

theatre alibi

High Muck-a-Muck



by Daniel Jamieson

© Daniel Jamieson NOT FOR PERFORMANCE

High Muck-a-Muck

(Three storytellers come to us.)

Storyteller The moon hung in the night sky like a great silver sixpence...

Storyteller Hey. How can the moon "...hang in the sky like a great silver sixpence"? Coins don't just hang in the air.

(The first takes a great silver sixpence out of his or her pocket and tosses it into the sky. It hangs there. The three tell the story between them.)

Storytellers From General Blank's Stainless Palace in the north to the snow-haired mountains in the south the Land of Kot was sleeping like a baby. The only sound from one horizon to the other was this - **(Another makes a whistling rush.)** - Long grass blowing in the wind as far as the eye could see. Wait. Not the only sound... **(The faint sound of a train whistle. A light over the horizon.)** A train was coming over the grassy plain. And on the train... **(A distant howl.)** ... wolves! Wolves in cages!

This wasn't any old train you see, this was the train carrying Bobolenko's Travelling Show !
The wolves were Colonel Cowley's Dancing Wolves. Oh yes, they danced alright... when Colonel Cowley cracked his terrible whip... CRACK!
There was Zaza Gaboom, "The Girl with the Iron Lungs" who could blow up hot water bottles 'til they popped... BANG!
And Hot Shot Palianko who could shoot a cherry off a pepperpot at two hundred paces... KAPEOW!
And more - clowns and tumblers and jugglers all packed aboard like one big family. Every day they would perform, every night they would travel, their only home on board this train. They were always welcome wherever they went in the land of Kot. They helped the people forget they were ruled over by General Blank and his big black dog.
And at the very back of the train, in the carriage next to the wolves... lived Mr MacCrystal.

(We see a man hunched with rags in his ears to stop the sound of the wolves, rocking with the train, gnawing a sausage, glued to a cheap, tattered novel.)

Mr Mac started out as a bareback horserider but a nasty fall put paid to that. Now he was probably the worst puppeteer in

the world. But he could still dream! He loved to read stories, anything with horses. **(A storyteller takes the book from his hands and reads the title before putting it back.)**
“Lady Georgette and her Man Max.”

Mr Mac **(Reading feverishly,)** ... The moon hung in the night sky like a great silver sixpence. Miss Georgette stood outside the Villain’s Den. she had but one chance to save the children inside. Now she would do it, so help her! She grasped the doorknob and with a sudden yank, she flung open the door...!

(The carriage door is flung open, giving Mr Mac a terrible fright. In steps a man with a dented top hat. The sound of the wolves is terribly loud with the door open.)

St. Scotty Bobolenko, the owner of Bobolenko’s Travelling Show.

Mr Bob Mr Mac.

Mac Mr Bob.

Bob The wolves are bad tonight.

Mac Hum?

Bob **(Plucking out Mac’s ear-rags,)** The wolves... bad tonight!

Mac It’s the full moon.

Bob Can nothing shut them up?

Mac Meat. **(He holds up his sausage merely to illustrate the fact.)**

Bob Thankyou. **(Bob seizes the sausage and tosses it back through the door to Mac’s distress. The wolves fall quiet.)**
Now Mac. We’ve been commanded to do a show for General Blank.

Mac You’re joking...!

Bob I wish I was. We must perform at the Stainless Palace in eight weeks time.
(He shows Mac the official letter.)
If General Blank doesn’t like us, we’re finished.

Mac But he should like us, shouldn’t he? I mean, we’re very good... aren’t we?

Bob **(Pause.)** I shan't beat about the bush... Mac, your act is rubbish.

Mac Thanks.

Bob I mean a puppet should seem like it's got a little life and soul of its own, but "Little Jim"... **(He lifts a crude puppet out of its box and pulls a lever. His little chin opens and shuts in a hopelessly mechanical fashion.)** Do you really think General Blank is going to be impressed by this?

Mac He's not that bad...

(There's an official portrait of General Blank and his dog on the wall of Mac's cabin, the like of which seem to be everywhere through our story. Bob speaks furtively now, as if he's frightened the picture will hear him.)

