prematurely by the raging River and the heavy heavy stone.

RIVER RAT

This is too ridiculous.

(RIVER RAT puts the stone into a CAT Pocket. It immediately falls to the ground, kerplunk.)

RIVER RAT (continued)

Oh, not that one. (Tries again, and again, the same.)

CAT (kerplunk)

Or that one.

RIVER RAT (kerplunk)

Or this one.

CAT (kerplunk)

Or this one.

RIVER RAT (kerplink)

Not this one.

CAT

That one won't work either!

RIVER RAT

You have seven useless Pockets.

CAT

They are not useless. They are not even Pockets. They are Decorative Patches to give style and grace to my jacket.

RIVER RAT

How do you carry your lunch and your ball-peen hammer and your curling iron?

CAT

If, on the very impossible chance, I should ever need a ball-peen hammer, I will get it from you.

RIVER RAT

Oh. I see. I carry everything you need, so your Pockets get to be decorative patches.

CAT

I hate the bulgy bulge that happens with full Pockets. I like the lean sleek look of Pocketless-Patches.

RIVER RAT (growing anger)

Pocketless-Patches, Patches that do not serve as Pockets—seven of them? Seven useless Patches? You get to have seven useless Patches and I can't have one measly additional Worry Stone?

CAT

All right, Rivy. I'll keep your Worry Stone. Right here. (Cat drops the stone into one of the Garden holes.)

RIVER RAT

Take that out of there at once.

CAT

You asked me to keep it and here is where I shall keep it.

RIVER RAT

Carry, carry, not keep.

CAT

Keep, carry. (Rhetorical.) What's the difference?

RIVER RAT (to self, breathing hard)

Keeping. Cat is keeping my Worry Stone in a Garden hole.

CAT

That way you will always know where it is.

RIVER RAT

...I will?

CAT

You will. It will always be right here. Always.

RIVER RAT

All right, Cat. You may keep the Worry Stone in the Garden. Where you shall check on it every day as you reap and tend and hoe.

CAT

I don't reap and tend and hoe.

RIVER RAT

Yes, you shall reap and tend and hoe, and then you can *can*.

CAT

Can can?

RIVER RAT

"Pick vegetable. Stuff in jar. Put on lid. Eat tasty morsels throughout the winter."

CAT

I get all the tasty morsels I need from you.

RIVER RAT

No! You need to be able to take care of yourself—

CAT

You take care of me.

RIVER RAT

So that I can have a day off.

(Pause.)

CAT (horrified)

But Rivy—.

RIVER RAT (going into Cave)

No but, promised. Like it or not, I'm going to teach you Gardening.

CAT

I am not interested in Gardening. I am interested in roaring and sleeping and playing and...

(RIVER RAT enters with a pile of fish heads.)

CAT (continues, sniffs)

Eating, yum.

RIVER RAT

Look here, Friend Cat.

CAT

What are those delicious-looking eat-ables you have so carefully piled?

RIVER RAT

These are not eat-able anythings. They are the Heads of Dead Fish.

CAT

What are you doing with the delicious looking Heads of Dead Fish?

RIVER RAT

One Fish Head goes into each hole along with one seed. The Dead Fish Head is for fertilizer. It is a Famous Gardening Technique.

CAT

I never knew Gardening was so delicious.

RIVER RAT

Delicious and nutritious.

CAT

I love the Garden.

RIVER RAT

Do you mean it, Cat?

CAT

Yes, yes, I love the Garden. I particularly love the fertilizer part of the Garden. Can we fertilize right now?

RIVER RAT

Certainly. I so hoped you'd like it.

CAT

Not like, love, I love the Garden. I will go along behind you and fill each hole with dirt.

(As RIVER RAT drops seed and Fish Head, CAT comes along behind and eats the Fish Head.)

RIVER RAT

Seed, Fish Head. Ensure a perfect crop. Seed, Fish Head. Careful not to pack the dirt too tightly.

CAT (mouth full)

Mumble mumble.

RIVER RAT

Seed, Fish Head. Happy plants. Seed, Fish Head. Otherwise the plants can't stretch out. The dirt must be very very loose.

CAT

Mumble wurmble.

RIVER RAT

Oh, don't worry about the worms. Worms are good. Worms help keep the soil very very loose.

CAT

Mumble yum.

RIVER RAT

Yes, happy seeds make yummy cobs of baby corn fresh from the Garden. A lightly-steamed-with-butter-and-salt meal fit for a Cat. And the Cat's good neighbor, River Rat. (Turns to address CAT.) What do you say, Cat?

CAT

Mumble...