

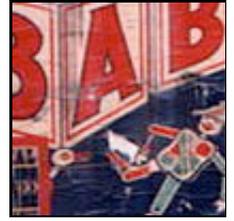
Mouse Capades



Written by Amy Lloyd

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At 21, I landed on the city, the one every actor talks about taking by storm: New York City. With a Bachelor of Fine Arts and four grueling years of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Chekov under my belt, I was going to raise a thundercloud of my own. I got an apartment and on my second audition I became a part of New York's theatre community.



Production: Babes in Toyland

Character name: This

Character description: Singing/dancing mouse

Okay, not the splash I had intended, but one can start with a drizzle and work up to a storm. I had made it through a program that started out with sixty-eight freshmen and graduated only fourteen seniors. I survived. We all felt the arrogance of being part of an elite intimate club. Little did I know that in those damn four years nothing had really prepared me for this.

Babes in Toyland was not what I would have envisioned for the perfect acting job, but my unblemished youthful enthusiasm blotted that all away.

At my first rehearsal I fully expected to walk into a room full of huggy, slightly wry, witted actors who would quickly embrace me as one of their own, the way we did in college. It was, after all, a bright and happy children's musical with lots of up-tempo and nice equity paychecks. What greeted me instead were twelve men and women in varying stages of alcoholism and self absorption. They spent most of their time bitching and comparing head shots, while they chain smoked and checked each other out for mating.

My character's name was "This" and my boy mouse counterpart was named "That." The actor playing the male mouse was in the midst of a bitter breakup and in spite of my best efforts to forge a friendship (I used to bring him cappuccinos during rehearsal) he only spoke to me with great effort and reluctance. In fact, the only time he spoke was during our ten minute rehearsal breaks when he would run to the phone, sputtering and whining hysterically to "Liam", his unfeeling ex.

I missed the camaraderie. Most of the cast played toy soldiers or stuffed animals and rehearsed separately from the mice. The only other actor I worked with was the 70 year old man playing the sweet grandfatherly figure who shuffled around the stage forgetting his lines and groping the hostile boy mouse. He ignored me, too. I was not even groping material.

The show stopper was a song and dance number called "Zim zam zumble," which involved enthusiastic skidding and tumbling across the stage, singing and making appropriate mousy gestures with our white, gloved hands. It took two hours every night to apply the gray and white makeup, prosthetic whiskers and then another twenty minutes to slip into the full grey flannel footed costume. I would then attach my mouse tail, pull on my mouse head and as the finishing touch, attach a shiny red bow between my ears. The hostile boy mouse, or HBM, had the same costume only instead of a shiny red bow, he wore a red miniature bowler hat. As yet another attempt at bonding I suggested he tilt it jauntily for a little added flair and he rolled his mousey eyes at me dismissively. To this day I can't remember his name. All I can recall is his slightly sneery expression and his frequent exclamations of, "I am a professional dancer, Christ!" All this, coupled with the extra hours spent alone every night due to the rigors of my costume and makeup, turned what I had hoped to be a joyful first acting experience into an empty and sad experience.

The show ran eight days a week with two shows on Saturday and kept me gainfully employed for ten weeks. I was, after all, on Broadway. The high note for me was the New York Times review of the show which cited me and the HBM as a "pair of swell mice." To date, it is my only New York Times review. I would have been more suited for the island of misfits toys had they even allowed mice, so dense was my feeling of isolation. Nevertheless, I remained positive, except on the matinee days. I was required with the HBM (the toys were spared this undignified activity) to go outside after the show and greet the children from the audience. Inevitably, one stupid kid would pull on my tail really hard and rip it right off its velcro patch which would result in one of two things: the kid would either start laughing hysterically or (my own personal preference) the kid would have pulled so hard that the sheer force would send them flying several feet backwards, thus hitting his head on a door knob or the corner of the concession table. Crying generally ensued. Eventually the producers put up a sign that read: Please don't touch the mice.

I had almost given up on forging a friendship with anyone when miraculously I found myself bonding with the guy who played Billy the Bear.

His name was Igor. My impression of Igor was that he was a shy, innocent, chorus boy, fresh off the bus, who had no interest in women romantically but did enjoy their company. I imagined he had lived a sheltered existence therefore I was interested in getting him drunk and seeing what would happen. I enjoy corrupting the innocent.

But apparently I was too late. The very first night Igor and I hung out officially as friends, he introduced me to some gay porn - first one I ever saw. In turn, I introduced him to gin and tonic, a little beverage he was innocent to and one I learned

to enjoy while playing some other stupid role in upstate New York. It was a beautiful thing to trade vices.

The movie Igor brought involved an incompetent pool boy who needed to make up for his poor pool cleaning skills by blowing the client. I kept wondering why it was so difficult for the pool boy to use the correct amount of chlorine in the pool, but then the muscular client seemed quite upset and in need of "proper compensation" for such shoddy workmanship. At some point Igor's stomach began to make an unusual sound. It was a cross between a rumble and a churning. I noticed it about three or four times and then rather hastily Igor leapt from the couch as he vomited to what amounted to half a bottle of Tanqueray onto my floor.

There is something deeply satisfying about sudden vomiting, particularly when it is in an inappropriate place. My older brother once sunk down on the steps outside of church during the service no less, and puked his guts out for a good ten minutes; I watched how it cascaded over each step and trickled down towards the rectory. Seeing the innocent Billy Bear both with an alcoholic vomit spewing out of him and probably a semi erection delighted me to no end. Igor and I never hung out again.

* * *

Next to pap smears writing bios may be Amy's least favorite activity.

"What do I say? What is so damn interesting about me anyway?" Born into a family of raccoons, Amy learned to dive into garbage cans and wrestle out discarded food without being bitten by rats. Once she discovered she was human she still wore heavy black eyeliner, paying her respects to her first family. Amy has worked as an actress. Her work includes playing an assortment of crazy people with drinking problems. She also made her New York stage debut at the tender age of 22 playing a singing and dancing mouse. The New York Times singled her out in its review and said she was, in fact, a "swell mouse." So put that in your pipe and smoke it.

These days she plays the role of a schoolteacher, delivering enticing lessons about double-digit subtraction. She also created her own one of a kind artwork collages and they are rented for film and television shoots.

Mostly she cries herself to sleep at night waiting to wake up from the nightmare of her life. No - she's actually quite happy, flourishing in her creativity and thanking god every day the cops haven't found her, yet.

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