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TALES FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM

Five short plays adapted by
Doug Goheen

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170 • Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

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(TALES FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM)

ISBN: 978-88680-441-1

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ABOUT THE PLAY

Tales from the Brothers Grimm represents an attempt both to dramatize five of the tales from the Brothers' collection and to do so in a historical context. In this manner, some background is provided to illuminate the Brothers themselves as well as the process through which they went to obtain their tales and the varied sources from which they collected them.

The five dramatized stories, in sequence of presentation, are "The Bremen Town Musicians," "Hans in Luck," "The Fisherman and His Wife," "The Elves and the Shoemaker," and "The Golden Goose." Two of the stories, "Hans in Luck" and "The Elves and the Shoemaker," allow for some participation from children in the audience.

In the original production, eighteen actors were used: nine men and nine women. With the exception of the two actors who portrayed Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, all actors played multiple roles. The breakdown of these actors and roles appears on the following page. A larger cast may be used, of course, by eliminating some or all of the multiple casting.

The original production was performed in a large, open room. "We used a horseshoe-shaped setting with children seated on the floor around the perimeter of the semi-circular playing space. The Brothers' permanently set desk and work area was off to one side," the author said. A video of the original production shows the interesting blocking and lively audience participation as well as the simple costumes. The video is available for sale or for rent from I. E. Clark Publications.

Although an attempt was made at historical accuracy, the only characters to suggest a German dialect were the two brothers and the two additional storytellers, Otto Runge and Frau Viehmann. In the tales, no dialect was used by any character. The German pronunciation of the Grimms' names is something like this: Jacob = YAH-cope; Wilhelm = VILL-helm.

Playing time is about 10 to 15 minutes for each tale, or 60 minutes for all presented together.

BREAKDOWN OF ACTORS AND ROLES

from the Original Production

(B) = The Bremen Town Musicians

(H) = Hans in Luck

(F) = The Fisherman and His Wife

(E) = The Elves and the Shoemaker

(G) = The Golden Goose

ACTOR 1

Jacob Grimm

ACTOR 2

Wilhelm Grimm

ACTOR 3

Dog (B)

Horse Rider (H)

Son 1 (G)

ACTOR 4

Rooster (B)

Scissors-Grinder (H)

Father (G)

ACTOR 5

Hans (H)

Rich Gentleman (E)

King (G)

ACTOR 6

Fisherman (F)

Son 2 (G)

ACTOR 7

Robber 1 (B)

Simpleton (G)

ACTOR 8

Butcher (H)

Elf 2 (E)

Parson (G)

ACTOR 9

Master (H)

Shoemaker (E)

Court Jester (G)

ACTRESS 1

Donkey (B)

Daughter 1 (G)

ACTRESS 2

Cat (B)

Grey-haired Woman (G)

ACTRESS 3

Robber 2 (B)

Country Maid (H)

Daughter 3 (G)

ACTRESS 4

Country Lass (H)

Frau Viehmann (E)

Sexton (G)

ACTRESS 5

Mistress (B)

Mother (H)

Princess (G)

ACTRESS 6

Flounder (F)

Queen (G)

ACTRESS 7

Wife (F)

Daughter 2 (G)

ACTRESS 8

Shoemaker's Wife (E)

Innkeeper (G)

ACTRESS 9

Elf 1 (E)

Mother (G)

Many roles may be played by males or females.

For a larger cast, omit the double casting.

TALES FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM

[At rise, JACOB GRIMM, 30, sits at his writing desk, which he shares with his brother. He speaks as he writes:]

JACOB. "And after this, the robbers never again dared to enter the house." *[WILHELM GRIMM, 29, enters excitedly]*

WILHELM. Jacob! Jacob! I have good news!

JACOB. Patience, little brother. Don't get so excited. Remember your heart.

WILHELM. But, Jacob. At the market, I met old Marie. And finally she told me the tale.

JACOB. Did she now? The one about Hans?

WILHELM. Yes. "Hans in Luck." How many does that make now?

JACOB. We are getting very close, Wilhelm, very close indeed.

WILHELM. Just think, big brother. Soon, our second book of tales shall be completely finished!

JACOB. Two hundred tales! Ten years of searching and gathering...

WILHELM. Listening and writing...

JACOB. A wealth of information for our fatherland.

WILHELM. Mother would be very proud of us.

JACOB. That she would, little brother.

WILHELM. Jacob, do you think the people shall take to our second collection as well as our first?

