

Tower - The Theatre Cat

First Draft

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Characters

Tower, the theatre cat – LORNA LAIDLAW

Aysha, a fifteen year old girl – [To be arranged]

Burt her younger half-brother – RICHARD DA COSTA [To be confirmed]

The Great Gilberto

The bee

Romeo

Back end of pantomime cow

Rat

Mr Rulebook, the Theatre Boss - JESS INMAN

Ebenezer Rulebook, his great grandfather

Ernest Rulebook, his grandfather

Eric Rulebook, his father

Dame Trot

Rat

Rulebook's Stagehand 2– TERINA TALBOT

Performing Dog

Ellaline Terriss [Music Hall singer]

Pantomime Cow [front end!]

La Prima Donna

Solo Rat

Rulebook's Stagehand 1– ALI CARNEY

Performing Dog

Shakespearean Actor 1

Jack, the Principal Boy

La Prima Ballerina

Rat.

Plus a Chorus of 12.

SCENE ONE

[The setting as the curtain rises is glitzy and showbizzy. The Chorus comes on and performs the opening number - Showbiz Anthems - celebrating Hippodrome Centenary - or possibly the Circus number]

[Half way into the number Burt, a wild-looking young boy, is making a disturbance in the stalls. He wrestles away from the FOH staff, and jumps on to the stage. He messes up the performance, and starts damaging the scenery - pulling down drapes, knocking over flats etc. His sister Aysha follows him on stage and is trying to stop him. Mr Rulebook, the theatre boss arrives, followed by his two Stagehands, and the chaos develops into a chase]

[Explosions, crashing scenery, people running in all directions, strobe lighting]

[The set has been 'ruined' - stripped down to a barer version, which remains the basis for the rest of the play]

[Blackout]

SCENE TWO *The Store*

[Lights come up on a dusty, cluttered store room, which is full of theatrical paraphernalia from down the ages. Aysha has grabbed Burt, and is restraining him]

Aysha: What do you think you're playing at?

Burt: I wasn't doing anything, man. This old woman starts telling me to shush. Because the show was starting. I wasn't having that, was I?

Aysha: Burt! We're in a theatre. You were supposed to sit and watch, not run up and smash everything up. I don't believe this.

[Burt starts bouncing round the room, picking things up]

Burt: Look at all this junk, Aysha man.

Aysha: Put that down. You've done enough.

[He picks up a mask, and starts fooling around with it]

I knew I shouldn't have brought you here. He's going to kill me. They're probably ringing the police now. He'll get a phone call to pick us up from the station. It's OK for you, you're in trouble all the time. It's going to mess everything up for me.

Burt: Chill, Aysh. They ain't caught us yet, have they?

Aysha: No thanks to you. Leave that alone, will you?
[He is trying on a wig, from on top of a dummy]

Burt: Suits me, doesn't it? I look like -

Aysha: Shh!
[There is a noise outside. Rulebook and his Stagehands appear, still searching. Aysha grabs Burt, covers his mouth, hides. The search party approaches the store room.]

Rulebook: Unbelievable. The whole show ruined, by two stupid little brats. We should never allow any children in this building. How many times have I said that?

Stagehand 1: Quite a few, Mr Rulebook.

Stagehand 2: Trouble. Always trouble.

Rulebook: No children, no troublemakers, no-one who might be a nuisance. You see team, if there's one thing that causes problems in the theatre it is audiences. Always. If we didn't have audiences everything would run smoothly. No problems.

Stagehand 1: Exactly Mr Rulebook, very true.

Stagehand 2: Yes. Brilliant, Mr Rulebook, brilliant.

Stagehand 1: Although I suppose, if there wasn't an audience, there wouldn't be much point in putting on any performances.

Rulebook: Silence! A noise. Over there. Surround it.
[They approach the children's hiding place. As they are about to reveal them, there is a loud squawk, and Tower, the theatre cat appears, from under a pile of costumes. The Stagehands are frightened, and jump back]
What are you doing - idiots. It's just that wretched theatre cat.
[Unconvincingly] Here, puss, puss.
[Tower hisses again and he backs off, trying not to admit to being frightened]
It was just this ...creature. They're not in here. You, check out the stage right wings, you - upstage left, in the fly gallery!

Stagehands: Yes, Mr Rulebook.
[They go, clearly unclear about which way is which]

Rulebook: Buffoons. [To cat, warily, trying to sound threatening] I'll deal with you later, Tower the Theatre Cat.

[He goes out]

Tower: Ooh, I'm shaking. It will take more than a little insect like you to see me off. [laughing] This is my theatre. Mine. Without me, and my family, there would be nothing. Don't you forget it.

[She stretches] I hate being disturbed.

You can come out now.

[Aysha and Burt come gingerly from their hiding-place]

Don't worry, I don't bite...much.

[Aysha summons up the courage to introduce herself]

Aysha: Good morning, Cat. I'm Aysha.

[She offers her hand]

Thank you for doing that.

Tower: You're welcome.

[She holds out a paw, and after some hesitation, they 'shake']

Aysha: This is my brother, Burt.

Burt: With a 'u', like hurt.

Tower: Hello. Burt, with a 'u'.

