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# A Fairy Tale Life: The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen



Comedy by Ernie Nolan

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# A Fairy Tale Life: The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen

**Comedy. By Ernie Nolan.** Cast: 7m., 4w., or 6m., 4w., extras. Thirty or more roles possible. This fantastical tale weaves together biographical elements of Hans Christian Andersen's childhood with his famous stories: *The Nightingale*, *Thumbelina*, *The Swineherd* and many more! Seventeen-year-old Hans Christian Andersen, the son of a simple shoemaker, is a real-life ugly duckling dreaming of the day he will become famous. Attending school for the first time as a teenager, he's not only surrounded by classmates years younger but also bullied and teased for the stories he shares. When the intimidating Headmaster Meisling announces a contest for the student with the "most incredible talent," Hans sets to work on creating delicate paper cutouts in hopes of winning the coveted prize: a trip to Copenhagen. Shortly after starting, he is interrupted by Edvard, the smartest boy in school. As an unlikely friendship begins to develop between the two outsiders, Hans shares the fascinating story of his young life as well as new stories he has created. Just when it looks as if Hans will finally have a happy ending, Klaus, a bullying classmate, destroys his entry for the contest and dashes his hopes for visiting Copenhagen. Summoning all the confidence and creativity that he can muster, Hans creates a powerful and moving entry that proves this ugly duckling is really a swan! *Unit set. Approximate running time: One hour. Code: FC2.*

Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

ISBN-10 1-58342-712-0  
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-712-5



9 781583 427125

[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)



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311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
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Printed on recycled paper

# **A FAIRY TALE LIFE**

## **The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen**

By  
ERNIE NOLAN



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(A Fairy Tale Life  
The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-712-5

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*A Fairy Tale Life: The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen* was commissioned by Emerald City Theatre, Chicago. Made possible by the Anne Shaw Fellowship. ASSITEJ-USA.

Emerald City Theatre's *A Fairy Tale Life: The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen* premiered at the Apollo Theater, Chicago, January 19, 2008.

## ORIGINAL CAST

Hans Christian Andersen . . . . . Tim Frank  
Edvard. . . . . Rawson Vint  
Klaus/Alfonse/Flower . . . . . Kurt Picklemann  
Meisling/Chorus/Ballet, Theatre Masters/  
Mr. Mole/Flower/King with Largest Kingdom/  
Emperor . . . . . Michael Kingston  
Troll/Moses/Flower/King with Largest Kingdom  
Attendant/Courtier . . . . . Ty Golde  
Papa/King of Denmark/Fieldmouse/  
Lord in Waiting . . . . . Michael Rashid  
Boy Student/Ballet Dancer/Morten/Flower/  
King with Largest Kingdom Attendant/Demon. . Matt Gottlieb  
Boy Student/Red Shoes Dancer/Voice of Ilsa/  
Thumb's Mother/Flower/Princess/Courtier . . . Meghan Wilson  
Boy Student/Ida/Voice of Ilka/Thumbelina/  
Poor Little Kitchen Girl . . . . . Kristen Pickering  
Mama/Opera Singer/Swallow/Flower/  
Nightingale . . . . . Kerri Van Auken  
Grandma/Mother Toad/Flower/  
Lady in Waiting/Courtier . . . . . Mickey Crocker

## PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Director . . . . .	Ernie Nolan
Lighting Designer. . . . .	John Horan
Assistant Lighting Designer. . . . .	Patrick King
Set Designer . . . . .	Christopher Ash
Properties Designer . . . . .	Katie Schweiger
Costume Designer. . . . .	Kate Stranksy
Assistant Costume Designer . . . . .	Iris Baninum-Houle
Puppet Designer . . . . .	Dave Herzog Marionettes
Sound Designer. . . . .	Joe Court
Technical Director . . . . .	Josh Lansing
Stage Manager . . . . .	Preeti Nath
Assistant Stage Manager. . . . .	Sarah Lackner
Production Manager . . . . .	Laura E. Scales
Associate Producer . . . . .	Sarah Lopez
Executive/Artistic Director . . . . .	Karen Cardarelli



