

Three Men In A Boat

by Jerome K. Jerome
Adapted for the stage by Tom Neill

Duration: approximately 1 hour

Characters

Jerome
George
Harris
Montmorency

First performed on 10 April 2008 at South Hill Park
Studio Theatre, Bracknell and directed by Tom Neill
with the following cast

Jerome - Phillip Whiteman
George - Jonny Liron
Harris - Martin Rock
Montmorency - Tom Neill

Then in June 2010 at Pentameters Theatre, London
and directed by Tom Neill with the following cast

Jerome - Paul Taylor
George - Rupert Savage
Harris - Davies Palmer
Montmorency - Tom Neill

Scenes

One -	Three Invalids
Two -	Plans Discussed
Three -	Setting Off
Four -	Afloat In An Open Boat
Five -	The First Night
Six -	Jerome Takes A Swim
Seven -	Magna Carta
Eight -	The Man Who Loves Not Tombs
Nine -	A Fishy Story
Ten -	Flight

Press

‘Gentle... whimsical... imaginatively directed’ - West End Extra
‘★★★★ Well staged... superbly acted... skilfully adapted’ - The Public Reviews
‘Genuinely funny ... a fantastic play’ - Ascot, Windsor & Eton Express
‘★★★★ A buzz and energy that was very uplifting... ingenious’ - Remotegoat

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Scene One - Three Invalids.

Three men and a dog are seated round a table. Smoky.

- MONTY There were four of us - George, William Samuel Harris, Jerome and myself, Montmorency. We were sitting in my study talking about how bad we were. Bad from a medical point of view I mean.
- HARRIS Sometimes I have such extraordinary fits of giddiness that I hardly know what I am doing.
- GEORGE Me too, and I never know what I am doing.
- JEROME My liver is out of order.
- GEORGE Why do you say that?
- JEROME I've just been reading this circular, which details all the symptoms by which a man can tell when his liver is out of order, and I have them all.
- GEORGE What is that?
- HARRIS An advertisement for liver pills.
- GEORGE I've never read a medicine advertisement without thinking that I am suffering from the particular disease in its most virulent form.
- HARRIS I remember going to the British Museum to read up on some slight ailment of which I had a touch - hay fever, I fancy it was. I got into studying diseases generally. Before I had glanced half down the first list of symptoms I was convinced that I had contracted some fearful and devastating scourge. Typhoid fever, Bright's disease, Cholera, Gout. Diphtheria I seemed to have been born with.
- GEORGE An interesting case for the doctor.
- JEROME Did you tell him your symptoms?
- HARRIS No. Life is brief and I feared he might pass away before I had finished. He examined me all the same and wrote out a prescription.
- JEROME What was the treatment?
- GEORGE 1 lb beefsteak with 1 pint bitter every 6 hours.
1 ten mile walk every morning.
1 bed at 11 sharp every night
And don't stuff up your head with things you don't understand.

HARRIS He saved my life!

JEROME You know, I have these symptoms and no mistake. Look here - 'a general disinclination to work of any kind'.

HARRIS I know a simple, old-fashioned remedy for that.

JEROME Administer.

Harris clumps him on the side of the head.

HARRIS Do some work you lazy oaf!

GEORGE In seriousness, I suspect that we are overworked. What we want is rest.

HARRIS And a complete change. Overstraining the brain leads to depression. We want a change of scene to restore the mental equilibrium.

JEROME I agree. Why don't we seek out some retired, old world spot; some half forgotten nook out of reach of the noisy world, and dream away a sunny week among its drowsy, enchanted lanes?

GEORGE A bicycle trip.

HARRIS Sounds humpy to me. No. If you want rest and change, you can't beat a sea trip.

JEROME Absolutely not. My brother in law once went on a sea trip for the benefit of his health. By the second day he wished he hadn't. The ship's cook said to him 'What can I get you, sir?' and his feeble reply was 'Get me out of this'.

HARRIS I have never been able to be sick at sea, but for George's sake perhaps we should consider something else.

GEORGE Let's go up the river. We should have fresh air, exercise, and the constant change of scene will occupy what there is of Harris' mind.

HARRIS Actually, that would suit me to a 'T'.

JEROME Yes, good idea George.

MONTY Woof.

HARRIS No good Montmorency, that's three to one and motion carried.

