

Fierce Creatures

*By Lisa Nanni-Messegee
and Todd Messegee*

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DEDICATION

Thank you, teachers, for all that you do.

STORY OF THE PLAY

“Miracle worker” Annie Sullivan Macy wakes on a lonely stretch of beach. A mysterious hermit encourages Annie to debate and share pieces of her life with him, including her greatest accomplishment, teaching the famous deaf and blind girl, Helen Keller. Like pieces of a puzzle, Annie’s memories spring to life, revealing hard-won victories, childhood horrors, and a rise to stardom. Annie discovers that she and Helen are forever connected - but who needs who? As Annie wrestles with this question, one more secret remains locked within her - and this mysterious man is going to draw it out - no matter the cost.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

Fierce Creatures received its world premiere on Saturday, August 12, 2017. It was produced by Acting for Young People and performed at TheaterSpace at George Mason University. It was produced by Mary Lechter and directed by Lisa Nanni-Messegee with original choreography by Ahmad Maaty. Scene and prop design by Gabe Zak, lighting design by Megan Gasztonyi, sound design by Adam Lemos. Costume design by Hayley Dandreaux. Hair and makeup design by Heather Hicks and Drew Goldstein. Fight choreography by Savannah Stanton-Ameisen and Adam Lemos. Dialect/acting coaching by Rebecca Wahls and Justin Sumblin. Stage manager was Kaity Cookson. See the original cast at the end of the script.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Widely Flexible cast. Minimum is 4 - 11 m, 7 w.

Maximum: 11 m, 19 w, 8 flexible.

PRINCIPALS

TEACHER: Flex age. Light Irish accent. Fierce, vulnerable. No one can see her except Captain Dad and at the end of the play, Helen (88). This role should not be double cast.

CAPTAIN DAD: Weathered appearance. A mysterious Hermit living on the beach. American accent. This role should not be double cast.

ANNIE: Can be cast with one actress or multiple actresses. All Annie roles have a light Irish accent.

ANNIE (8/10/12)

ANNIE (14)

ANNIE (17)

ANNIE (38 – 50s)

HELEN: Can be cast with one actress or multiple actresses. The famous “deaf-blind-mute” girl who learned how to communicate.

YOUNG HELEN (6): Makes guttural sounds but cannot speak words.

ADULT HELEN (38/40/88): Speaks her lines and also fingerspells.

SUPPORTING

JOHN MACY: Various ages, charming, American.

KATE KELLER: 29; gracious, strong.

MR. KELLER: 51; Southern accent. Proud, rigid.

MICHAEL ANAGNOS: 43, Greek-American, no accent.

MRS. SOPHIA HOPKINS: 39; maternal.

ALICE SULLIVAN: 25; Irish accent. Very ill, determined.

THOMAS SULLIVAN: 29; Irish accent. Devastated.

JACK BENNY: 24; American. A vaudeville comedian.

POLLY THOMPSON: 33; Scottish accent, also fingerspells.

JIMMIE SULLIVAN: Various ages; Irish accent. Loving, has a limp.

JULIA WARDE HOWE: 39, American. Enjoys her celebrity.

MISS MARY C. MOORE: 21, American. Motivated teacher.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN: 29; British accent. Silent film star.

MARY PICKFORD: 26; American. Silent film star.

MAGGIE HOGAN: 17; Irish accent. A hunchback. Very kind.

SADIE SHEEHAN: 16, with “some sight,” American. Student.

MABEL BROWN: 17, “semi-blind,” American. Student.

FRANCIS TREVELYAN MILLER: 41; American. Hollywood screenwriter.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (Cont'd.)

GEORGE FOSTER PLATT: 52; American. Hollywood film director.

JAMES KELLER: 18; Southern accent. Wants respect.

***SIMPSON KELLER:** 13; Southern accent. Youthful.

FRANKLIN B. SANBORN: 49; official.

SARAH WIGHT: 55; a strict teacher.

LAURA BRIDGMAN: 55; blind-deaf-mute. Still lives at Perkins.

***HENRY:** Southern accent; reporter.

***JOE:** Southern accent; reporter.

***PETER:** Boston accent; reporter.

***DR. BLAIR:** A scientist.

***DR. KRAUSE:** An aurist.

***EMCEE:** Host of the Vaudeville show.

*** *Indicates a flexible gender role.***

ADDITIONAL EXTRAS and OPTIONAL ROLES

Dream Dance – dancers (optional)

Perkins students

Crowd at the train station

Train Conductor (could be offstage voice or VO)

Additional doctors

Actors and art department workers on the movie set

Vaudeville dancers (optional)

Bee Palmer, Queen of the Shimmie (optional)

Audience for the Vaudeville performance (could be offstage voices or VO)

Male Heckler (could be offstage voice or VO)

SETTING / TIME PERIOD

Two worlds – the lonely stretch of beach (where time stands still), and various locations from Annie's memories.