JACOB. Time will tell, Wilhelm. But first, we must complete the second volume, eh?

WILHELM. Before I tell you Old Marie's tale of Hans, you first tell me how you finished with our musicians.

THE BREMEN TOWN MUSICIANS

JACOB. A good idea. Our musicians. "The Bremen Town Musicians." The story begins, as you recall, with a certain woman who lived on the outskirts of the village of Bremen. Now this woman had an old donkey which for many years had faithfully carried the woman's corn-sacks to the mill. Well, one day when the tired old donkey and her mistress had returned home from just such a trip, the woman saw how the donkey's strength was going.

[The DONKEY and the MISTRESS appear]

MISTRESS. What am I going to do with you? Each day and each trip makes you more and more unfit for your work.

JACOB. And the woman shook her head and went into her house. But the donkey, seeing that no good was in store for her, began to wonder what the future might hold.

DONKEY. More and more unfit for my work? Hee-haw. What does she have in mind for me? Hee-haw.

JACOB. And the donkey tried to think of what to do.

DONKEY. I could go and live with my aunt at the farm in Frankfurt. But that is such a long way. I would probably never make it there. I could run away and join the circus. But then I would be put to work. Oh, dear. Whatever shall I do? Hee-haw [*an unpleasant sound*].

WILHELM. And that's when the idea struck her. Right, Jacob?

JACOB. Right, Wilhelm. The idea to go to Bremen Town.

DONKEY. I know what I'll do! If I can't carry corn-sacks, and I can't go to my aunt's farm in Frankfurt, and I can't join the circus, then I will go to Bremen Town. Surely with my beautiful voice, I can be the town musician. Hee-haw! [*an awful sound*]

JACOB. And with that, the donkey set out for Bremen Town. Now, as she was so old and tired, she didn't move very fast. But her new plan kept her going. After a couple of miles, the donkey came upon an old hound dog lying in the road, gasping like one who has run till he was tired.

DOG. [*Enters and lies down howling mournfully*] A-a-o-o-ugh!

DONKEY. What are you howling for, old fellow?

DOG. Ah, as I am old, and daily grow weaker, and no longer can hunt, my master wanted to kill me, so I took to flight. But now what am I to do? [*Howls*] A-a-o-o-ugh!

DONKEY. Your tale sounds familiar, old friend. I tell you what. I am going to Bremen to be the town musician. Why don't you come with me?

DOG. Bremen Town? But what would I do?

DONKEY. Your voice makes music almost as sweet as my own. Hee-haw. Engage yourself also as a town musician.

DOG. Do you really think I could?

DONKEY. Hee-haw! [*a terrible sound*]

DOG. A-a-o-o-ugh [*almost as bad*].

JACOB. The hound agreed and off the two went on their journey. But before long, they came upon an old cat, sitting on the path, with a face like three rainy days!

CAT. [*Enters and sits*] M-e-o-u-w!

DONKEY. Now, old shaver, what has happened with you?

CAT. Who can be merry when her neck is in danger? Because I am now getting old and my teeth are worn to stumps, and I prefer to sit by the fire and nap rather than chase about after mice, my master wanted to drown me, so I ran away. But now, good advice is scarce. Where am I to go? Me-e-o-u-w! [*almost as bad as the others*]

DOG. Sounds familiar.

DONKEY. That it does.

DOG. [*To Donkey*] Do you think ...?

DONKEY. Yes, I do. [*To Cat*] See here, old friend...

DOG. You can come with us to Bremen Town.

CAT. But what for? Me-o-u-w. What would an old, useless feline do in Bremen Town?

DONKEY. We're going to be the town musicians. Hee-haw.

DOG. A-a-o-o-ugh.

DONKEY. And since you understand night music, you can join us in our serenade!

CAT. Would there be an occasional plate of milk as well?

DOG. Of course.

CAT. [*Happily*] Me-e-o-u-w.

JACOB. The cat thought well of their idea and decided to join them on their journey. But before long, the three fugitives came to a farmyard where a rooster was crowing with all his might.

ROOSTER. [*Enters*] Cock-a-doodle-doo! [*It would wake the dead*]

DONKEY. Your crow goes through and through one

ROOSTER. Alas, guests are coming for Sunday. The housewife has no pity, and has told the cook she intends to eat me in the soup tomorrow, and this evening I am to have my head cut off. So now I am crowing at the top of my lungs while I still can. Cock-a-doodle-doo!

