

THE POETRY MACHINE

a play for children (and adults if they want) in two short acts

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Synopsis

An ageing poet is suffering a severe case of writer's block after the death of his/her partner. The poet comes across a gypsy who promises that a poetry machine will be able to help him/her write by simply placing material in the machine to form a story. The writer takes the machine home and after putting his/her grandchild's toys in the machine, concocts a story in poetry about a pirate, robot and teddy bear. The poet finishes reading the story to find that his/her grandchild has disappeared, presumably having crept inside the poetry machine.

The poet also enters the machine and encounters the characters invented from the previous story, each inhabiting the opposite persona from that of the story. In the quest for his/her grandchild, the poet tries his/her best to comfort the chaotic characters when the gypsy reappears. Blaming the gypsy for the disappearance of his/her grandchild, the gypsy continues to infuriate the poet by speaking in riddles until the poet is finally awoken by his/her grandchild. Back in reality the poet realizes that the machine was not necessary to renew his/her writing and that s/he had the talent all along.

Characters

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Poppa/Nanna | Elderly poet and typical grandfatherly/motherly figure |
| Kay | Grandchild, Boy/Girl, aged around 6 yrs, slightly precocious |
| Gypsy | Stereotypical gypsy lady with robes and gnarled hands |
| Pirate | Typical pirate with a hook hand and wooden leg |
| Robot | Metallic clad robot with a ruby red mouth |
| Teddy Bear | Cuddly teddy bear, like Chewbacca in Star Wars |

Props

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Poetry Machine | A box, large enough for a person to enter, with a handle at the side that churns out paper |
| Pirate figure | |
| Robot figure | |
| Teddy Bear | |
| Lightsaber | |
| Sword | |
| Crystal Ball | |

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 - Study

Poppa/Nanna sits at desk in front of pad and paper, pulling hair out in frustration.

POPPA/NANNA:

Oh, why, dear me, why
Can't I muster up a line
My brain just can't think!

World's greatest poet!
They all said, so long ago
Wait for his next book!

What did they all know
I disappointed them all
(Sigh) Nothing but a fraud...

All I have is, is...
Blank pages full of nothing
(grabs handful of paper)
Worthless, meaningless

Rubbish, this isn't
Writing. Aye, silly old sod
(throws paper in the air)
I need something new!

I'll go for a walk
Some fresh air will do me good
And help clear my mind

Who knows what I'll find
Once I've had some time to see
Who is the real me

Am I what they say?
Whether I can actually
Write to save my life?

Gabriel/Gabrielle my dear
It's been so long, since you've been...
Well, you know...been gone

Each and every day
I think, if only I could
Have one more chance to...

Aye, well there's nothing
I can do now that I am
Without you, Gabriel/Gabrielle.

It's for you I am
Without words, without a verse
Without a stanza

Without a single
Line to my name, without you...
Verses are like weights

Words are like concrete
Rhymes turn to the thickest stone
Alas, I'm too weak

To bear the burden
Without you here by my side
Aye, how I miss you.

Poppa/Nanna walks out door muttering to himself.

SCENE 2 – MARKETS

Gypsy sits at velvet covered table peering into her crystal ball. Poppa/Nanna walks past obliviously.

POPPA/NANNA: What can I do to
 Make me write like I used to

GYPSY: I have a machine

POPPA/NANNA: Huh, do you mean me
 Are you talking to me then
 What was it you said?

GYPSY: I have a machine
 That turns whatever you put
 In it into verse

 It writes from nothing
 To make a story of sorts
 Written in poetry

POPPA/NANNA: A poetry machine
 Dear me, that's just what I need
 If my mind can't think

 Then I'll turn the cogs
 Some other way, by the push
 Of a button p'haps

Or the turn of a
Lever. Yes, modern machines
Can do just as well

What I used to be
So good at doing myself
A machine that can

Take the place of my
Brain and write the things I can't
Is such a thing real?