Bob Another circus did a show for General Blank last year. They had an old clown called Benny Benzeeny. He hadn't been funny for years - he was about to retire. Anyway. Benny was doing the old "slipping-on-a-banana-skin gag" - a bit corny but a harmless bit of fun before the next act. But General Blank went mad! "I could do better myself!" he shouted and set his dog on him...

Mac No!

Bob Yes. And that dog... it's huge! **(The dog in the picture begins to growl and show it's teeth.)** It ate Benny up. There was nothing left but a bit of fluff from his wig. The ringmaster went to help and the dog ate him too! It even chewed up his whip like a liquorice bootlace. Now. Is that what you want to happen us?

Mac Course not!

Bob So. Colonel Cowley says he could do with a hand cleaning out the wolf cages...

Mac You want me to shovel wolf dung?

Bob Of course the wages would be rather less but I'm told you get used to the smell in no time...!

Mac Never!

Bob Then you'll have to leave the show.

Mac But... this is my home...

Bob Sorry Mac. "That's show business."

Mac Wait! Give me a month!

Bob To do what?

Mac To get better!

Bob You've been rubbish for years! What can you change in a month?

Mac I'll... I'll get a new puppet... I'll make a new act! Please, give me a chance.

(Pause. Mr Bob wrestles with himself, figuratively, you understand.)

Bob Alright...

Mac Thank you, oh thank you!

Bob But it's your last chance. Then it's wolf dung or goodbye.

(He takes his leave. Mr Mac ponders, then quickly writes a letter.)

Mac My dear Goody Woodchuck,
I need you to make me a puppet again. Only this time I want you to make it the finest puppet you know how...

(He exits sealing the envelope.)

St. He left the train at the next station and six days later he was at Goody Woodchuck's cottage in the depths of the forest.

(Mac re-enters, impatiently following a shuffling old crone.)

Woodchuck Tea?

Mac No thankyou. I haven't got much time.

Woodchuck Suit yourself.

Mac Have you made it?

Woodchuck The tea?

Mac No! The puppet.

Woodchuck Yes.

Mac Can I see it?

Woodchuck Why the hurry?

Mac I've got three weeks to come up with a new act or I'm out of the show.

Woodchuck Well, I don't think you'll be disappointed. **(She fetches a box.)** Now as for skin colour and clothes, I know you'll want to do all that, so I've not painted or dressed her...

Mac HER?! I never said anything about making it a girl!

Woodchuck You never said not to.

Mac What do I know about girls?

Woodchuck Calm down. You'll be fine...

(She opens the box. Inside lies a puppet girl made of butter-coloured wood, unadorned, without hair, in only a calico shift and yet already beautiful. Mac is struck dumb.)

Woodchuck What do you think?

Mac She's... beautiful.

Woodchuck Boxwood, you see. Smooth as silk.

Mac You're a genius!

Woodchuck No! I tell you, I had the strangest feeling. She was already lying there in the block of wood and all I had to do was chip her out.

Mac How much do I owe you?

(She fetches a chair and puts it behind him.)

Woodchuck You might want to sit down.

Mac Just tell me woman!

(She whispers in his ear and he sits down with shock. She watches him counting a wad of notes out of his wallet. Mac gives her the money.)

Woodchuck Thankyou dearie.

(Mac notices a puppet horse and examines it.)

Mac How much for this?

Woodchuck That old thing? I'll throw it in for nothing, seeing as you've shelled out so much already!

Mac You're a saint.

Woodchuck Have you got an idea cooking Mr Mac?

Mac I think I have Goody... I think I have!

(He leaves her.)

St. It was the last day of the month when Mr Mac caught up with Bobolenko's Travelling Show at a station along their way.

(A train whistle sounds. Bob sits on a trunk ready for an impromptu audition on the platform. Mac is wearing an old-fashioned servant costume.)

Bob Right. The train leaves in ten minutes Mac. If you can't impress me by then I'm afraid I can't let you back on board.

Mac Yes Mr Bob. Only I'm having a little trouble getting her out today.

Bob Who? Out of where?

Mac Miss Georgette out of bed sir. **(Mac fetches a small figure wrapped in a bundle of bedclothes. There are snores from under the covers.)**

Miss Georgette?

(No response.)