[They shake]

Tower, the theatre cat, at your service. With an 'o', like power.

Burt: Funny name for a cat.

Tower: Yes, well. Funny cat.

I'm named after this theatre, if you want to know. When it opened one hundred years ago, it had a great tower on it. The Tower of Varieties it was called. My great grandmother was theatre cat then, and the tower was where she lived.

Aysha: Your great grandmother?

Tower: Was theatre cat, yes. They called her Tower. Then my grandmother was theatre cat. She was called Tower. Then my mother. She was called Tower too.

Burt: Shouldn't she have been Tower three?

Tower: Yes generations of Towers have served this place. Not that 'he' understands that. No-one really appreciates us. A hundred years of selfless service, and when they decide to celebrate, what happens? Not so much as an invitation to the party.

Still. You don't want to hear my troubles, I expect you want to carry on wrecking the theatre.

Aysha: Yes, I'm sorry about that. It's Burt, he doesn't really understand..

[Burt is once again fiddling with things]

Burt. Stop it.

[He doesn't]

Thanks for getting rid of....

Tower: Oh, him? Mr Rulebook, the theatre boss. My pleasure, believe me.

Aysha: Have they really not invited you to the party?

[Tower has noticed the audience for the first time. She does a double take, and then freezes]

Tower: Shh! There are people in. An audience.

Aysha: Yes, of course. It's part of the celebration you were talking about. A hundred years since the theatre was....

Tower: Quiet. I think they've noticed us. Don't panic. Leave it to me.

[She changes her attitude, and moves to address the audience direct. Theatrical]

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the theatre. I am Tower, the theatre cat. Star of the stage for many years. Welcome to this morning's performance.

[To Aysha] I've still got it.

Aysha: Yes, very good.

Tower: May I begin with a quick song and dance routine as my tribute to -

Aysha: Quick, I think he's coming back.

[She bundles Tower reluctantly away from her public, as Mr Rulebook comes back in]

Rulebook: Any sign?

Stagehands: No Mr Rulebook.

Rulebook: Blast. They cannot hide for ever. Mark my words, we will find the little horrors, and they will be sorry.

Stagehand 1: Shall we check back in there.

Rulebook: Er, no.

Stagehand 2: Are you worried about Tower?

Rulebook: Of course not. We need none of us worry about that beast.

Stagehand 1: Why not, sir?

Rulebook: I'm afraid I cannot tell you. It's part of the secret plans.

[Pause]

Oh alright then. As you know the theatre is about to be rebuilt.

Stagehand 1: Yes Sir. A whole new look for the new millennium.

Rulebook: Quite, and in the new building the rules will be completely clear. No animals. Health and safety regulations. Unhygienic, you see. No, I'm afraid all livestock will have to be destroyed.

Stagehand 2: You mean....

Rulebook: Precisely. No more cat .

Stagehand 1: Excellent, Mr Rulebook, very satisfying.

Stagehand 2: Yes. Brilliant, Mr Rulebook, brilliant.

Stagehand 1: Although I suppose, it is a bit cruel.

Rulebook: Search! Now! You, the downstage Vomitorium. You the LX gel-store.

[They go, again unclear about which way is which]

Morons.

[He goes]

Aysha: Oh, Tower, I am sorry. What a nasty man.

Tower: Never mind. You have to take the rough with the smooth in showbusiness. I've had a decent run, played my time in the spotlight.

Heard the applause. [Going] Everyone at some time has to take her final bow, turn and leave the stage. Don't waste your tears on me....

Aysha: Don't give up. It isn't fair, Tower. We'll help you. It's the least we can do after you helped us, isn't it.., Burt? Oh no. Where is he now?

[Burt has during the past few minutes gone into a substitution cabinet which is in the corner of the room]

Tower: Where was he?

Aysha: I think he hid in there.

Tower: Oh dear. Gilberto's cabinet.

Aysha: What -

[She goes to open it]

Tower: Don't, whatever you do-

[The cabinet is empty]

Aysha: Burt, Burt, where is he?

Tower: Ah. I'm afraid he's gone.

Aysha: Gone.

Tower: Disappeared.

Aysha: What do you mean?

Tower: This is the theatre. A place of dreams, imagination, magic. Anything can happen here.

Aysha: But he can't just have disappeared to nowhere.

Tower: That is a magic cabinet. It belonged to the Great Gilberto.

Aysha: Gilberto?

Tower: The Great Gilberto. The world-famous illusionist. Surely you've heard of the Great Gilberto? Probably the most famous performer in Birmingham in 1899, the year the theatre opened, as a circus. This beautiful cabinet was the climax of his act. Performing dogs, and large illusions. Animals you see. Always animals at the heart of this theatre.

Aysha: Yes, but what does it do?

Tower: No-one knows how it works, of course, but at the end of the act, whatever was in this cabinet disappeared, into thin air.

Aysha: Burt?

Tower: Don't worry. We'll find him.

Aysha: Look Tower, can we do a deal?

Tower: What?

Aysha: I'll help you, do anything I can to make sure they let you stay here. If you help me find Burt, safe and sound.

Tower: You'd do that for me?

Aysha: Anything I can. Deal?

Tower: Deal.