# A FAIRY TALE LIFE

## The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen

### CHARACTERS

Hans Christian	Moses
Edvard	Morten
Headmaster Meisling	Swallow
Klaus	Fieldmouse
Mama	Mr. Mole
Grandma	King with Largest Kingdom
Papa	Princess
King of Denmark	Lady in Waiting
Ballet Master	Other Lady in Waiting
Choral Master	Lord in Waiting
Director of Theatre	Nightingale
Ilsa the Red Dancing Shoe	Poor Little Kitchen Girl
Ilka the Red Dancing Shoe	Demon
Lady in Red Shoes	Students
Troll	Ballerinas
Ida	Opera Singers
Thumbelina's Mother	Flowers
Thumbelina	Courtiers
Mother Toad	Members of Emperor's Court
Alfonse	

Can be performed with a cast of 10-11 with doubling or more. With extras and no doubling, there are more than 30 roles in the play.

## DOUBLING FOR A CAST OF 10

Actor 1 (m)	Hans Christian Andersen
Actor 2 (m)	Edvard
Actor 3 (m)	Klaus/Alfonse/Flower
Actor 4 (m)	Meisling/Chorus, Ballet, Theatre Masters/Mole/ Flower/King with Largest Kingdom/Emperor
Actor 5 (m)	Troll/Moses/Flower/ King with Largest Kingdom Attendant/Demon
Actor 6 (m)	Papa/King of Denmark/Fieldmouse/Flower/ King with Largest Kingdom Attendant/Lord in Waiting
Actor 1 (f)	Boy Student/Red Shoes Dancer/Voice of Ilsa/ Thumb's Mother/Flower/Princess/Courtier
Actor 2 (f)	Boy Student/Ida/Voice of Ilka/Thumbelina/ Poor Little Kitchen Girl
Actor 3 (f)	Mama/Morten/Swallow/Flower/Nightingale
Actor 4 (f)	Grandma/Mother Toad/Flower/Lady in Waiting/ Courtier

## TIME AND PLACE

A schoolyard in Slagelse, Denmark, 1822, and the fantastical locations of Hans' imagination.

## NOTE

The script contains **Fairy Tale Moments**. These should be highly theatrical moments where drab reality is suspended and the world becomes highly theatrical and magical. They should be explored through music, dance, puppetry, gymnastics, and basically be incredibly enchanting.

# A FAIRY TALE LIFE

## The Story of Young Hans Christian Andersen

*(A schoolyard in Slagelse, Denmark, 1822. HANS CHRISTIAN, a gangly, awkward boy of 17, is seen on-stage making paper cutouts. He makes delicate cuts with great precision in order to make his intricate art. Several boys who are younger than he, around the ages of 11 and 12, enter led by KLAUS. They sneak up on HANS CHRISTIAN and then pounce.)*

KLAUS. What a sight!

HANS CHRISTIAN. Leave me alone, Klaus!

ANOTHER STUDENT. What's the great gawker doing now?

ANOTHER STUDENT. He's so odd!

KLAUS. Is he playing with paper dolls?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Just let me be! You wouldn't understand.

KLAUS. Oh, we wouldn't? *(He steps closer and picks up an old book, 1,001 Arabian Nights, out of HANS CHRISTIAN's bag.)* What's this old thing?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Do not touch that. Never touch any of my things! If you knew any better, you'd go away right now. Don't make me call my troll!

*(The boys freeze and become silent.)*

KLAUS. What did you just say? Don't make me punch you in the stomach.

HANS CHRISTIAN. I have a troll in the woods that protects me, and if you don't... *(The boys erupt into fits of uncontrollable laughter.)* Stop! Stop laughing, all of you! It's true! I do!

*(KLAUS mocks HANS CHRISTIAN by squawking like a duck.)*

HEADMASTER MEISLING *(offstage)*. What's going on there?

*(The group becomes silent at the sound of HEADMASTER MEISLING's voice.)*

HANS CHRISTIAN. Oh no, the monster!

KLAUS. Meisling! Quickly!

*(The students quickly run and line up in a straight line. Enter HEADMASTER MEISLING. Silence.)*

HEADMASTER MEISLING. What was that infernal noise?