Miss Georgette?

(Still no response.)

MISS GEORGETTE!

(She pokes out her head. She's an elegant little lady, if rather tousled. Mac speaks her voice in falsetto.)

Georgette WHAT?

Mac Time to get up ma'am.

Geo What is there to do today Mac?

Mac Maybe a bit of flower arranging...?

Geo Maybe I'll stay in bed. **(Her head disappears back under the covers.)**

Mac You could always ride your horse ma'am.

Geo **(Head popping out smartly,)** Splendid idea! Now all we need is an adventure. **(Suddenly an arrow thunks into the wooden chest on which Mac sits with a message attached.)**

Geo Hello! This looks promising! **(She reads the note.)** Why... the villains! They've kidnapped three children from the village and they want a thousand gold coins to set them free.

Mac Will you pay ma'am?

Geo Never! We'll rescue them! Giddyup Snowball!

(The horse sets off at a blistering gallop. Mac speaks to the rhythm on the horses hooves as it gallops on the spot.)

Mac Miss Georgette she's fast on a horse,
Fast as a girl can be.
She can ride like the wind on a blustery day,
Faster than the eye can see.

She can do it, She can do it,
She can do it she can do it she can do it, HEY...! X 2

(Each time Mac goes, "HEY!" the horse jumps.)

Geo Whoa!

(Her horse stops beside a miniature log cabin. We hear drunken laughter and shouting.)

The Villain's Den! Let's take a peep round the back...

(The den is turned round to reveal the interior. Inside is a tableau of three bad men round a table playing cards and drinking rum. Three kiddies tied in a bundle hang from the ceiling.)

It's them alright, the rotten scoundrels!

Children Help! Help!

Geo Look at those poor little children!

(The Den is turned back round.)

Geo Right. I'm going in.

Mac What's your plan m'lady?

Geo I'll think of that when I get inside.

Mac Good luck ma'am.

Geo Thankyou Mac. I'm going to need it... One, two, three...!

(Georgette dashes through the door. There's mayhem inside and things fly over the top of the Den. Suddenly Georgette flies out of the window onto Snowball with the bundle of kiddies in her arms.)

That beats flower arranging any day of the week!

Mac What about the villains?

Geo Don't worry about them. They'll be hanging round here for some time!

(Mac turns round the Den and the badmen are now hanging in a bundle from the ceiling.)

Come on! Giddyup Snowball! Giddyup! Wahay! Wahoo! Etc.

(Mac takes her galloping offstage then peeps back round the corner.)

Mac What did you think Mr Bobolenko?

Bob Mac... After twenty years you've finally learnt how to work a puppet!

Mac It's her Mr Bob! She practically works herself!
So... am I still in the show?

Bob You certainly are! **(He and Mac shake hands.)** Four weeks and you'll be in front of General Blank!

St. So Mac went back to his old cabin on the train.

Mac Here we are Georgie-girl. **(He sits her on the table.)** May not be a mansion but the view changes every day. **(The train starts moving. He yawns.)** Reckon it's time for a bit of shut eye... **(He lays her on a shelf.)** Night night dearie. **(He turns out the lights and tumbles gratefully into his bunk. After a moment there's a definite yawn from Georgette's direction. Mac jumps up and looks at her. He puts her**

back thoughtfully, but he's so tired he falls quickly asleep.)

St. The next morning, Mac wasn't the first thing to wake up in that cabin.

(Slowly the puppet Georgette lifts her head, trembling with the effort like a baby, and looks round. She sees Mac snoring away.)

Geo Pappa! **(Her head flops back exhausted but now she gabbles contentedly.)** Pappa! Pappa!...

(Laboriously she rolls over onto all fours and crawls unsteadily towards Mac - and the edge of the shelf - until she falls to the floor. Mac wakes bolt upright. Georgette begins to howl like a baby. Mac's so confused he can't see where the crying's coming from straight away. When he finds Georgette he holds her at arms length. Her arms and legs flap helplessly.)

Mac You... you're alive! **(He holds her to him and comforts her.)** Shhh. There there. **(She cries less and he sits her on his knee to look at her.)** That's better.

Geo **(Pointing at him,)** Pappa!