DONKEY. Listen, red-comb. You had better come away with us.

DOG. We're on our way to Bremen...

CAT. To be town musicians! [*All three animals make their noises in unison. (If your audience doesn't stop up their ears, you have failed)*]

ROOSTER. I have a voice of high quality as well. Cock-a-doodle-do!

CAT. Come with us and we will make beautiful music together!

JACOB. And the four set out on their journey together... the donkey [*DONKEY brays*], the dog [*DOG howls*], the cat [*CAT mews*] and the rooster [*ROOSTER crows*]. But as they were all getting on in years, they could not reach the town of Bremen in one day.

DOG. I'm thirsty.

CAT. And I'm hungry.

ROOSTER. And I need to get some rest so I can crow bright and early in the morning.

DONKEY. Look! There's a light up ahead!

CAT. Maybe we can rest there for the night.

[The four cautiously approach the house, wherein two ROBBERS sit eating]

ROBBER 1. I haven't had food this good since we robbed the old maiden's house two months ago.

ROBBER 2. Well, don't be so sloppy. You're spilling crumbs all over. You eat like an old hound dog. *[DOG starts to howl, offended. CAT quickly covers his mouth]*

ROOSTER. *[To Donkey]* What do you see? What are they doing?

DONKEY. Sh-h-h-h! I see a table covered with good things to eat and drink and two robbers sitting at it, enjoying themselves.

CAT. That would be just the thing for us!

ROBBER 2. Hand me one of those chicken legs.

ROOSTER. Chicken legs!

DONKEY. *[Placing hand over Rooster's mouth]* Sh-h-h-h!

DOG. If only we were there.

DONKEY. Listen, I have a plan to drive away the robbers. Follow me.

JACOB. Then the animals took counsel together to manage a plan and drive away the robbers. Quietly, they snuck closer to the little house until they were just outside the door. Then, at a given signal...

[The four ANIMALS make a horrendous noise with their braying, howling, mewing, and crowing]

ROBBER 1. Help! A robber! A robber!

ROBBER 2. That's not a robber, you fool! *We're* the robbers!

ROBBER 1. Then what is it?

ROBBER 2. It must be... a ghost! *[Both ROBBERS scream wildly and exit]*

DONKEY. Come, now. The food is ours. *[The ANIMALS cheer and gather around the table to begin eating]*

JACOB. The four companions now sat down at the table, well content with what was left, and ate as if they were going to fast for a month. As soon

as they were done, they put out the light and each found for himself a comfortable sleeping place. Meanwhile, the two robbers had not gone far, when...

ROBBER 2. Wait a minute. Look there. The light has gone out. We ought not to have let ourselves be frightened out of our wits.

ROBBER 1. *[Still very frightened]* But a ghost... You said it was a ghost.

ROBBER 2. Forget what I said, you clumsy fool. Now you march right up there and see what's going on.

ROBBER 1. Me? Why me?

ROBBER 2. Do you see anyone else around to do it?

ROBBER 1. *[Looking around]* No.

ROBBER 2. Then it's got to be you.

ROBBER 1. But I'm afraid.

ROBBER 2. Silly man. There's nothing to be afraid of. Besides, you're a robber, aren't you? Now, go.

[ROBBER 1 advances cautiously to the house. He first encounters the CAT, who spits at him and scratches his face. In his flight from the cat, the robber stumbles upon the DOG, who bites him in the leg. As the robber holds up his leg in pain, the DONKEY kicks him with her legs, and the ROOSTER crows madly. Finally, the ROBBER manages to retreat to his partner]

ROBBER 2. Well, what happened?

ROBBER 1. There is a horrible witch sitting just inside the door. She spat on me and scratched me with her long claws.

ROBBER 2. A witch?

ROBBER 1. And as I ran from the witch, a man with a knife stabbed me in the leg.

ROBBER 2. What?

ROBBER 1. And then a dark monster beat me with a wooden club.

ROBBER 2. A monster?!

ROBBER 1. And as I ran through the yard, a judge called out, *[sounding like a rooster]* "Bring the rogue here to me!" So I got away as fast as I could.

ROBBER 2. *[As she is exiting]* Well if that isn't the silliest thing I've ever heard!

JACOB. And after this, the robbers never again dared to enter the house; but it suited the four musicians so well that they decided never to leave it, and to this day the minstrels are still there.

WILHELM. An excellent story, brother.