KLAUS. It was Andersen squawking again, sir.

HEADMASTER MEISLING. Mr. Andersen! Since you've arrived, our daily routine has been disrupted every single day. One moment you're asleep in class because you say you slept on a pea the night before! The next you're late because a flying trunk took a wrong turn. Another you miss class entirely because you lost your enchanted gashoes. And today's antic?

KLAUS. He was going to send a troll after us.

*(The students laugh.)*

HEADMASTER MEISLING. A troll?

HANS CHRISTIAN. My troll in the woods protects me, and he was about to...

*(The students laugh louder.)*

HEADMASTER MEISLING. Andersen, don't be ridiculous!

HANS CHRISTIAN. I'm not. My grandmother taught me...

HEADMASTER MEISLING. *I* am your teacher now, Mr. Country Bumpkin!! You are forbidden to tell any more of these fairy stories!

*(Fairy Tale Moment. The stage freezes except HANS CHRISTIAN. A TROLL enters and messes with KLAUS' uniform cap. He waves to HANS CHRISTIAN, who sadly waves back. The TROLL exits. MEISLING continues his tirade.)*

HEADMASTER MEISLING (*cont'd*). You've been sent to my school, away from the city, not to become some great teller of tales. You're here to be improved, to be made into a conventional member of society. This is a place where young men grow up to be like their fathers.

KLAUS. Not like the duckyard you were born in, Andersen! (*He squawks.*)

HEADMASTER MEISLING. Mr Borgvold! (*KLAUS stops.*) Everyone, please, the motto of our school...

STUDENTS (*including HANS CHRISTIAN and KLAUS*). Order, regularity, diligence.

HEADMASTER MEISLING. Andersen, you must follow in the words of the great Cicero and let your desires be ruled by reason. (*Back to the students.*) Now, everyone, in addition to your Latin translations, I have a challenge for you this afternoon. It's a little competition. The theme: "What is your most incredible talent?" The student who impresses me the most and a guest of their choice will accompany my wife and I to Copenhagen next week...

HANS CHRISTIAN. Copenhagen? I...

(*HEADMASTER MEISLING shoots HANS CHRISTIAN a look and he stops talking.*)

HEADMASTER MEISLING. You have until the end of the afternoon to prepare. Now, back in to school and get to work. (*MEISLING files the students out. He turns back to HANS CHRISTIAN. KLAUS lingers back as well.*) Andersen, don't even think about competing with one of your fairy stories. If you do, it'll be tossed into the garbage bin! Now collect your things and come in-

side. (*MEISLING passes KLAUS.*) And fix your cap, Mr. Borgvold!

(*KLAUS feels the top of his head and is shocked that his cap is not as it was before. MEISLING exits. KLAUS comes forward and squawks at HANS CHRISTIAN.*)

HEADMASTER MEISLING (*cont'd., offstage*). Klaus!

(*KLAUS begins to exit back in the direction of the school. A bird is heard chirping. He picks up a rock and throws it in the direction of the sound. He laughs at himself. KLAUS exits. HANS CHRISTIAN busily gets back to work at his paper cuttings. A moment later, EDVARD, one of the students, runs on worriedly...*)

EDVARD. Oh no, where is everyone?!?!

(*HANS CHRISTIAN, surprised that someone is talking to him, looks at EDVARD, shrugs, and returns to his cutting.*)

EDVARD (*cont'd.*). Headmaster Meisling will be furious with me! I just sat down to finish my Latin homework under that tree and I fell asleep. Look at me! I'm late *and* I haven't finished my translations. I'll never stay first in our class if I continue to...

HANS CHRISTIAN. Are you talking to me?

EDVARD. Excuse me?

HANS CHRISTIAN. You've never talked to me before.

(*There is an awkward moment.*)



EDVARD. Well...I've wanted to talk to you, but the others have always been around. I don't like it when they make fun of you.

HANS CHRISTIAN. Oh, that's life, you see. (*Matter of fact.*) First you go through terrible suffering, and then you become famous.