[They shake hands/paws elaborately]

Aysha: So what do we do?

Tower: I'm afraid there is only one thing we can do. It's risky, but our only option. We follow him.

Aysha: In there?

Tower: In there. After you.

[Aysha goes in. Tower looks to go the other way]

Aysha: Tower. If you want me to help you.

Tower: Of course.

[They go in the cabinet and close it.]

[Music and lighting show something magical is happening]

[Blackout]

SCENE THREE - CIRCUS

[Lights come up on the stage as a circus ring in 1899. Audience sounds. It is the middle of the show. The ringmaster, Ebenezer Rulebook - great-grandfather to the current boss, enters. He is giving a send-off to the act just finished]

Rulebook: Please may I hear your applause for one of the highlights of 1899, here at the Tower of Varieties, the Magnificent Rumbo Austin, and his Four Comic Nippers!

[Applause]

As always here, at Birmingham's newest and greatest theatre, I Ebenezer Rulebook, ringmaster, have the pleasure of bringing to you the very best in entertainment. Later we have The Rovers in their extraordinary bicycle polo match, the wonderful wire-walking of La Belle Tosca, and of course Ginger - the greatest clown pony in the world. But now, your favourite illusionist, with his performing dogs - Victoria and Albert, the Great Gilberto!

[The Great Gilberto -played by Burt - arrives, followed by two performing dogs. They perform an act involving balancing, sitting and begging, jumping through hoops, etc. It is wordless, but accompanied by pipe-organ music.]

Gilberto: [Dodgy Italian accent] Lady and gentemens. For my finale, most magnifico trick, I present il gabinetto magico - the whirl-famous magic cabinet.

[With the ringmaster's help, the cabinet is turned round, opened, and Gilberto persuades the two dogs to jump in. Drum roll. He dramatically open the cabinet, to reveal Aysha and Tower]

Gilberto: What! Who are you?

Aysha: Burt?

Gilberto: What is this? Mama Mia. My act ruined. Never has the Great Gilberto suffered such humiliation. Never...

[He storms off. The ringmaster returns. Tower pulls Aysha away, as he glares after them]

Rulebook: Ladies and gentlemen, the Great Gilberto. Excuse me, for one moment.

[Music]

[He follows the two intruders off, angrily]

[Blackout]

SCENE FOUR - The Store Room

[Lights up, as Aysha and Tower arrive back]

Aysha: It was him, but he never recognised me.

Tower: No, strange.

Aysha: And what was that funny voice he was putting on, and those dogs. I don't get it.

Tower: The thing is -

Aysha: And all those old-fashioned clothes. Where was that, and how did we get there? That man in the red coat.

Tower: The thing is -

Aysha: He looked just like the man here, the boss, Mr Hymnbook.

Tower: Rulebook. The thing is -

Aysha: It was like we travelled through time.

Tower: Ah. That's the thing. We did.

Aysha: What?

Tower: We went back in time, to 1899, the time of that magic cabinet. It seems as if your brother has passed through, and was living then. Alongside Mr Rulebook's Great-grandfather, Ebenezer. He was the boss then. You see mine isn't the only family that's been here a hundred years. When we entered the cabinet, we were transported there as well, but we came back quickly.

Aysha: And Burt?

[Pause]

Tower: I think he may be unreachable. He didn't recognise you, as you said.

Aysha: So what can we do?

[Tower thinks]

Tower: We must keep following him. The key is this room. Different objects will take us to different times. In one of these times we will find your brother.

Aysha: What are you on about?

Tower: You forget, I have been the Theatre Cat here for many years. I've seen plenty of shows, many many weird and wonderful stories. Time travel is nothing new to me.

Aysha: You've been through time before?

Tower: Well in many ways...

Aysha: Have you?

Tower: It's quite simple...

Aysha: Have you travelled through time.

Tower: Well, no...Listen. Trust me. Look for interesting objects. Magic objects.

[They search around. The cat finds an electric guitar, and does head-banging with it.]

Aysha: Tower. That isn't going to do any good.

Tower: It may.

Aysha: Come on. What about this?

[She brandishes a skull. Waits as if she will be transported. Nothing happens]

This is hopeless.

Tower: Patience, girl. Until you learn the patient art of silent stealth, you will never catch a bird.

[She demonstrates stalking. Aysha looks blank]

We haven't found the right thing, that's all.

Aysha: I'm never going to see him again. Dad will kill me - I said I'd bring him here today to keep him out of trouble, and I've lost him through a time-tunnel. Typical, that is

Tower: [Banging with a gavel that she has found] Order, order, silence in court. Calm down. Wait a minute....

[The gavel is behaving strangely in her hand, leading her around. Time travel music and lighting again. There is a noise. The Music Hall Master of Ceremonies - Ernest Rulebook - bursts in]

Rulebook: Ah there it is. Well done Tower. Good girl.

[He grabs the gavel from a surprised Tower, and goes back out]

Aysha: Mr Rulebook's great-grandfather again? He looks different.

Tower: No. That's his grandfather. Ernest Rulebook. Boss here in the 1900s I think. He must have thought I was granny. Strange.

Aysha: What did he want a hammer for?

Tower: Let's go and see.