Mac Well... no. I'm your servant. I'm your man Mac.

Geo Mac.

Mac Yes. And you're Georgette!

Geo Courgette.

Mac No, that's a vegetable.

Geo **(Copying him exactly,)** "No, that's a vegetable!"

Mac You're a quick learner!

Geo "You're a quick learner!"

Mac Popacatapetl!

Geo "That's a vegetable!"

Mac No. It's a mountain in Mexico. Popacatapetl.

Geo Popacatapetl!

(She holds Mac's hands and jumps up and down with excitement. He leads her to and fro, practising her walking.)

Mac The Popacatapetl is not in Canada rather in Mexico, Mexico, Mexico...

Geo The Popacatapetl is not in Canada rather in Mexico, Mexico, Mexico...

(As her talking grows in confidence, so does her walking.)

Mac Canada Malaga Rimini Brindisi!

Geo Canada Malaga Rimini Brindisi!

(Mac and Georgette start to dance to the rhythm of the rhyme.)

Mac & Geo Tibet-a, Tibet-a, Tibet-a, ah yes, Tibet-a, Tibet-a, Tibet-a.
Nagasaki and Yokohama!
Nagasaki and Yokohama...!

(Suddenly there's a knock on the door and Georgette jumps into Mac's arms.)

Stage manager Show time in two hours ladies and gentlemen, showtime in two hours...!

Geo Showtime?

Mac People pay to see us do a show! **(Georgette tries to hide.)**
Don't worry! Just do what I make you do and everything will be fine.

St. At first everything was fine...

(Mac appears "on stage" with Miss Georgette under her bedclothes. She snores.)

Mac Miss Georgette.

(Snore.)

Mac Miss Georgette!

(Snore.)

Mac MISS GEORGETTE!

Geo **(In Mac's falsetto,) WHAT?**

Mac Time to get up ma'am.

St. Georgette did as Mac made her and the audience seemed to like her.

Geo Now all we need is an adventure! **(The arrow thunks into the bedpost.)**

St. And the more the audience liked her, the more Georgette liked them. Until she decided she'd try a few tricks of her own...

(Snowball begins to gallop.)

Mac Miss Georgette she's fast on a horse,
Fast as a girl can be...

(Mac draws breath for his next line but Georgette pipes up in her own voice.)

Geo The Popacatapetl is not in Canada rather in Mexico, Mexico, Mexico!

Mac She can ride like the wind on a blustery day,
Faster than the eye can see...

Geo Canada Malaga Rimini Brindisi!

Mac She can do it, Hey. She can do it, Hey.
She can do it she can do it she can do it, hey...

(Georgette starts trying her own tricks, pulling Mac about helplessly.)

Mac She can do it... etc.

Geo **(At the same time now,)** Nagasa-a-a-ki and Yokoha-a-a-ma!

(Suddenly she's free of Mac and moving on her own.)

Faster, Mac, faster... Come on!
Giddy up Mac!

(Mac increases the speed of Snowball's gallop. Geo dances wildly on the horse's back without anyone holding her. She leaps off Snowball and lands in Mac's arms. Flowers shower the stage.)

St. The crowd loved it!
Soon people were coming specially to see Georgette the Magic Puppet. And did the attention go to her head?

Of course it did!

(Georgette sits alone in the train cabin pulling the heads off flowers. Mac rushes in.)

Mac You'll never guess! We're top of the bill for General Blank on Friday night!

Geo Whoopee.

Mac Aren't you excited? We're the stars of the show!

Geo Why can't I just do the act on my own? It's so undignified, having to sit on your lap.

Mac I've already explained...

Geo I hate it I hate it I hate it!

(In the next carriage the wolves have started to howl worse than ever. Mac shouts at them,)

Mac Be QUIET!

(There's no let-up and he's forced to throw some sausage through the door but not before a quick bite. They quieten at last.)

Don't know what's the matter with them tonight.

Geo They want to be free. And so do I.

Mac You are free...

Geo I want to leave the show and have real adventures!

Mac But... how could I do a puppet act without a puppet?

Geo There's Little Jim!

Mac Georgette...! I'd be dog food in two minutes if I got up in front of General Blank with that thing!

