

Mouse-capades- (adventures in part-time jobs.)

By Amy Lloyd

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At twenty-one 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 (with roommates, but that's another story) 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 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 prepared me at all.

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-tempos 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 never spoke to me or if he did it was 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 un feeling ex. I missed camaraderie. Most of the cast played toy soldiers or stuffed animals and rehearsed separately from the mice. So the only other actor I worked with was the seventy-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.

Our big number or in show -biz terms- the show stopper- was a song and dance 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 *h.b.m.*, 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 even remember his name. All I can recall is his slightly sneery expression and his frequent exclamations of, "I am a professional dancer, Christ!"

So this coupled with the extra hours spent alone every night due to the rigors of my costume and makeup, what I had hoped to be a joyful experience as my first real acting job left me empty and sad.

The show ran eight days a week, two shows on Saturday, and kept me gainfully employed for ten weeks. I was, after all, on Broadway. A high note for me was the New York Times reviewed the show and cited me and the *h.b.m.* as a "pair of swell mice." To date, 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 hostile male mouse (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 my tail really hard and rip it right off its velcro patch. Now one of two things would then occur: the kid would start laughing hysterically at this **or** (my own personal preference), the kid would have pulled so hard, depending on the weight of the child, that the sheer force would then send him 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 playing Billy the Bear.

His name was Igor. My impression of Igor was that he was that 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 enjoyed corrupting the innocent.

Apparently I was too late. The very first night Igor and I hung out officially as friends, he brought some gay porn- first one I ever saw; and in turn I introduced him to gin and tonics, 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 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 in-appropriate 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. So 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.