[They go out]

[Blackout]

SCENE FIVE

[The lights come up to find the stage has changed to an Edwardian Music Hall setting. Ernest Rulebook enters, armed with his gavel, and launches in to his introduction]

Rulebook: My beautiful boys and belles of Birmingham, may I proudly present in all her priceless pulchritude, that mademoiselle of musical mellifluity, harpy of hypnotic harmoniousness, Miss Ellaline Terriss.

[Ellaline, the Music Hall Singer, comes on stage to cheers. She signals the band to start.]

Ellaline: [Sings] *On a summer afternoon
Where the honeysuckles bloom
When all nature seemed at rest
Neath a little rustic bow'r
Mid the perfume of the flow'r
A maiden sat with one she loved the best
As they sang the songs of love
From the arbour just above
Came a bee which lit upon the vine*

[Burt arrives, dressed in a very funny bee costume. Through the number he is working very hard on his bee performance]

*As it sipped the honey dew
They both vow'd they would be true
Then he whispered to her words she thought divine*

Burt: *You are my honey honeysuckle
I am the bee
I'd like to suck the honey sweet from
Those red lips I see
I love you dearly, dearly
And I want you to love me
You are my honey honeysuckle
I am the bee*

[Lights come up on Aysha and Tower, who have arrived in the Royal Box. Tower is playing to the crowd, waving]

Aysha: Tower!

That's him again.

Tower: Yes he looks sweet, doesn't he? Being a bee suits him.

Aysha: Don't be stupid. Burt! Burt!

Tower: Shh!

[The two singers have noticed the distraction and are showing their irritation]

Ellaline: Honestly. Some of the riff-raff they let in here these days.

[Burt glares at the Royal Box]

Aysha: It's me. Aysha.

Burt: Quiet. [Under his breath] Sing on, go on.

[She re-gathers herself for the second verse. Aysha and Tower leave the box]

Ellaline: [Sings] *So beneath that sky so blue
These two lovers fond and true
With their hearts so filled with bliss
As they sat there side by side
He asked her to be his bride
She answered "Yes" and sealed it with a kiss
For her heart had yielded soon
'Neath the honeysuckle's bloom
And through life they'd wander day by day
And he vowed just like the bee
"I will build a home for thee"
And the bee then seemed to answer them and say,*

Both: *You are my honey honeysuckle
I am the bee
I'd like to suck the honey sweet from
Those red lips I see
I love you dearly, dearly
And I want you to love me
You are my honey honeysuckle
I am the bee.*

[Applause. They go off]

[Blackout]

SCENE SIX - The Store Room.

[Aysha is frantically searching for objects. Tower is imitating the Music Hall singer]

Tower: You are my honey, honeysuckle bzzz bzzz..... So that is what the place was like in granny's day. Miaow. Even then, you see, it was the animals that were the lifeblood of this theatre. Dogs, bees and of

course cats. But do they appreciate us, well that is a different matter.....

Aysha: You don't care do you?

Tower: Of course I do, sorry.

Don't worry. We got the right idea, just the wrong date. He's at large in the past. We've seen him a hundred years ago, and then about 80 years ago, perhaps we need to travel to some more recent time.

Aysha: So what kind of thing shall we look for?

[They start combing the contents of the store room again]

Tower: Tricky. You see for years this was what they called a variety theatre. Like it sounds - there was a variety of things on. Every night, twice nightly my Dad used to say. You'd have a mixture of things. Perhaps a comedian, a big band, a sketch or a speciality. Animal acts of course.

Aysha: Oh stop going on about animals

[Tower looks hurt]

I didn't mean that. I'm just worried. You don't understand about Burt. He's got problems you see.

Tower: I certainly see that.

Aysha: It's not his fault. He's had a bad time, that's all. He just gets upset. No-one has ever really cared about him. At least that's what he thinks. Never had any luck.

Tower: Well, he's lucky to have a sister like you.

[Pause]

Come on. What we need is something that might take us to the days of variety. It could be almost anything. They had acrobats, symphony orchestras, they did bits of plays.

Aysha: Is that what these are from?

[She holds up two swords. Throws one to Tower]

En garde!

[They do a little sword fight. The swords start controlling them]

It's working, can you feel?

[Time travel music and lighting]

[Tower's sword is attacking her, and ends up pinning her to the wall.]

Tower: Help. It's attacking me. Aysha.

Aysha: I can't. I'm being taken somewhere.

[Aysha is lead by her sword, out on to the stage. Tower remains in the store room, pinned down.]

[Blackout]

SCENE SEVEN – Variety

[Aysha comes on into a Shakespearean sword-fight, involving Burt, as Romeo, and one other actor. It is dramatic and swash-buckly, but out of Aysha's control. They call out insults as they fight]

Burt: Grey-coated gnat!

Actor 1: I'll bite thy ear for that.

Burt: Scurvy knave

Actor 1: Thou saucy merchant. Here's for your pains.

Burt: A ha!

[And so on as necessary. When Aysha is cornered and about to be killed, the Director - Eric Rulebook - arrives.]

Rulebook: Stop. Appalling, absolutely awful. No passion, no feeling. This is the work of William Shakespeare, the greatest playwright of them all. I need you to move me.

Actor 1: Where to?