Geo Then come with me! You could still be my servant! You could hold the horses while I go in and save people!

Mac But my dear, all that riding round... saving kiddies from the Villains' Den... It's just make-believe.

Geo So nobody needs any help out there?

Mac I'm sure they do but they might be a bit surprised to get it from a puppet.

Geo Lady Georgette to you! Don't forget, you're still my servant!

Mac I'm not your servant and you're certainly not behaving like a lady!

Geo How dare you!

Mac "Lady Georgette", "Her Man Mac"... It's all made up, you see. I got it from a book I was reading...

Geo Saddle up my horse!

Mac I've still got it somewhere...

Geo My horse!

Mac Here! "Lady Georgette and her Man Max"! **(She opens the window of the moving train.)** What are you doing?

Geo I'm going to jump out of the window on my horse.

Mac Don't be daft! Snowball can't move on her own!

Geo Snowball? Giddyup! SNOWBALL!

Mac Georgette! She's just a stupid piece of wood and so are you!

St. The moment he'd spoken, suddenly he saw her for what she really was - a wooden little girl with real, hurt feelings... his little girl. But it was too late now...

Mac I'm sorry, my dear... I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it...
(But Georgette throws herself out of the window.)
NOOOOOO! Stop the train! Stop the train! **(He rushes out of the carriage. The train stops and everyone searches with lanterns.)**

Everyone GEORGETTE! GEORGETTE!

(Mac searches in vain, then climbs heartbroken back on the train. It rolls away across the plain.)

St. Night fell on the plain, then the only sound 'til dawn was the sigh of the wind in the grass.

(Night passes. Now there's a yawn from the grass. Georgette stretches and climbs onto the railway embankment and looks all around.)

Geo Free at last! **(She spins for joy.)**

Bayar **(Distantly,)** Hey! Little girl!

(Georgette ducks.)

St. After all her brave talk, suddenly she was scared.

(Georgette plays dead. A boy appears out of the long grass. He's wearing rabbit furs. He can't see Georgette.)

Bayar Hey little girl! Want to play? My name's Bayar?

St. A boy.

(He finds Georgette and thinks she's a doll.)

Wow! **(Calling out again,)** Little girl? You left your doll!
We could play with her together...

St. A wilder looking creature Georgette could not have imagined.

Bayar I'll look after it for you shall I? I live in the old shepherd's hut by the Lilac tree.
Bye then. **(He picks Georgette up and lugs her off.)**

(They arrive at Bayar's place.)

Bayar Here we are. Home sweet home.

St. Bayar's hut was the poorest place Georgette had ever seen.
(Bayar sits Georgette against the wall.)

Bayar Sorry it's so cold. **(He sits next to her and tucks them both under a grubby patchwork blanket, much to Georgette's disgust. He takes her hand and plays with it, sticking it in the air and articulating it like a little mannequin. Suddenly he catches himself.)**

I don't normally play with dolls. Just you're the first toy I've seen for years. You can be... Grogna.

What shall we play Grogna? **(He pretends to hear her.)**

"Catch my Finger!" Alright, but remember I'm the world champion at Catch My Finger... **(He holds up his finger and gets Georgette ready to catch it. He makes her hand grab for his finger but miss.)** Caught my thumb! Catch... my... finger... Caught-My-Thumb! Never mind! Girls are never any

good at that game Grogna! I know! You've loved this one since we were tiny. **(He holds up her palm.)**
"Round and round the garden
Like a teddy bear.
One step, two step... tickly under there...!"

Geo Please! **(She snatches away her hand.)** I am not "Grogna" and your hands are filthy!

Bayar You... you're...

Geo Yes, alive.

Bayar But you're a doll!

Geo A puppet, please.

(Bayar approaches nervously and waves his hand over her head.)

Bayar No strings!

Geo Not that sort of puppet.

Bayar What sort then?

Geo A ventriloquist's.

Bayar A dummy!

Geo Is that funny young man?

Bayar No. How do you work? Is it magic?!

Geo If you like.

Bayar In my house!

Geo **(Looking round dubiously,)** Yes... I am Georgette. Lady Georgette.

Bayar Hello. I'm Bayar. **(He hugs her unaffectedly. She hates it.)**

Geo Thanks for your hospitality young Bayar. Now I must be off.