MONTY I'm not sure I care for the river. It's all very well for these fellows, but there's nothing for me to do. Scenery is not in my line, I don't smoke and if I see a rat, they're bound not to stop. No doubt, they'll start fooling about with the boat and slop me overboard. If you ask me, I call this whole thing bally foolishness.

End of scene.

Scene Two - Plans Discussed.

They spread a map of the river on the table.

GEORGE We'll set out next Saturday morning from Kingston. I know a place where we can get a skiff at a fair price. Now, I can't get away from the City until the afternoon, so you and Harris will have to take the boat up to Chertsey and meet me there.

HARRIS Have you been planning this?

GEORGE Right, shall we camp out or sleep at public houses?

JEROME I fancy camping - stretched out in the silver stillness, lit by pale stars...

HARRIS ...in the freezing torrential rain.

JEROME Where's your poetry Harris?

HARRIS Camping out in rainy weather is not poetic. It is evening, you are wet through and there is a good two inches of water in the boat. You find a place on the bank that is not quite so puddly as all the other places, you lug out your tent and two of you proceed to fix it.

A flashback to Harris trying to fix a tent. Wind and rain. He is holding two corners flat to the ground. He loses each in turn and then recovers. Jerome yanks the tent leaving him face down in the mud.

Here! what are you up to?

JEROME What are you up to?! Let go, can't you?

HARRIS Don't pull it; you've got it all wrong you stupid ass!

JEROME No I haven't!

Harris' hat blows off

HARRIS Bloody hell!

He recovers his corners again.

JEROME Let go your side!

HARRIS I tell you, you've got it all wrong! You stupid idiot.

Harris gives an almighty tug which frees the other side. The wind catches the tent and blows it into his face. He throws it to the ground.

That's it!

Harris and Jerome circle the tent trying to find each other. Eventually, the tent blows away.

BOTH There you are! What did I tell you?

End of flashback.

GEORGE I think you have a point Harris. So let's sleep out on fine nights, and when it's wet we'll stay in like respectable folks. Now, the first thing to settle is what to take with us.

HARRIS I suppose you've planned that too? Good. Grab the grocery catalogue and Jerome, get a bit of pencil and paper and start writing down.

JEROME That's Harris all over - so ready to take the burden of everything and put it on the backs of other people. He reminds me of my Uncle Podger. One time, a picture came home from the frame-makers and was waiting to be put up. You never saw such a commotion when my Uncle Podger undertook to do the job. He said...

A flashback to Harris as Uncle Podger.

HARRIS Leave that to me. Don't worry yourselves about that. I'll do all that.

JEROME And then he would take off his coat, and begin.

HARRIS You girl, go out for sixpenn'orth of nails. Oh come here boy, go after her and say I need them an inch and half. Will, go and get me my hammer. Tom, bring me a ruler - it's next to the hammer. Jim! Run round to Mr. Goggles and ask, will he lend me his spirit level?

GEORGE I've got some picture cord sir.

HARRIS Don't go anywhere Maria, I shall want somebody to hold me the light. Tom! Where's Tom? Tom, come here. When the girl comes back she must go out again for a bit of picture cord. Now, you hand me up the picture.

He labouriously mounts the chair, takes the picture and positions it on the wall.

About here? Yes? Good. Now, hammer. Nail.

He drops the nail as he is about to hit it.

There now the nail's gone.

George and Jerome search for it. Podger directs, absent mindedly putting the hammer in his back pocket. The nail is found.

Right. Nail. Hammer. Well, where's the hammer gone? Seven of you standing there gaping and you don't know what I did with the hammer!

George and Jerome search for it. Podger turns round and it is finally spotted. He finally gets the nail in and the picture up. He labouriously dismounts the chair.

There you are. And to think some people would have had a man in to do a little thing like that!

The picture falls off the wall in slow motion. End of flashback.

JEROME Harris will be just that sort of man when he grows up.

HARRIS So, what could we do with?

GEORGE We must not think of the things we could do with, only the things we can't do without.

HARRIS So, what?

GEORGE We won't take a tent.

HARRIS No tent.

GEORGE We'll have a boat with a canopy - much simpler and more comfortable, if a trifle stuffy.

HARRIS Everything has its drawbacks, as the man said when his mother-in-law died and they came for the funeral expenses.