Rulebook: Move me to tears.

Burt: Shall we do it again.

Rulebook: No, I couldn't stand it. Let's rehearse another scene. The balcony scene. Romeo, you are arriving in Juliet's garden. You've just fallen in love with her. She is up on the balcony. Where has she got to?

[Sees Aysha, still on the ground] Oh there you are, what on earth.... Never mind. Get in position, please. Act Two Scene Two.

Romeo: [Entering, in love] But soft what light through yonder window breaks,
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun,
Arise fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she
Be not her maid, since she is envious.

Rulebook: Wait!

[He goes up to Romeo]

Have you ever been in love, boy?

Burt: Not really, no.

Rulebook: Well act. Imagine, feel it in here. I want the audience to feel sick.

Burt: Feel sick?

Rulebook: Sick with love, along with you. They need to see two young people who are entranced.

Burt: Entranced Right

Rulebook: Show me entranced. The walk.. good. The look... that's better. She's up there, you love her. Better, yes. From 'She speaks'

[Burt gathers himself]

Romeo: She speaks yet she says nothing

Rulebook: Juliet. Speak and say nothing, come on.

[Aysha opens and shuts her mouth]

Romeo: She speaks yet she says nothing, what of that?
Her eye discourses, I will answer it

[Getting into it well]

Aysha; Burt, Burt, what are you doing Burt?

Romeo: That's too early. And it's 'Romeo, Romeo...'

Aysha: [Carrying on] What's in a name? Whatever you're called, you've got to come back

Romeo: She's gone all wrong.

Rulebook: [Shouts out] It's working. Go with it, go with it.

Romeo: Er...I know not how to tell thee who I am.

My name dear Saint, is hurtful to myself -

Aysha: It's not, it's Burt. Burt.

[Pause]

Romeo: Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow.

Aysha: I'm coming down.

Romeo: No, no. I'm supposed to come up there.

Aysha: I know its confusing. You've travelled through time, that's all.

Burt, Burt.

Romeo: Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books
[Struggling] I would I were thy bird.

Aysha: My Burt. Oh this is no good.

Rulebook: Stop! Stop! Let's have a short break shall we, and try again.

[Blackout]

SCENE EIGHT - The Store Room

[Tower is still where she was left, pinned to the side by her sword.
Aysha arrives, resigned]

Tower: Aysha. Thank goodness.

Aysha: What?

Tower: Could you unpin me?

[Aysha goes and takes the sword away that is still pinning Tower down]

Sad?

Aysha: What do you think? They were rehearsing some play and he was there, stuck in another time. Doesn't even know his own sister. I have to go back to my dad and tell him "sorry, but I'm afraid Burt's caught in another time dimension. Of course I'm sad.

Tower: When I was sad, do you know what my Mum used to do?

Aysha: A song and dance?

Tower: No. She used to clean me, by licking me all over. Like this....

Aysh: Ugh. No thanks.

Tower: Only trying to help. What did your Mum do?

Aysha: Don't remember.

Tower: Oh come on, don't be like that.

Aysha: I don't remember my Mum.

Tower: Oh, I see.

[Pause]

Was she run over?

Aysha: No.

Tower: Did she just go off to another home, without saying, and not wearing a collar.

Aysha: Tower! I'm not a cat.

Tower: Sorry.

[She nuzzles up to her, to make her feel better]

Aysha: That tickles.

[Pause]

She died when we were little. Dad had the two of us to himself. For a bit, Burt went to our Nan, and I looked after dad. But Burt never liked that. He still doesn't see much of Dad. I don't think he really likes him.

Tower: Does he smell?

Aysha: What?

Tower: Does your dad leave a funny smell, wherever he goes. Mine did.

Aysha: Not exactly. He's just always at work.

Tower: Listen, you shouldn't worry about your Burt. He'll be fine. He just needs to be a stray for a bit. Then he'll sort himself out.

Aysha: He needs me.

Tower: And we shall get him back to you. Do you want to hear a song?

Aysha: From you?

Tower: Yes.

Aysha: No.

Tower: Well you will anyway.

[She sings. A slow-building ballad, which starts sweet and gets more and more over the top. By the end, Aysha has joined in, and is laughing]

*When I was a kitten, my mother said to me
You have to make a choice about the kind of cat you'll be
Will you be a lap-cat, who just lies about and purrs?
Will you be a show-cat with a pedigree and furs?
Will you be a stray cat and scavenge door to door?
Or are you going to hold your head up high and aim for more?*

*No cat of mine
While I am here
Will stand in line
Or live in fear
So learn to fight fight fight
For what is right.*

*Before I was the theatre cat I lived upon the streets
And learned to choose my friends well from the mongrels that you meet
The cat-scrap that I fought in made me strong and made me hard
I had to be the cat who was respected in the yard.
No shaking quaking soft-paw no scaredy cat for me
But the strutting skanking alleycat that I have grown to be*

*Hold up my head
Perk up my tail
Yes I'll be dead
Before I fail
Yes I will fight fight fight
For what is right.*

*Hold up your head
Perk up your tail
We will be dead
Before we fail
Yes we will fight fight fight
For what is right.*

Tower: Come on. Let's see where these things take us next. What can we find.