Bayar So soon?

Geo I have lives to save.

Bayar I thought we could be friends.

Geo Oh no! I couldn't possibly be friends with you.

Bayar Why not?

Geo I save people like you. I don't make friends with them.

Bayar Oh.

Geo Good day young man.

Bayar **(Mumbles,)** Goodbye.

(Georgette leaves. Bayar Weeps. Something makes Georgette peep back. She's shocked to see Bayar crying.)

Geo What are you doing?
(Bayar hides his face.)
Do you do it because you're sad?
(Bayar nods and blows his nose squelchily on a dirty rag.)
Hey. How would you like to be my servant?
(Bayar looks at Georgette.)
You could hold my horse while I go in and rescue people.

Bayar You haven't got a horse.

Geo I did have one. I left her behind. That could be your first job!
To find me a new horse!

Bayar How can I "find" you a horse without any money?

Geo Borrow one! If anybody asks, say it's for Lady Georgette!
Do you want the job?

(She holds out her hand. Bayar shakes it.)

Bayar Alright.

(They go off.)

St. It was evening before they'd walked to the nearest farm. The farmer's horse had been put in his stable for the night.

(We see the horse. Bayar and Georgette creep into the stable.)

Bayar Are you sure about this?

Geo Why not?

Bayar This “Borrowing-Without-Asking” thing...it’s stealing, isn’t it?

Geo Nonsense! Anyway. Think of the lives I can save with him.

Bayar Alright. But don’t rush me. I’ll have to make friends with him.

(Bayar goes to the horse and pats him gently.)

Bayar Hello my friend! I’m Bayar. And that’s Lady Georgette. Say hello Lady Georgette...

(She rolls her eyes then waves.)

Bayar Have you had a hard day my friend? Carrying the big fat farmer?
Listen. How would you like to ride round the country saving people instead? You’d be a hero! A legend! And me and Georgette would be a lot lighter than that farmer too...
How about it? Are you coming? Yes? Yes?

(Bayar coaxes him forward but the horse holds back at the last.)

Geo Oh for Heaven’s sake... move!

(She walks round and smacks the horse on his bottom. He kicks back, sending Georgette flying offstage. Bayar struggles to control him.)

Bayar Whoa boy whoa...!

(The farmer appears and grabs the horse’s halter from Bayar.)

Farmer Vulcan! Be still!

(The horse calms.)

Bayar Thankyou. **(The farmer looks at him and Bayar remembers he’s in trouble. He runs but the farmer catches him.)**

Farmer No you don’t! What were you up to?

Bayar Lady Georgette... she needs a horse.

Farmer I don’t see no “Lady” round ‘ere.

Bayar Georgette? Georgette!

Farmer Truth is, you were stealin’ ‘im, weren’t you? Know what General Blank says we should do with horse thieves? Hang ‘em by the heels from the nearest tree and let the crows peck

out their eyes!

Bayar No, please, no!

(Bayar struggles free and runs away. Meanwhile, Lady Georgette appears from the other direction looking rather dishevelled.)

Geo You there... I s'pose you're the owner of that vicious brute.

Farmer Don't tell me... You're Lady Georgette!

Geo I'm glad you recognise me. Now kindly saddle that wretched beast and we'll be off. **(The farmer is speechless.)**
Oh how tiresome... **(Carefully, as if to an idiot,)** I am Lady Georgette. I rescue people on horseback. I am probably the greatest horse rider in the Land of Kot.

(A smile spreads on the farmer's face.)

Farmer Oh, that Lady Georgette!

Geo Yes!

Farmer Sorry mi'lady!

Geo Quite alright.

Farmer Before you leave ma'am, would you mind givin' a display of your dazzlin' skill on horseback?

Geo Well...I suppose I could spare a moment or two...

Farmer Would you mind if I gathered folk for the show? We don't get much entertainment round 'ere.

Geo Certainly.

St. So all the people from the village gathered to watch.

Geo Ladies and gentlemen, I haven't time for a full display, but I will show you a few of my favourite tricks!