JACOB. Thank you, Wilhelm. And now it is time for your tale.

WILHELM. Actually, Old Marie's tale. She told me while she was shopping for vegetables.

HANS IN LUCK

JACOB. The tale of "Hans in Luck."

WILHELM. Yes, Hans, who had served his master for seven years.

[HANS and his MASTER have entered]

HANS. Master, my time is up; now I should be glad to go back home to my mother. Give me my wages.

MASTER. You have served me faithfully and honestly. As the service was, so shall the reward be. Hold out your handkerchief.

WILHELM. And as Hans did, his kindly master dropped into the kerchief a large lump of gold. *[It's so heavy HANS nearly drops it]*

MASTER. Now be on your way, Hans. Your mother shall be very proud. Farewell and Godspeed. *[He exits]*

WILHELM. And Hans set out on the way home with the gold wrapped in his handkerchief. As he went on, he met a horseman trotting quickly and merrily by on a lovely horse.

[The HORSEMAN obtains a "horse" from the audience, as does each of the next three traders. Children volunteer to become the horse, the cow, the pig, and the goose. The "riding," "carrying," etc. are done in mime]

HANS. Ah, what a fine horse it is you have to ride.

HORSEMAN. Hello there, Hans. Why do you go on foot, then?

HANS. I must, for I have this lump to carry home. It is true that it is gold, but it is so heavy that it hurts my shoulder.

HORSEMAN. I will tell you what, Hans. We will exchange: I will give you my horse, and you can give me your lump of gold.

HANS. With all my heart. But I can tell you, you will have to crawl along with it.

HORSEMAN. [*Handing Hans the rein*] Now you must hold the bridle tight in your hands, like this. And if you want to go at a really good pace, you must click your tongue and call out, "Jup! Jup!" [*The HORSEMAN exits*]

WILHELM. Hans was heartily delighted as he rode away bold and free. After a while, he thought to go faster, so he began to click his tongue.

HANS. Jup! Jup!

WILHELM. The horse put himself into a sharp trot; and before Hans knew where he was, he was thrown off and lying in a ditch. The horse would have gone off, too, if it had not been stopped by a young country maid who happened by just then driving a cow before her.

MAID. [*Helping Hans to his feet*] Here, now. What has happened?

HANS. It is a poor joke, this riding. Especially when one gets hold of a mare like this that kicks and throws one off, so that one has a chance of breaking one's neck! Never again will I mount it. Now, I like your cow, for one can walk quietly behind her, and have, over and over, one's milk, butter, and cheese every day without fail. What would I not give to have such a cow?

MAID. Well, if it would give you so much pleasure, I do not mind giving you my cow for your horse.

WILHELM. And so the deal was made. And the country maiden jumped on the horse and rode quickly away.

[*"HORSE" returns to audience. MAID exits*]

WILHELM. Now as Hans drove his cow quietly before him, he thought over his lucky bargain.

HANS. If only I have a morsel of bread—and that can hardly fail me—I can eat butter and cheese with it as often as I like. If I am thirsty, I can milk my cow and drink the milk. My goodness, what more can I want? In fact, I am feeling very hot and thirsty right now. I will milk the cow and refresh myself with the milk.

WILHELM. But as poor Hans tried to milk his cow holding his cap underneath, he worked in such a clumsy way that the impatient beast at last gave him such a blow with its hind foot that he fell on the ground, and for a long time could not think where he was.

HANS. [*Dazed*] Where am I?

WILHELM. By good fortune, a butcher came along the road just then leading a young pig.

BUTCHER. [*Helping Hans up*] Here now, Hans. What sort of trick is this?

HANS. I am on my way home to my mother. But the journey grows long. So I was trying to milk my cow to give me a drink.

BUTCHER. [*Handing him a flask*] Here. Have some ale and refresh yourself. The cow will certainly give no milk. It is an old beast, best fit for the butcher.

HANS. Well, well. Who would have thought it? Certainly it is a fine thing when one can kill a beast like that at home; what meat one has! But I do not much care for beef; it is not juicy enough for me. A young pig like that now is the thing to have. It tastes quite different, and there are the sausages!

BUTCHER. Listen, Hans, out of love for you, I will exchange my pig for your cow.

HANS. Heaven repay you for your kindness!

WILHELM. And again, the deal was made.

[*"COW" returns to audience. BUTCHER exits*]

WILHELM. Hans drove his pig before him thinking to himself how everything was going just as he wished.