Aysha: I've already decided. Look.

[She has found a bag of beans]

Tower: Bag of magic beans. Of course. Jack and the Beanstalk. Pantoland. You know about that?

Aysha: Not really.

Tower: It's been part of the tradition here, since the 1950s. Pantomime. Oh some of my greatest successes have been in pantomime. Every Christmas, great funny stories. Most of them based around animals of course. I've done them all, Puss in Boots, Dick Whittington and his cat, Mother Goose - that was quite a performance, I can tell you.

[The beans have come to life. Lights. Music]

[Dame Trot -played by Mr Rulebook - comes in]

Dame Trot: My beans, my beans. Give them to me, you hopeless boy.

[She grabs them, and goes out]

Tower: Come on. This time we must get stuck in..

SCENE NINE - Pantomime

[The lights come up on a pantomime setting. Jack enters, pulling a rope, the end of which remains off-stage]

Jack: Hello, I'm Jack, you've heard of me I hope,
I'm pulling something special on this rope.
The story so far, just in case you've missed it,
It's sad - but this part really takes the biscuit.
I live on Flower Farm with my Mum,
You've seen her, she's the one with the big -

[Music crash]

TUM, I was going to say tum.

But this year a huge cloud has blocked the sun,
So all our flowers have died, every one.

['Aaah']

We've no more flowers, nothing to sell, no money
Nothing to eat, it really isn't funny.

['Aaah']

So Mum sent me to try and sell our cow,
This is Daisy on this rope right now.

[He tries to pull her on, but without success]

It's no use, she won't budge. Perhaps if you...
Could you call out 'Daisy'. Come on. After two.

One. Two[With audience] Daisy!
No, no. Nicely. Make it sound friendly.

[He practises with audience. Eventually they get it right, and Daisy comes slowly on, to music]

There you are, right Daisy, walk this way...

[Gag with them walking, then with Jack losing her, looking the wrong way, getting twisted up in rope etc]

Its hopeless, we'll never get to market today.

[He sits down. The peddler arrives]

Peddler: Good Morning boy, good morning. How d'you do?
Oh dear you do look sad, what's up with you?

Jack: I've given up. I'm s'posed to try to sell her
But she won't budge, no matter what I tell her

Peddler: Is that all? Your problem's at an end
I'll buy your charming cow from you, my friend.

Jack: Brilliant. You're on. Oh, how much will you pay?

Peddler: This bag of beans, to take your cow away

Jack: My Mum said twenty pounds and nothing less.

Peddler: The beans are magic.

Jack: Magic?

[Thinks about it very briefly]

OK. Yes!

[He grabs the bag of beans and skips off. The peddler approaches the cow gingerly]

Peddler: Right then dear, come to your new master,
That's the way, come to Daddy, faster.

Got you!

[The peddler has Daisy by the collar. She takes off her hood, revealing herself to be Aysha.]

Aysha: Right. I know it's you, Burt. I'd recognise those legs anywhere.

[She tries to pull the pantomime cow apart, but cannot. She ends up with the lead only in her hands, as Daisy escapes.]

[She turns to the audience, and is about to speak when the rope goes tight, and she is pulled off stage]

[Dame Trot enters]

Dame Trot: Oh sorry children. Oh isn't it cold today? Well it either is or it isn't. I said. Cold isn't it?

[She plays with audience through this section]

Still, don't need to worry much longer. Our Jack is selling the cow. Twenty pounds. Just think what we will be able to do with that. Coal for the fire. A new dress for me. A holiday. Where should I go? Somewhere warm. Do you know if he managed to sell her? He what. He has what. Has-been? Are you calling me a has-been? Rude children. Well I never. I think I'd better get down there and sort some of you out... Oh here's my Jack now.

[Jack comes back on, nervously]

You wouldn't believe what they've been calling me, Jack. Oh well done. No Daisy. You did sell her, then.

[To audience] You see. My Jack does what he's told.

Give me the money.

[Jack puts the bag of beans in her hand, and tries to sneak off. She does a double take, and grabs him by the ear]

Beans! BEANS!

Jack: They're magic beans Mum.

Dame Trot: I don't care if they're Mexican Jumping beans in tomato sauce, you little bean head.

[He wriggles free. She chases him off]

I'll deal with you lot later.

[Music]

[Blackout]

SCENE TEN – The Store Room

[Lights up on Aysha reporting to Tower]

Aysha: He was the back end of the cow. I know it. I recognised his waddle.

Tower: Nonsense. All the animals in the theatre are real. We are the genuine article - we don't have back ends and front ends.

Aysha: The cow did - and his back end was Burt.

Tower: Rubbish.

Aysha: He recognised me this time. I'm sure. That's why he ran off.

Tower: Well I hope you're right. It would mean we were getting closer.

Aysha: I am right.

Tower: Good. Anyway no time to argue. It means we must step up the hunt. He seems to be having a go at every kind of show there has ever been in this theatre. We must go through them with him. One way or another, we will find the way to get him back. Circus, music hall, variety, pantomime....what else do we do? Keep looking Aysha.

[The Ballerina comes in. She is in an animal costume]

Ballerina: Oh. I am sorry. I usually come in here to prepare.