(Georgette climbs on to the horse. He seems quiet enough but when the farmer lets him go he explodes like a rampaging bull. Georgette clings on for dear life. The horse bolts offstage. There's an almighty crash. Georgette limps back on, covered in mud.)

Farmer Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present the greatest horse rider in the Land of Kot! **(He laughs and laughs.)**

Geo **(Stamping her foot,)** Be quiet! How dare you laugh at a lady!

Farmer Listen to 'er! Lady High Muck-a-Muck! I've a good mind to take you over my knee and smack your bottom!

Geo It'll hurt you more than me.

Farmer How's that then?

Geo Because I'm made of wood.

Farmer You what?

Geo I'm made of wood!

Farmer An' I'm gettin' sick o' your tall stories...

(Georgette picks up a large hammer and whacks herself all over with it, making a variety of loud, wooden sounds. She finishes with a resounding "Tock!" on her head and smiles sweetly at the farmer. Thinking it might be a trick hammer he knocks himself on the head with a painful, dull thud.)

St. All at once, fear spread among the villagers like a bad smell.
"It's not natural."
"She's a freak of nature!"
"Freak!"
"Monster!"
"Get 'er!"
"GRAB 'ER!"
Some people set loose their dogs!
(Barking.)
How on earth was Georgette going to escape?

(Georgette looks round in terror. The noise rises to a crescendo when on charges Bayar on Vulcan. The horse rears but Bayar is master of him.)

Bayar Jump up!

(Georgette leaps up behind him. Bayar gives a great cry, an old battle cry of the horsemen of the plain. Vulcan bursts from the stage.)

St. The village watched them go without a word. Perhaps they had seen the greatest horse rider after all...

(We see Bayar and Georgette galloping full tilt over the countryside.)

St. Bayar rode so fast the land blurred around them.
They rode through a forest... like a needle stitching lightning.

Bayar Ya! Ya!

St. They leapt over a river...like an arrow from a bow!

Bayar Ya!

St. When they were quite sure no-one was following them, they stopped on the plain.

(They dismount. Georgette sits to rest. Bayar holds Vulcan by the reins and pets him.)

Geo Where did you learn to ride like that.

Bayar My father taught me.

Geo I can't really ride at all, can I? I am just a stupid piece of wood.

Bayar Don't talk like that.

Geo What did happen to your family?

Bayar They were washed away.

Geo How?

Bayar We had to cross a river with a herd of horses. My dad went first with my mum and my sister but the river was too strong. It dragged them away. I waited but they never came back.
(Bayar touches Georgette's face.)
You're crying.

Geo I didn't think I could. **(She touches her tears.)**

Bayar Are your mum and dad made of wood?

Geo No! I haven't got a mum and dad. Just my puppetmaster.

Bayar What happened to him?

Geo Nothing. I ran away.

Bayar Was he cruel to you?

Geo No. I was cruel to him.

Bayar Why?

Geo I don't know. Poor Mac... **(Suddenly she gasps in horror.)**
The show for General Blank...!

Bayar He's doing a show for General Blank!

Geo Yes. It'll be rubbish without me! General Blank will set his dog
on him for sure!

Bayar When is it?

Geo Tomorrow! How far's the palace?

Bayar More than a hundred miles. You'd have to ride non-stop...
(She stands up.) You're not serious?

Geo He'll die if we don't help him!

Bayar Alright... **(She hugs him with excitement.)**

Geo Thankyou! Thankyou!

Bayar But we've got to go now. There won't be a minute to spare...

(They jump on Vulcan and with a whoop from Bayar, they ride off.)

St. Next night, at the Stainless Palace on the far side of the land
of Kot, General Blank was taking his seat for the show. Beside
him was his giant, black dog. **(The dog growls.)**

General Blank VIKTOR, be still.

**(There's a musical flourish and Scotty Bobolenko comes on to the stage
looking scared witless.)**

Mr Bob Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your special
entertainment tonight, the one and only, "MISS GEORGETTE
AND HER MAN MAC!"

**(There's a fanfare but then there's a bit of a scuffle in the wings and nobody
appears.)**

"MISS GEORGETTE AND HER MAN MAC!"

**(Mr Bob goes off and shoves Mr Mac on stage with Georgette's bundle of
bedclothes. He looks terrified too but launches into the act.)**

Mac MISS GEORGETTE?