GYPSY: Yes, it does exist
The poetry machine is real
Whatever you want

It to write about
It can invent lines for you
All you have to do

Is make sure that you
Put your name on the bottom
Of your written poem

So that you can claim
It as your own. The machine
Is yours...for a (*squeezes finger and thumb together*) price.

POPPA/NANNA: (*trying to act casual*)
Well, how will I know
If this machine which you boast
Really does as you

Say it does, surely
A machine cannot do what
A human can do

GYPSY: If you don't believe
Then that is for you to think
The machine will work

Better than your brain
Can at the moment, *ex-poet*
Isn't that right, hmm?

POPPA/NANNA: You mean you can tell?
Am I really such a fraud?
Can you read my mind?

What else can you find

In the recesses of my thoughts
Strange gypsy woman?

GYPSY: I know that you want
To get back what you have lost
Little do you know

That all is not lost
That which you believe is gone
Will come back to you

And haven't you lost
More than your stories lately?
You are seeking much...

POPPA/NANNA: Gabrielle, do you mean...
S/he will return? Can that be?
Are you mocking me?

GYPSY: I did not say that!
I only mean that you will
Find that which you seek

POPPA/NANNA: Inside this machine
Well if it will really do
As you say it will

Then old gypsy wench
I will take it from your hands
For the fee you ask

GYPSY: Here is your money
It will make your dreams come true
POPPA/NANNA: Yes, I hope so too

SCENE 3 – Poppa/Nanna's house

(Machine sits on one side of the room. Poppa/Nanna stands observing it)

POPPA/NANNA: A machine that thinks
Impossible! It can't be!
Why did I believe

That crazy old hag
Could solve my problems with this
Filthy piece of junk

GRANDCHILD: Poppa/Nanna! I've missed you!

(Grandchild runs up and gives Poppa/Nanna a hug. Grandchild is holding a pirate toy, robot figurine and teddy bear.)

POPPA/NANNA: I wasn't expecting you
I've missed you too dear
To what do I owe
The pleasure of this visit

GRANDCHILD: Poppa/Nanna! Can you tell
Me a story please!

POPPA/NANNA: Of course my child. But tell me
What is that you have?

GRANDCHILD: Why? These are my toys
You remember teddy bear
And this is Zingbot

(Shows Grandpa the robot toy)

It's the coolest thing
It can shoot laser beams from
It's eyes and it's nose

Too, I bet. You see!

(Grandchild starts pointing toy around and making sound effects)

POPPA/NANNA: Right-o, and what about him?
Who's this little guy?

GRANDCHILD: Ha! Little? This is
The awesome Captain Kerplank
He sails seven seas

And finds pots of gold
Wherever he goes, matey
They are all afraid

Of this swashbuckling
Pirate. He can slice you with
His sword and chop you

Into pieces, arrrgh!

POPPA/NANNA: *(distractedly)* Hmm, yes that does look like fun
He seems very...cool?
(changing the subject) Did you say that you
Wanted to hear a story?

GRANDCHILD: Oh, yes please Poppa/Nanna!

POPPA/NANNA: Well then, why don't you

Take a seat. Here I'll take those (*Poppa/Nanna takes toys*)
I'll...get you some...milk!

(Poppa/Nanna goes to Poetry Machine on other side of the stage clutching toys)

Now this is my chance
To see if the Gypsy was
Telling me the truth

To find out whether
This machine will actually
Write me poetry

(Poppa/Nanna thrusts toys into the machine and cranks handle. Poetry Machine churns out a scroll of paper.)

POPPA/NANNA: Haha! What is this!
Success! There is writing here
I have a story

My very first one
In so long. Now to test it
(calls out) I have a story!

(Poppa/Nanna heads back to the other side of the stage with the scroll of paper and a glass of milk.)

GRANDCHILD: Yay Poppa/Nanna. Let's hear!

(Grandchild sits attentively and sips milk)

POPPA/NANNA: Umm, now this story
Is called "The Robots Attack"
Okay, now here goes...

Scene 4 – The story

(Poppa/Nanna starts reading from the scroll, hesitantly at first and gradually becomes more flamboyant. On the other side of the stage the Pirate, Robot and Teddy Bear act out the story or a puppet show acts out the story.)