Tower: Oh Madame, I beg your pardon. Of course. This is my friend Aysha. Please, you must prepare for your performance.

[She begins to do stretching etc]

[To Aysha] This is the Prima Ballerina. The best dancer in the Ballet Company. Even she is being an animal, you see.

Aysha: I thought ballet dancers just wore those little skirts.

Tower: Oh no. It's very different from how you may imagine it. You must come and see a ballet here. It's fantastic. Come on, let's leave her to it.

Aysha: But what about Burt -

[She isn't prepared to go. Tower is signalling desperately when the Prima Donna enters]

Prima Donna: Agh. What are you doing in my warm-up room?

Tower: Ah, Prima Donna. Just leaving.

[To Aysha] The Prima Donna of the Opera. Whoops.

Prima Donna: And her?

Tower: She is preparing?

Ballerina: Quiet, please!

[The singer starts doing scales, more and more loudly. The ballerina stretches more furiously, and Aysha, continues rummaging. Tower is tormented.]

Prima Donna: This is impossible!

Ballerina: Yes. Impossible!

[They storm out]

[Pause]

Aysha: You certainly have all sorts here, don't you?

Tower: The very finest of everything. You should see, and hear... Well, we have had. Of course what happens when the theatre is rebuilt won't be up to me will it?

Aysha: Come on. Don't give up. Pull this.

Tower: What is it?

Aysha: Some sort of

Tower: Tail! From 'Rats', the big musical. Of course. That's what we've missed out. Musicals. It was only a little while ago. This will be when we can get Burt back, I'm sure. Put it on, Aysha. This is our chance.

[The music/lighting starts again, and the tail leads them off]

[Blackout]

SCENE ELEVEN - *Musicals*

[The stage is bare, with perhaps a projected logo for 'Rats' the musical. The whole company is in this scene, all as rats. They arrive individually and join a chorus. This scene is obviously a pastiche of certain blockbuster musicals, but needs of course to work in its own terms for those who have never seen one]

Rats: *Are your teeth long and sharp?
Can you bite through a brick?
Is your tail this long?
Do you make people sick?*

*Do you click with your claws?
Do you spit when you speak?
Can you scuttle on floors?
Do they call you a freak?*

*Rats are just vermin
To be chased by a cat
It's hard to determine
The sex of a rat
They won't even try to
They'd rather dismiss
Oh humankind why do
You treat us like this?*

[Spotlight down on a young female rat]

Solo rat: *When I was young I had a dream
Of living life in idle pleasure
Of sunflower seeds and shampooed fur
A gilded cage of easy leisure
But my dream will never be
No years for me as much loved pet
Just the freedom of the sewers
Just a life-time to forget.*

*When my love and I were young
We'd skip together through the meadow
With the dragonflies our friends
I'd chase his tail, he'd chase my shadow
But the men in the white coats
Caught him in their nets of doom
Took my happiness away
Just to test some new perfume*

Rats Chorus: *You on the surface listen to this
It isn't much fun for a rat underground
When your home is a sewer your song is a hiss
And the catcher is scattering poison around.*

*What they say about rats
Is a desperate lie
Don't think that the rats
Will lay down and die*

Rat leader: *Can you hear the rodent voice*

*Raising the roof with songs of war?
We will join our tails together
We have a cause worth fighting for
When the traps are filled with bait
And when the poison hits the floor
That is the time that we shall
Take to the barricades*

*We will gnaw through all your cables
We will leave droppings on your floors
We will spread bubonic plague
Just as we spread the plague before
When the traps are filled with bait
And when the catcher seals the door
That is the time that we shall
Take to the barricades*

*That is the time that we shall
Take to the barricades*

[They have moved into a defiant formation, with a big flag. A young rat screams]

Young rat: The catcher!

[There is a momentary silence. The huge shadow of a cat appears. A great booming voice cries out]

Catcher: Go rats. Go.

[The rats scream out in terror. In the chaos, Aysha makes another attempt to get Burt, but he wriggles clear.]

Aysha: No, he's gone again!

[As all the others flee in terror, Aysha is on the floor, Burt runs straight into the advancing Tower, who is revealed as the owner of the shadow. He manages to stamp on Burt's tail as he is leaving.]

Tower: [Making the most of his triumph] Is this the little rat you were looking to catch?

[Blackout]

SCENE TWELVE - The Store Room

[Lights come up on the store room. Aysha and Tower have Burt by the tail, but he is wriggling. They manage to pin him down.]

Tower: Did you see me? I was magnificent. What a performance.

Aysha: Yes, you were brilliant. Can you give me a hand?

Tower: [Reliving the triumph] "Go, Rats. Go!" Commanding, masterful, imperious. The critics will love me. I shall be once again what I deserve to be. A star.

Aysha: Tower! He'll escape, and you will be a stray cat on the street, if you don't help me.

[He helps]

Burt, Burt, listen. It's me. Aysha.

Burt: I know who you are. Let me go. You're hurting me.

Aysha: You know me?

Burt: Of course I do. What you on about? What did you do that for? You've spoilt everything.

Aysha: I had to get you back Burt. You were caught in another time.