HANS. Everything is going just as I wish!

WILHELM. Presently, he met with a young country lass who was carrying a fine white goose under her arm.

LASS. [*Entering*] Good morning.

HANS. Good morning, country lassie. Where are you taking that goose?

LASS. To a christening feast. Just lift her. [*HANS does*] See how heavy she is? She has been fattened up for the last eight weeks. Whoever has a bit of her when she is roasted will have to wipe the juice from both sides of his mouth.

HANS. True, she is a good weight. But my pig is no bad one.

LASS. Look here. It may not be all right with your pig. I have just come from the village where the mayor himself just had one stolen out of its sty. I fear that you got hold of it there.

HANS. Good heavens!

LASS. They have sent out some people, and it would be a bad business if they caught you with the pig. At the very least, you would be shut up in the dark hole.

HANS. Can you help me out of this fix? You know more about this place than I do.

LASS. I risk something at this game. But I shall not be the cause of your getting into trouble. Give me your pig and I will give you my goose.

WILHELM. And they exchanged their animals.

JACOB. This is a very interesting tale, Wilhelm. What will happen when Hans arrives home?

WILHELM. Ah, now it is time for *you* to have patience, Jacob. Hans took the goose under his arm and continued on his journey.

["PIG" returns to audience. LASS exits]

HANS. When I think it over properly, I have even gained by the exchange. First, there is the good roast-meat, then the quantity of fat which will drip from it and which will give me dripping for my bread for many days, and lastly the beautiful white feathers—I will have my pillow stuffed with them, and I shall then go to sleep without rocking. How glad my mother will be!

WILHELM. As Hans was going through the last village before arriving home, there stood a scissors-grinder sharpening blades.

HANS. All's well with you, as you are so merry with your grinding.

SCISSORS-GRINDER. Yes, my trade has a golden foundation. A real grinder is a man who as often as he puts his hand into his pocket finds gold in it. But where did you buy that fine goose?

HANS. I did not buy it at all, but exchanged a pig for it.

SCISSORS-GRINDER. And a fair exchange it was. Now if only you can get on so far as to hear the money jingle in your pocket whenever you stand up, you will have made your fortune.

HANS. How shall I manage that?

SCISSORS-GRINDER. You must be a grinder as I am. Nothing is needed to do so but a grindstone; the rest finds itself. I have one here; it is certainly a little worm, but you need not give anything for it but your goose. Will you have it?

HANS. How can you ask? I shall be the luckiest fellow on earth. If I have money whenever I put my hand in my pocket, why should I ever worry again?

WILHELM. And for the fifth time on his journey home, Hans struck a deal.

[SCISSORS-GRINDER exits]

HANS. How lucky I am that everything I want happens to me! I must have been born a Sunday child!

WILHELM. Now, as Hans had been on his legs since daybreak, he began to feel tired.

HANS. I am beginning to feel tired.

WILHELM. Soon, he could only go on with great trouble. The grindstone weighed him down dreadfully, and he could not help thinking how nice it would be if he did not have to carry it just then.

HANS. I will stop here by this stream to rest and drink and refresh myself before continuing on my journey.

WILHELM. But when Hans knelt down to drink from the stream, the grindstone slipped from his hands into the water.

HANS. How lucky I am to have this heavy stone sink to the bottom of the stream beyond my reach! For this is the only thing that has troubled me. There is no man under the sun so fortunate as I!

WILHELM. And after Hans had rested and had finally completed his journey home, his poor mother rejoiced in her son's arrival and cried tears of happiness.

MOTHER. Hans, my boy! After all these years, you have finally returned home.

HANS. Yes, Mother.

MOTHER. And what have you brought with you? What have you earned for your seven years of hard work?

WILHELM. Hans thought to himself and began to tell his mother the long story.

MOTHER. So you exchanged the gold for the horse?

WILHELM. She listened attentively...

MOTHER. The horse for the cow...

WILHELM. And seemed to grow a little impatient...

MOTHER. The cow for the pig...

WILHELM. Perhaps a *lot* impatient...

MOTHER. The pig for the goose...

WILHELM. Until Hans started to become anxious...

MOTHER. The goose for the grindstone...

WILHELM. That maybe his mother was not so happy to have him home after all.

MOTHER. And the grindstone was lost at the bottom of the stream.

HANS. It seemed a blessing at the time. Please do not be angry. In truth, I have nothing to show for my seven years of labor.