

# CAUTIONARY TALE

A new musical about growing up and growing glum

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Music by Rebecca Applin

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## Script extract 3: The Fishbuckets

### COPYRIGHT NOTICE

*Cautionary Tale* is a show about finding hope and spreading joy when all seems lost. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we've lost our chance, for the time being, to work on developing the show as we had planned but we'd still like to share the joy.

For a limited time, we're sharing extracts from the score, lyrics and script of *Cautionary Tale* online so you can get a flavour of this show by reading, rehearsing and performing some of it in your own home.

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*The Hamington children are blessed with knowing the answer to every question in the world. Unfortunately, not many adults appear to enjoy that special quality – especially not the teachers of Gloaming who seem to prefer their pupils NOT to know the answers. As FRAU FISHBUCKET speaks the following lines, the Hamingtons answer each of her questions as soon as the last syllable leaves her lips. The / marks the point of each interruption – the dialogue overlaps. The Hamington’s are used to hiding their talent though, and they just sort of mutter their answers quietly, almost as though they don’t even realise they’re doing it.*

FRAU: Cassius Hamington, what’s that in your/ hand?

EDISON: It’s a really big bogey / Frau Fishbucket

CHILDREN: Urgh, It’s a bogey, yuck, etc etc ...

FRAU: Haven’t I told you not to bring your nasty nonsense/ in here?

AUGUSTUS: Actually Frau Fishbucket, you’ve told us every day for the past three years and eleven days.

FRAU: Must I take it away / for Safe Keeping?

CASSIUS: *(Together)* No, there’s no need for that Frau Fishbucket.

EDISON: *(Together)* Actually, that would probably be a good idea.

CASSIUS: *(Launching himself at his brother in fury)* Edison!

*Edison dodges out of his brother’s reach, bumping into Jemima Fishbucket and knocking over Archibald Fishbucket as he does so. Maybe no one notices, but Archibald’s hair gets immediately stuck to a metal chair leg. You see, the thing about the flame-haired Fishbucket children is that whenever they feel anything too intensely they generate a sort of electric charge from their hair. It transforms them into electromagnets and lightning bolts; powerful tools and weapons all at once.*

JEMIMA: Oi! Watch where you’re going Edison!

*All of a sudden, every metallic item in the room begins to vibrate. It’s as though the metal objects are suddenly paying very close attention to Jemima.*

MAEVE: *(Noticeably working to keep her temper)* Be careful Mima!

JEMIMA: Shut up Maeve! I don’t need you telling me what to do.

*Suddenly the metal objects seem to be looking at Maeve too.*

AUGUSTUS: Yeah. Shut up Magnetic Mima. Better be careful not to get too stroppy!

CASSIUS: Yeah. Maybe we should take you swimming and turn you into a compass<sup>1</sup>.

*The Hamingtons high-five each other at the clever burn. ("Ooh! Buuurn!")*

*Not having studied advanced engineering or physics, the non-Hamington children are all fairly baffled by this, but the Fishbuckets understand. Maeve and Jemima turn on Cassius and start yelling as all of a sudden time expands and all of the metallic objects fly across the room towards their hair, which is now crackling with magnetic electricity.*

JEMIMA: *(Together)* Shut up Cassius, you vile little toad. Why don't you shove your bogey up your....

MAEVE: *(Together)* You're such an insufferable know it all Cassius. I'm sick of all you Hamingtons...

*FRAU FISHBUCKET sees what is happening and tries to stop the girls by yelling at them too. As she does so, a single teaspoon flies from her desk and attaches itself to the bottom of her hair. She detaches it surreptitiously and possibly uses it to stir her tea.*

FRAU: *(over the noise)* Girls! Calm down! Stop it at once! Get up Archie!

*The girls suddenly become aware of all of the metal objects now surrounding them like a halo. They turn and stare at them in horror. We see them take deep breaths and do some sort of yoga-tai-chi movement that clearly helps calm them down. Suddenly the objects drop from the air and land on the floor in a crash – burying Archibald who is still on the floor.*

ARCHIBALD: Ow! Watch what you're doing you two!

*There is a general cacophony of amusement and horror at what has just happened, with children re-enacting the flying objects etc...*

*The crash of the falling objects has brought FRAULEINE FISHBUCKET from her office in the sports cupboard to see what is going on. She pauses to take in the chaos for a moment, then raises a whistle to her lips and blows a shrill and painful blast. Silence.*

FRAULEINE: *(waits for the silence to settle in. Then...)* Children proceed to the PE Library and begin learning the first four rules of Football. You won't be playing, but it's important to know the theory.