Puppet **(Mac's falsetto,)** WHAT?

(A puppet pokes its head out of the bed. It's Little Jim in a dress.)

Mac Time to get up ma'am.

Puppet What is there to do today Mac?

Mac Maybe you could ride your horse ma'am?

Puppet Sklendid idea!

(The galloping music starts.)

Mac Miss Georgette she's fast on a horse,
Fast as a girl can be.
She can ride like the wind on a ... Oh dear!

(Mr Mac has such trouble operating the old puppet he drops it and the head rolls across the stage. Mac struggles to reassemble it.)

Sorry your Excellency, just a minor technical problem...

(The dog growls horribly. Mac is just ready to run for his life when on to the stage steps the real Georgette.)

Mac Georgette!

Geo Good evening General. **(She curtsies deeply.)** Sorry I'm late.

Mac Is it really you? Are you alright? Did you get hurt?

Geo I'm fine.

Mac I thought I would never see you again. I'm so sorry for what I said...

Geo No. I'm the one who should be sorry...

General Blank VERY TOUCHING, I'M SURE. Now, if you've quite finished...
GET ON WITH THE SHOW!

Geo **(Fearlessly,)** Yes your Excellency, but first I'd like to meet someone...

Mac Pssst... Can't it wait?

Geo No! I want everyone to meet him. **(Sends him off.)** Your Excellency, may I introduce the boy who saved my life...
(She beckons at the wing of the stage.)

Come on! Don't be shy!

(Bayar peeps wide-eyed round the corner, then ducks out of sight.)

Bayar I can't!

Geo Course you can! Don't be soft!
(She goes offstage and pushes him on. He stands like a rabbit in the headlights.)

Geo Your Excellency, this is Bayar. He's the bravest person in the Land of Kot!

Blank WHAT?! THAT PIPSQUEAK! DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!

Geo He is...!

Blank SILENCE! IF HE'S SO BRAVE, WHAT CAN HE DO? COME ON... COME ON...

Geo He can... he can ride anything!

Blank PROVE IT! LET HIM RIDE MY DOG!

Geo No! I mean any horse...!

Blank ARE YOU DISOBEYING ME?

(Bayar comes forward.)

Bayar It's alright. I'll do it.

Geo No...!

Blank SPLENDID! NOW FOR SOME PROPER ENTERTAINMENT AT LAST! GO VIKTOR, GO!

(The King releases Viktor. He goes for Bayar, snarling horribly.)

Bayar Hey Viktor... I'm s'posed to ride on your back. Nobody thinks we can do it. They think I'm a stupid peasant and you're a stupid dog. How about we show them who's stupid?
(Bayar climbs carefully on his back. Viktor growls uncertainly.)
Good boy! What a strong back you've got!
Can my friend get on too? She's light as a feather.
(Viktor barks once, but he can't help growling as Georgette climbs on too.)
Good boy Viktor, good boy... Viktor, walk on.

(Viktor walks obediently to and fro.)

St. No-one could believe their eyes.

Mac **(Whispering to musician,)** Play! Play!

(Music starts. Mac begins to sing quietly,)

Mac They can do it. They can do it.
They can do it they can do it they can do it... HEY!

(The music and singing grow louder, the dog jumps again and again, licking Mac's face on each "Hey". Bayar whoops his horseman's cry, until, with one last triumphant leap, Viktor rides offstage with Bayar and Georgette.)

St. So the General's dog was tamed before his eyes and there was nothing he could do about it! The animal was so completely useless for scaring people anymore, he was given to Bobolenko's show by popular demand.

(Georgette and Bayar come round carrying suitcases with Viktor on a lead. They chat happily and Viktor barks and wags his tail. Mac looks at them fondly. A train whistle sounds. Georgette comes and takes his hand.)

St. And if you want to find them nowadays, Georgette, Bayar, Mac and Viktor, they're still aboard that rickety old train, rattling backwards and forwards across the grassy plain.

St. Still top of the bill in Bobolenko's Travelling Show.

St. Still happier than any of them ever imagined possible.

(They climb aboard the train, wave goodbye and set off towards the grassy horizon.)

The End.