Burt: I was having fun, Aysh. For the first time ever. It was sound, man. Doing all this stuff. People was clapping me. Me, Aysh. I was good at it.

Aysha: Yes I know, you were. But you have to come home.

Burt: What man? I hate the place. This is so much better. I can do loads of things here.

Aysha: That's good. Honestly. Perhaps we can come back here again sometime, then, if you like it.

Burt: No, man, you don't get it. I'm staying here. This is home now.

Aysha: Burt.

Burt: [To Tower] You explain to her. You understand, cos this is your home ennit? I can live at the theatre. Sleep in this trunk - look.

[He gets in a trunk]

Tower: I'm afraid she's right, son You're going to have to go home. Real world. Explain to your Dad what it is you enjoyed. Come back and visit. Watch things here. Maybe when you're older you will work here.

Burt: Oh man. It ain't fair.

Tower: Listen. What you've discovered is you've got an imagination, a heart. It's all you need. Now it's your job to feed it.

Aysha: Come on Burt, let's go.

[Rulebook enters with his Stagehands]

Rulebook: No-one is going anywhere. Stay exactly where you are. Every one of you. You, downstage right. You centre stage.

[The Stagehands look blank]

Grab them, you peabrains!

[They do so]

For one hundred years my family has run this magnificent theatre. One hundred years. A century. And do you know what it means to me? Everything. My life is in these walls, on this stage. All the great performers of our times have walked these boards, singing dancing, acting. Boards which my great grandfather, my grandfather, my father and now I have kept polished. Generations of Rulebooks. Always keeping up standards.

And then today. You people come here, and what happens? I'll tell you.

I have just sent my stagehands here out to talk to the audience, the young people of Birmingham. To ask them about what they have been watching for the last hour, the show that you ruined by jumping on stage. Do you know what they said?

Others: No.

Rulebook: Tell them.

Stagehand 1: Er....they said they enjoyed it.

Rulebook: What?

Stagehand 2: They did, Mr Rulebook.

Stagehand 1: Yes, I've written down some of what they said.

[She gets out a notebook.]

"One of the funniest things I've seen in a long time" "That cat was magnificent"

Tower: Yes!

Rulebook: Silence. What are you talking about?

Stagehand 2: It's true. "Please pass on our congratulations to the boss. Truly a wonderful show"

Stagehand 1: "Mr Rulebook's performance as a frightened rat, was one of the most moving things I have ever seen. He should give up managing the theatre, and be an actor full time"

Rulebook: They said that?

Stagehand 1: They certainly did.

Rulebook: Right. Right. 'Full-time'?.... Right. Well, this brings me to my point. You, boy!

Burt: Yes, I know. "If I ever see you here again, I will have to ring the police. Get out. Never again." I'm going. I knew it was too good to last. I'm off, don't worry.

[He starts to go]

Rulebook: Stop!

What I was going to say was..."If you could get permission from your father, I would like to take you on here as my apprentice."

Burt: Me?

Rulebook: To learn the ropes. You obviously like the place, and I need someone who will really work at it, to take over from me, eventually. Perhaps quite soon, if I'm going to be doing more acting.

Burt: Oh brilliant. Yes, yes.

Rulebook: [To Aysha] Will you see to it that he really does get his father's permission. [She nods]

As for you. [To Tower] I suppose I must acknowledge that you were quite good.

Tower: I was wasn't I? A last exhibition of everything I've given to this theatre.

Rulebook: Yes, well.

[Pause]

Aysha: Isn't there something more you need to say to Tower?

Rulebook: What about?

Aysha: Well, the new building. The plans. The special room.

Rulebook: Yes of course. I will be speaking to the architects in the morning. I will expect them to show me plans with a special animal wing. Room for all the theatre's animals, and pride of place to a special star dressing room for you, Tower, and any little Towers that follow you.

Aysha: And?

Rulebook: There's more?

[Aysha scribbles in the air]

Ah yes, of course. Your invitation.

[He hands Tower an invitation, and leaves]

Tower: Embossed and everything. 'You are invited to a special celebration of one hundred years of Birmingham's favourite theatre. Bring your friends. Starting immediately'

Burt: Let's go.

[He and the stagehands start to leave. He talks to them as they go]

That was great that the audience said all that.

[Stagehand 1 shows him his empty notebook]

Stagehand 1: We made it up. Seemed the best way.

Burt: Wicked. You made it all up. He went for it didn't he? Wicked.

[They swap 'high fives' as they go. Aysha and Tower are left alone]

Tower: Aysha. I don't know what to say.

Aysha: How about, 'Shall we dance?'

Tower: Shall we?

Aysha: Why not?

[They dance out]

SCENE THIRTEEN - The Party

[Music. The chorus comes on to sing the Showbiz anthems chorus. The whole company joins to sing and dance, with as wide a range of animals taking part as is possible. Before the final chorus a cake comes on. Tower comes to the front to speak]

Tower: Ladies and gentlemen. In the last hundred years so many wonderful moments of magic of all kinds have happened on this stage, in front of us, our parents and our grandparents. In the next hundred years may you be the audience for many more. 3 cheers for the Birmingham Hippodrome. Hip hip, hooray, hip hip, hooray hip hip, hooray.

[Final Chorus]

[The end]