

THEATRE ***of FABLE*** ***Two 1-Act Plays***

By Jules Tasca

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Here are two unusual and richly imaginative plays you can perform for a full evening's entertainment with the barest minimum of rehearsals. All the action is mimed by actors wearing masks as readers speak the dialogue.

In *THE VINEGAR MAN*, a successful wine merchant is devastated when his young wife dies bearing their son. The merchant retreats into a shell, ignoring his child and nanny and any happy family life he could have had. Like his wine he allows to turn into vinegar, he turns sour and uncaring. Years later, after his son has grown up and run off to be married, the merchant forces the loyal nanny to live in the vinegar warehouse and ignores a beautiful baby left on his doorstep, unaware the child is his own granddaughter. But like Dickens' character Scrooge, the Vinegar Man is saved at the end from his own bitterness and the entire family is reunited.

In *FINDING HAPPINESS*, young, simple Fantodd is sent into the forest by his unhappy father to find the elusive feelings of happiness and bring them back home. In the forest, Fantodd meets all kinds of characters who claim they have the secret of happiness but after trying them all, Fantodd finds none of them makes him happy. It is only at the end, when Fantodd and his father find brides and work hard at making a living, that happiness indeed finds them.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

THEATER OF FABLE was part of
a *Myth and Ritual Program* at Oxford, England,
and was performed by *The Oxford Court Players*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 5 w, extras)

NARRATOR: Tells the story.

CHARLES SCUROL: A bitter wine merchant.

***VALENTINA SCUROL:** His beautiful bride.

***FREYA RENWE:** Loyal nanny.

***DREAM LADY:** Has an evil streak.

VALENTINE SCUROL: Charles's son.

ANNIE LAURIE: Valentine's wife.

***CARL:** Annie's uncle.

***NUN:** At the orphanage.

EXTRAS: 3 children and 3 workers or buyers.

**(These roles can be doubled.)*

THE ACTION

The actors never speak but mime to the dialogue that is read by an unmasked Chorus who sit in full view of the audience. At times, the Chorus speaks in unison to emphasize emotion. Most of the time, each choral member will deliver only the line of his or her masked counterpart on the stage proper. There is also a Narrator who is not masked. The Narrator should have his or her part memorized to facilitate moving about the stage.

PROPS

Bottle of wine and glasses; auditing book and quill pen; cap and long white cape; cases of wine for customers; map for Charles; contracts; note from Valentine; note in baby's blanket; blanket; bowl and spoon; bag of coins to jingle; cane, hats, scarves; record book for Nun; wad of money for Charles; 3 pillows; accounts for Valentine; pipe for Carl.

SETTING

The setting is several risers of different sizes. A synthesizer, wood blocks or other musical instruments are used to punctuate lines or scenes.

COSTUMES / MASKS

The characters all wear nineteenth century clothing and they are masked. The masks are full face, so gesticulation to convey emotion will be larger than in naturalistic acting. Chorus and Narrator are not masked and are in full view of the audience. If your company does not wish to construct masks from scratch, white plastic male and female mask blanks can be purchased from costume or dance supply retailers and painted by your actors. Beards, mustaches or eyebrows can also be affixed.

See additional notes at the end of playbook.

ACT I
THE VINEGAR MAN

(AT RISE: As prologue MUSIC fades out, the NARRATOR begins the fable.)

NARRATOR: Once upon a time in the 19th century there was a young orphan boy who learned the trade of wine making from an old Sicilian ...

(A LIGHT comes up on CHARLES SCUROL. He stands in tableau, holding a bottle of wine. The label on the wine bottle reads "SCUROL WINES." A member of the CHORUS claps two wood blocks together.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont.)* His name is Charles Scurool. You see him frozen for a few seconds in the fragile optimism of youth. He had quite a knack for making extra delicious wines, and it gave him a sense of worth to the world to be doing his work. *(WORKERS enter, and CHARLES comes out of tableau to hand them their money.)* Many people worked for Charles and prospered along with him. They grew grapes and pressed them into what Charles called ...