Locations are suggested and include Tewksbury Asylum, Perkins School for the Blind, Annie and Helen's Massachusetts farmhouse, the shore, Ivy Green, medical office, Hollywood office and lot, Annie's childhood home in the Feeding Hills, and a Vaudeville stage/backstage.

SFX

Ocean waves / seagulls, train whistle and hiss of the brakes, off stage crash noise, piano notes played (live or pre-recorded), thunder, applause

NOTES

It is not necessary to “play the age” of Teacher (70) and older Helen (88). The world in which these characters operate allows for some flexibility here – consider them to be “ageless” but grounded because of their life experiences.

The role of Annie is highly flexible as far as casting. The part can be played by one actress or multiple actresses. The parts can be cast with sensitivity toward the various ages of Annie, or age can be conveyed through character and design. It’s entirely up to you. The same goes for the role of Helen.

Annie Sullivan described herself as “a contradiction.” In many ways she was; for example, for most of her life she was not blind but could not fully see either. As for the famous dark glasses, there are virtually no photographs of her wearing them. It can be assumed the glasses were used when outside in sunlight and on days when her eyes were sore. For this play, both Annie and Teacher should have identical dark, circle-framed glasses. They should not wear them the entire play, but only at specific times. Some of those times are marked in the script but the rest is open to interpretation.

Additional notes on the characters can be found at the end of the script.

Finally, there are two opportunities indicated for dance/movement in the play. They are entirely optional.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: In darkness. SFX: sound of ocean waves, crashing against a shore.

Optional: the play may begin here or the sound of the waves may transform into music and a timeless dream dance can begin. The dance should tell the story of Teacher's dream, with these storytelling beats:

- *Annie Dancer (in her signature dark glasses) falling in love with John Macy – yet there's push-pull. Should they be together? Should they not?*
- *Quicker tempo when adult Helen Dancer joins them. Such a happy family.*
- *Another shift. Excitement. Celebrity: all eyes are on Annie and Helen, and John is on the outside. Tension. John retreats.*
- *Helen steps back, allowing Annie room to connect with John, but it's too late. The marriage is over.*
- *John diminishes, disappears. Annie is left hugging Helen.*
- *A darker turn. While Annie stays frozen in the embrace, Helen steps out and is replaced by Thomas Sullivan, Annie's estranged father. Annie then discovers she's in her father's arms. It's a horrible discovery. Longing from him, hard rejection from Annie.*
- *End of optional dream dance.*

Dawn is breaking. The ocean waves are mixed with the occasional cry of a distant seagull.

LIGHTS full on a lonely stretch of beach, similar to the shoreline of Brewster, Massachusetts. Lying on a sand dune, asleep, in the throes of a vivid and distressing dream, is Annie Sullivan Macy – but we'll call her TEACHER (70, but vital). She's barefoot and wearing a "ready to wear" long sleeve dress, popular in the year 1936. Teacher has her

signature dark glasses. She wears them intermittently. When they're off, she can tuck them in the collar of her dress. Next to her is a man, seated above her on a dune, looking out at the water. We know him as CAPTAIN DAD (40, but weathered) – a hermit with disheveled white hair, long beard (only if it realistically suits the actor), and bare feet, wearing a ragged pair of blue overalls with an equally ragged white tank top (or white "Hensley" button down). Teacher bolts awake. Squints. She puts on her dark-colored glasses.)

TEACHER: It's bright. Where am I?

CAPTAIN DAD: She wakes.

TEACHER: I was dreaming. Helen and I were dancing. My husband John was there, as handsome as the day we first met. (*Troubled.*) Then it all changed. I saw my father. My heart is still racing from it all. It was such a vivid dream.

CAPTAIN DAD: A regret.

TEACHER: What?

CAPTAIN DAD: A fragment of it is unresolved. Like a little puzzle. You need to put it back together in order to make peace with it. Until you do, we'll remain here, counting seagulls and wiggling our toes in the sand.

TEACHER: Who are you?

CAPTAIN DAD: Who do you think I am?

TEACHER: You look like someone I knew when I was a girl. But he passed away well over fifty years ago. He was a hermit, who lived in the sand dunes along the shoreline in Brewster Massachusetts. I used to call him Captain Dad and he would call me –

CAPTAIN DAD: – Daughter.

(A beat. TEACHER is stunned, haunted.)

TEACHER: Impossible.

CAPTAIN DAD: Yet here we are.

TEACHER: I must've hit my head. I'm hallucinating. What day is it? What year?

CAPTAIN DAD: Look to the sea.

End of Freeview

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