*(Indicating JEMIMA, MAEVE AND ARCHIBALD)* Not you three. We need a word with you

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<sup>1</sup> <http://smallscience.club/experiments/floating-compass/>

NARRATOR:

Do you remember that feeling you got when you were a kid, and you knew you'd done something bad, and you knew you'd been found out and were about to get in to trouble? That horrible sense of dread that something awful and unavoidable is about to happen? For the children of Gloaming, that's how it feels every single day.

FRAULEINE: Your behaviour is shocking!

MAEVE: We couldn't help it mum! Those boys are / horrible!

JEMIMA: They're disgusting and they don't care about...

FRAULEINE: Be quiet. I don't care what the Hamington boys do. I care about you three. You know better than to let your emotions run away/ with you.

FRAU: There were scissors flying everywhere! Someone could have been / killed!

ARCHIBALD: No one was hurt! ... Only us.

MAEVE: Mummy tell her – it's not fair!

FRAULEINE: Mummy and I agree. That sort of behaviour is not acceptable. If it happened in public you'd be taken away to the /Citadel.

FRAU: They'd lock you up in the Citadel!

FRAULEINE: Or worse! Banish you forever!

[SONG: THE FISHBUCKET'S TALE]

FRAU AND FRAULEINE FISHBUCKET SING:

FRAULEINE:  
You've never met, I think it's true  
Your Grandpa, who was so like you  
He used to storm, he used to stamp

FRAU:  
And once he broke a table lamp

FRAULEINE:  
With abject fury though and through  
He'd rage until his face turned blue  
His hair stood up upon his head  
And most alarming, it must be said

It took on quite a curious force  
That shocked us all,

FRAU:

of course, of course

FRAULEINE:

And each red tendril soon began  
To stick to every car and can  
And bucket, spoon and knife and fork

FRAU:

The neighbours soon began to talk  
Of this young lad's strange magnetism

FRAULEINE:

It soon begat a terrible schism  
Between the boy and his young friends  
For it's very hard to make amends  
For impaling little Alice

FRAU: (To whom the boy had meant no malice)

FRAU:

And thus it was that Ferdinand  
Was exiled to a Foreign Land

FRAULEINE:

Where he would be so much less harm

FRAU:

(Apart from to the odd gendarme)

FRAULEINE:

He was dispatched to live in France  
Which left his parents quite askance  
To loose their most beloved heir  
Because of his magnetic hair

FRAU: And Ferdinand grew to forget  
What trouble his hair could beget  
Until one fateful Friday morning

FRAULEINE:

When all at once without a warning  
A Frenchman, in that way they do,

Bumped into Ferdy 'dans la rue'  
Now as an English man of note  
A rage soon swelled in Ferdy's throat  
To be so jostled by a Frog  
With all and sundry quite agog

FRAU:  
His red hair stood on end toute suite  
And lifted Ferdy off his feet  
It's strange electro magnet power  
Conspiring with the Eiffel Tower  
Left him suspended far above  
The city of eternal love

FRAULEINE:  
And there he stays unto this day  
And really I regret to say  
That frankly it was all his fault  
For never calling to a halt  
His awful temper.

FRAU:  
And, yes, it's true

BOTH:  
The same fate waits for you three too.

*Out of the children's earshot...*

FRAU: Do you think they even listened? I can't keep saying the same things over and over.

FRAULEINE: What else can we do? We can't let her take them.

FRAU: I'm so tired Emmy. I feel like I'm going to crumble away to nothing.

FRAULEINE: Stop it Gert.

FRAU: I can't help it.

FRAULEINE: I love you so much. I couldn't bear to lose you. My heart would break.

*As she speaks, FRAU begins to hover slightly above the ground. (I know, I know. Budget. But I have faith that you can make it work.)  
She looks down at her floating feet and smiles.*

FRAU: Stop it Em. The kids'll see.

*The workaday hug and kiss of tired parents at least a decade in to their relationship. It's real and full of love but pretty ordinary too.*

NARRATOR:

*(inexplicably carrying a beautifully wrapped present)*

It's a curious thing to see parents so intent on grinding out any gleaming glint of eccentricity in such remarkable children, but so it goes from day to day in that ghastly gloom pit of Gloaming. I urge you – leave now, before your souls are crushed forever.

There's no place for the interesting, idiosyncratic or impish; no gap in Gloaming for the glorious or gifted.

*(ding! He places the present in the street just in time for Maeve to discover it. Over the next section she and her siblings eagerly unwrap layer upon layer of shiny wrapping paper until they are left with a golden ball of copper wire.)*

Of course, It wasn't always like this. Why, when I was a boy the streets of gloaming teemed with wonders and every day the school playground overflowed with riotous joy. There was Aaron Arbuthnott, who could turn somersaults for hours, Hepzibah Hancock who was so shy she'd turn invisible and little Anna Anstruther who could roar like a lion. And myself, Sebastian Shaw, who no matter what was happening, could always see the truth.