CHORUS: The drink of Gods.

CHARLES: *(To the WORKERS.)* That's what this is...*(HE pours from the bottle into glasses. The WORKERS drink.)* Grapes from the earth, sweetened by the sun, bathed by rains from exploding clouds. Oh, it's a marvel of nature when the fruit's juice bubble-brews into the heady elixir of fine wine. *(MUSIC punctuates. CHARLES and the WORKERS sip from their glasses.)*

CHORUS: Ahhhh!

(THEY indicate how it tastes. Then the Workers exit. CHARLES crosses to one of the risers and pulls out a large auditing book and begins making entries with a quill pen.)

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NARRATOR: Charles Scuroi enjoyed his business. His head was always in his bookkeeping. But something was missing from his life ... *(A young GIRL enters. Wood blocks clap.)* One day, a girl came into the wine merchant's office. Her name was ...

CHORUS: *(Softly.)* Valentina. *(MUSICAL punctuation.)*

CHARLES: So, your name is Valentina. And what may I do for you?

VALENTINA: You are the owner, the wine man?

CHARLES: I am so called. My name is Charles Scuroi.

VALENTINA: I'm grateful that you're taking time to talk with me. I know you're busy.

CHARLES: Not at all. How often do the gods send one of their own to a simple merchant's office?

VALENTINA: Oh, thank you, sir. You flatter me. I come here because I'm told your business is good and you employ many and I ... and I ...

CHARLES: I see trouble brimming in those eyes. Say what you will ... well?

VALENTINA: Sir ... sir ... I need ... I need a position. I need to work.

CHARLES: *(Crossing to HER.)* Where are you from? Where's your family?

VALENTINA: My family is an old remembrance from across the sea. There were such bloody wars that my mother sent me and my older brother here to be safe. My brother worked in a factory, and I kept the apartment and took in sewing and mending. But now my brother tired of the hard factory routine. He ... he went out West to look for gold.

CHARLES: Gold? *(HE laughs. MUSIC punctuates.)* Gold. He's a fool to have left his sister for gold. But it's plain to see that you love him and miss him. *(SHE wipes away a tear.)* Come now. When you were born an angel kissed the beauty of heaven into your face. I won't let the devil mar it with a frown.

VALENTINA: I'm sorry. I'm here because the little sewing that I do won't keep me.

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CHARLES: Then you will work here in my office. You can tend to my bookkeeping.

VALENTINA: You mean ... *(HE nods "yes.")*

CHARLES: You see. The devil has let go of your jowls and up pops a smile. *(He laughs.)* You'll start tomorrow. *(SHE takes HIS hand in both her hands.)*

VALENTINA: Oh, thank you. Your heart is carved from sympathy itself. Your bookkeeping will always be exact. I promise, sir.

(SHE releases HIS hand and crosses off, exuberantly. Charles stares at the hand that Valentina caressed. MUSIC punctuates. The LIGHTS fade.)

NARRATOR: *(As the LIGHTS come up on VALENTINA working on the bookkeeping.)* As the weeks passed, the wine merchant stopped attending to his business ... *(CHARLES enters, looks at VALENTINA and begins pacing, increasing tempo as he goes.)* He spent most of his time admiring the lovely Valentina. It wasn't long before he was entranced with love, an intoxication he had never felt before. Oh, he gave her a compliment or two, but he thought he had no business losing his heart and he had no idea of how to be a lover. So he paced through the days on the energy of strong emotion and longing until he could stand it no longer and his heart burst.

(MUSICAL punctuation as CHARLES stops.)

CHORUS: Valentina!

VALENTINA: What? What is it, sir?

CHARLES: Don't call me sir.

VALENTINA: I beg your pardon.

CHARLES: Don't call me sir.

VALENTINA: What's the matter?

CHARLES: From this day forth ... you will not be a bookkeeper.

VALENTINA: Oh, I see ... well ... whatever the reason, perhaps it's best that you let me go.

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