Once upon a time there was a Pirate
Captain Kerplank was his name
He sailed across seven seas
And all sailors knew of his fame

He was the greatest swashbuckler of them all
Everyone used to say
With a sword that could slice
From your throat to your nave

The mere sound of his name
Would make one with fear shake
And even tyrants would quiver
When faced with his first mate

A ferocious duo
Who plundered without care
Were the utterly fearsome
Kerplank and Teddy Bear

Across oceans they roamed
On a foreboding pirate ship
And no treasure was safe
From their cruel, heartless grip

Together they would conquer
Whatever great unknown
Doing all that it took
To bring their riches home

For treasure was all that mattered
To the greedy Captain Kerplank
Who made the fate of whoever opposed him
A deadly walk off the plank

All the men knew better
Than to stand in his way
Because none of them really fancied
Ending up in a meat tray

So the fearless pirates would go
Wherever they wished to roam
Without any opposition
The whole globe was their home

Until came the day
When Kerplank and Teddy landed
On a deserted island
Where they became stranded

Without warning they had cruised into a storm
And in all the chaos their sail had become torn
The waves crashed against the flailing pirate ship
Then all of a sudden, a hidden reef they hit

With the ship quickly sinking
And taking water onboard
The pirates had no choice
But to swim for the shore

PIRATE: "C'mon, jump in!"

POPPA/NANNA: Yelled Kerplank to Teddy Bear
And sent him flying into the water
Yanking him by the hair

TEDDY BEAR: “Help, I can’t swim”
POPPA/NANNA: A frightened Teddy Bear cried
Blinking away tears
From the water in his eyes

TEDDY BEAR: “Captain! Sir!
Don’t leave me to drown
The ship is sinking fast
And it’s dragging me down”

PIRATE: “Get moving you soggy rag
Start kicking your legs
I’m doing all the swimming for you
And my leg is a peg!”

POPPA/NANNA: Kerplank and Teddy Bear
Finally made it to land
With a petrified Teddy Bear clutching
Captain Kerplank’s good hand

PIRATE: “Okay you wet sponge
We’re finally on firm ground
Now you can stop
Being such a coward”

TEDDY BEAR: “But Sir, where are we?
Teddy wondered aloud
This island is like none other
That we’ve found

Kerplank raised his eyes
And found it plain to see
That this island
Was built of machinery

Steel contraptions towered
Into the thunderous sky
Where neon lights flickered
And flying cars whizzed by

Before Kerplank could answer
They were alerted to a sound
And someone started shouting at them

ROBOT: (*from offstage*) “Put your weapons to the ground!”

PIRATE: “We have no weapons! We come in peace!” Kerplank cried

Trying to hide the sword that hung by his side

ROBOT: "If it is in peace you come then what is your business here?"
And out of the darkness a robot appeared

He had human form
But with a metal skin
And a bright red light
Where his mouth should have been

PIRATE: "Good lord, what are you?"

POPPA/NANNA: Kerplank shouted in shock
And instinctively raised his sword
In a defensive block

"Attackers!" The robot yelled
Sounding the alarm

ROBOT: "Enemies I order you
To immediately disarm!"

A bright flash occurred
Like a ball of flame
And the robot swiped a lightsaber
Towards Teddy Bear's mane

TEDDY BEAR: "Protect me Sir! He's trying to kill me"

POPPA/NANNA: And Teddy Bear ran back towards the direction of the sea
Meanwhile Captain Kerplank was frozen with awe
Because he'd never seen anything like the lightsaber before

PIRATE: *(to himself)* "The greatest swords in the world
I already possess
But surely this blade
Would among them be the best"

"Teddy come back
Don't be such a scared-ey cat
You don't mean to tell me
That you're scared of *that*"

POPPA/NANNA: Teddy stopped short, not believing his ears
Of course he was fleeing, petrified with fear

TEDDY BEAR: "B-b-but Sir...h-h-he has
A thing-a-me-jeb
That looks strong enough
To cut off your head"