GEORGE We must take a rug each, a lamp, some soap, toothbrushes and paste, a basin and a couple of big towels.

HARRIS Write all that down.

JEROME Two towels. Yes, how pleasant to wake up on a fresh morning and take a swim before breakfast.

HARRIS Work up an appetite.

JEROME If it will make you eat more than you do ordinarily then I'm against you having a bath at all. We can only tow so much food.

- GEORGE Think of the alternative. It will be much better to have him clean and fresh about the boat.
- HARRIS In that case, I demand my own towel.
- JEROME Three towels.
- GEORGE For clothes, two flannel suits, plenty of under-things, boots as well as boating shoes and lots of handkerchiefs.
- HARRIS Yes, Yes. But what about food?
- GEORGE For breakfast we shall want a frying pan.
- HARRIS Indigestible I would have thought.
- JEROME Don't be an ass.
- GEORGE A teapot, kettle and stove. I suggest we take eggs, bacon, cold meats, tea, bread and butter, jam - but no cheese.
- HARRIS What?!
- JEROME George is right. Cheese makes far too much of itself. It'll go through the hamper and want the whole boat. You can't tell whether you are eating apple pie, German sausage, strawberries or cream. It's all cheese.
- HARRIS Write down cheese.
- JEROME No. I remember a friend of mine buying a cheese in Liverpool. A splendid cheese it was, ripe and mellow, with a two hundred horse power scent that could knock a man over at two hundred yards. I was in Liverpool at the time and my friend tasked me with taking it back to London.

A flashback to Jerome's journey. He is carrying the cheese in a bag.

- HARRIS Ticket please sir. Platform four.

Jerome boards the train and sits down opposite George as a grim man and Harris as a stout lady. The train departs and there is silent motion for a time.

- GEORGE Very close in here, isn't it?

- HARRIS Yes, quite oppressive.

Jerome removes the cheese from the bag. Silent motion. The passengers sniff. And then again more adventurously. And then taking a huge whiff.

GEORGE Dear God, it reminds me of a dead baby!

HARRIS It is disgraceful that a respectable married woman should be harassed in this way!

BOTH Good day!

JEROME From Euston I took the cheese down to my friend's house with the intention of leaving it with his wife.

George enters as the wife.

GEORGE What is it? Tell me the worst.

JEROME It's cheese. I hope you understand that this has nothing to do with me. Tom bought it in Liverpool and asked me to bring it up with me, that's all.

GEORGE What did he say about it?

JEROME He says it is to be kept in a moist place, and that nobody is to touch it.

GEORGE Nobody's likely to. Has he smelt it?!

JEROME He seems greatly attached to it.

GEORGE Do you think he would be upset if I gave a man a sovereign to take it away and bury it?

JEROME I think he would never smile again.

GEORGE Would you mind keeping it for him?

JEROME Madam, for myself I like the smell of cheese and the journey the other day with it from Liverpool I shall ever look back upon as a happy ending to a pleasant holiday. But, in this world, we must consider others. The lady under whose roof I have the honour of residing is a widow and, for all I know, possibly an orphan too. She has a strong, I may say an eloquent, objection to being what she terms 'put upon'. The presence of your husband's cheese in her house she would, I instinctively feel, regard as a 'put upon'; and it shall never be said that I put upon the widow and the orphan.

GEORGE Jerome. It's me or the cheese. I decline to live in the same house as it and I shall take the children to a hotel until it is eaten.

End of flashback.

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JEROME The hotel bill came to fifteen guineas and although he loved cheese, this was beyond his means. He got rid of it, at last, by taking it to a seaside town and burying it on the beach. The place gained quite a reputation for strong air. Weak chested and consumptive people used to throng there for years afterwards.

HARRIS Fond as I am of cheese, perhaps you're both right.

MONTY And so the lengthy list of things we simply couldn't do without was finally finalised. The bags were packed; then unpacked; then packed again and this time with toothbrushes; and eventually strapped up at 10.50pm. After that, we started on the food hampers, and of course I did my best to help out. I sat down on things that weren't ready to be picked up. I arranged the teaspoons in the four corners of the room, tested the consistency of the jam and whenever anyone reached out their hand for anything I supplied them with my cold damp nose. At 12.50pm we finished and went to bed, resolving to be up at half past six. It's now nine o'clock AM.

End of scene.