ARCHIBALD: What is it?

MAEVE: Gold thread! It's Gold thread!

JEMIMA: No it's not. It's just a ball of wire.

MAEVE: *(Holding the wire, with evident disappointment)* Oh.

*For a moment, the ball of wire in her hands pulses with light.*

ARCHIBALD: Did you see that? Did you see it?

*As Maeve nods in bafflement and gazes at her hands*

JEMIMA: Oh shut up Archie. Nothing happened!

ARCHIE: What did you do?

MAEVE: Nothing. I was just disappointed.

JEMIMA: What are you / talking about?

ARCHIE: Well do it again.

MAEVE: *(a bit baffled by how to be disappointed again)* Do what again?

ARCHIE: It's like our hair stupid! You just have to feel something!

MAEVE: *(understanding)* Oh!

*(then.. clearly excited as the ball of wire starts to glow)* Oh!

*From here until the arrival of the Safe Keeper, the Fishbucket kids go bananas with their new toy – they start by throwing the ball of wire between them so it lights up as each one catches it, then they unravel the wire and hold it between them, lighting it up with pulses of electricity. Then Jemima and Archie turn the glowing wire like skipping rope as Maeve leaps over it, her hair crackling with joy. Basically – design team, Go Nuts! What other magic can happen with three electrified children and a ball of wire? (One rule: the laws of physics still apply). This should be joyful and enthralling. Full of simple theatricality that looks like real magic.*

NARRATOR:

“But what happened?” I hear you ask! “What terrible cataclysm could have killed so much joy?” Well you might wonder where the wonders that populate our world disappear to within Gloaming’s wonderously woeful city walls.

The highly perceptive may have contemplated the enticing edifice that towers over the tops of the townhouses..

Indeed, the Citadel of Safety is a prison for peculiarity, a jail for joie de vivre, an internment camp for the interesting. Every joyful, dangerous or just plain old unusual thing that has ever been unfortunate enough to pass through Gloaming is imprisoned in this monolith of misery.

That unfeasibly unfriendly pile of gothic overindulgence is the home of Gloaming’s most terrifying and powerful citizen, a creature whose sheer malevolence, if once understood, is enough to keep you awake all night, sobbing into the pillow and praying for the dawn.

I urge you, if you can, leave now before you too are trapped in the web of this sinister spinster, this spider of solemnity; the Safe Keeper.

*A single crabbed and wizened creature makes its way slowly, inexorably onto the stage. There’s probably a threatening and doom-laden orchestral underscore that feels like the soundtracks of Jaws, The Shining and Psycho had a baby.*



*The Fishbucket children have noticed what's happening and have stopped their play to stare. After this huge build up, there is a moment of deathly and foreboding silence.*

SAFE KEEPER: Hello children.

*The Safe Keeper is the sweetest little old lady you can imagine. In a rare moment of silence on Gloaming's main street she hobbles steadily, suspensefully towards the Fishbucket children who are desperately trying to wind up and hide their still-glowing treasure.*

SAFE KEEPER: What's that you've got there? A new toy? What a clever, pretty thing. Can I have a look?

*The children watch in fear as she reaches out a wizened hand, as though in awe, but at the last moment, she seizes the ball of wire, which goes dark immediately.*

SAFE KEEPER: Oh dear. What a shame. *(Pretending she doesn't know.)* Why has it gone out?

MAEVE: *(As the others shush her)* It only works for us?

SAFE KEEPER: Really? How special.

MAEVE: It's the electromagnetism.

SAFE KEEPER: *(Pointed)* What a big word for such a little girl.

ARCHIE: *(to the rescue)* She doesn't know what it means. It's just batteries. Isn't it Mima?

MAEVE: No it's *(not!)*

JEMIMA: *(Hand over Maeve's mouth)* Yeah. Batteries.

SAFE KEEPER: My goodness. Batteries and electric wire? That's far too dangerous for little girls and boys.

ARCHIE: It's not / we know how!

SAFEKEEPER: I beg your / pardon?

JEMIMA: We're very careful

SAFE KEEPER: It's better to be safe than sorry. I'll have to take it away for safe keeping.

MAEVE: Give it back! It's ours!

*There's a kerfuffle as MAEVE tries to grab the wire from the SAFE KEEPER, possibly kicking her in the shins in the process. ARCHIE and JEMIMA leap in to aid / stop her (it's unclear which). The SAFE KEEPER tucks the wire into her pocket, beating the children with her cane as she does so. Quite understandably, this makes them cry.*

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