EDVARD. Guess I'll become famous too! They make fun of me because I get good grades...

HANS CHRISTIAN. I'm sorry. I really don't have time to talk. I have to prepare for the monster's contest.

EDVARD. Contest? Did I miss an announcement?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Yes. Monster Meisling is holding a contest. The student with the most incredible talent and a guest of their choice get to travel to Copenhagen with him and his wife next week.

EDVARD. Do you think you can win?

HANS CHRISTIAN (*frustrated with EDVARD's chattering*). Do you?

EDVARD. Oh, oh no! Not at all. I don't have any amazing talents. It's a shame too. I would love to get back to the city. I haven't seen my father in months. He's been so busy with work, he hasn't been able to visit.

HANS CHRISTIAN. But you're the smartest boy at school. That takes talent.

EDVARD. Oh, no. I've just learned to learn properly, that's all. But the stories you tell. Now that's something special!

HANS CHRISTIAN. Do you really think so?

EDVARD. Absolutely! And once you win you can pick me to go with you!

HANS CHRISTIAN. Why would I do that?

EDVARD. Who else are you going to take? Klaus Borgvold? *(He laughs. HANS CHRISTIAN finds no humor in EDVARD's comment and returns to his cuttings.)*

HANS CHRISTIAN. I don't have to take anyone.

EDVARD. Yes, of course. It's your decision. But why do you need to get to Copenhagen anyway? Are you from there?

HANS CHRISTIAN. No, I'm not like you wealthy boys. I'm from a "duckyard."

EDVARD. A duckyard?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Well, practically...Odense. *(He sticks out his tongue in disgust.)* But in the end, I am merely a poor peasant lad over whom a royal mantle has been thrown.

EDVARD. What's been thrown over you?

HANS CHRISTIAN. To put it simply, three years ago I left home for Copenhagen. I was only fourteen.

*(For a moment the schoolyard becomes Odense, 1819. Enter GRANDMA hurriedly.)*

GRANDMA. Quickly, Hans Christian! Get your bag. She's going to try to stop you from leaving.

EDVARD. Is that your mother?

HANS CHRISTIAN. My grandmother. She's shared with me the most wonderful stories, for she was alive long before Mother and Father.

*(Enter MAMA.)*

MAMA. Hans Christian, you can't leave me. I'll be all alone!

HANS CHRISTIAN (*explaining*). That's my mother. She works her fingers to the bone so that I can have a good life.

GRANDMA. Alone? You'll have me to help you!

MAMA. You aren't any help. Always telling stories, never working. I need him to stay.

GRANDMA. But the gypsy agreed with my stories about the boy. He is destined to become famous!

HANS CHRISTIAN. The gypsy says that I will be like a wild bird flying high up and grand. That I'll have great success the likes of which the world has never seen.

MAMA. As a tailor in our town!

GRANDMA. Nonsense! He will go to Copenhagen and return the family name to glory like it was once upon a time!

MAMA. You have put silly ideas into his head! How will he survive on his own?

GRANDMA. We've saved a sum fit for a prince.

MAMA. How much?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Thirteen rigs-dollars.

MAMA. He'll starve! I know the difficulties of being on your own at a young age. When I was a girl I sold matches on street corners, barefoot and shivering in the snow. I don't want the same hardships for him.

*(GRANDMA pulls HANS CHRISTIAN over for a moment alone.)*

GRANDMA. Now, Hans Christian, it takes great strength to believe in yourself. But in case you find yourself doubting, I'm sending one of the trolls from the wood to

look out for you. He'll make sure you happen upon no harm. Do you have everything you need?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Everything. A change of clothes and Papa's book. (*GRANDMA kisses him farewell.*) Farewell, Grandma!

GRANDMA. Your papa would be so proud!

HANS CHRISTIAN. Goodbye, Mother!

MAMA. Watch! You'll get no farther than the next village, get frightened, and turn back. (*HANS CHRISTIAN looks for a more heartfelt farewell. MAMA reluctantly steps forward and kisses him.*) Or you'll go to Copenhagen and, like your grandmother says, return the family name to glory like it was...

GRANDMA & MAMA ...once upon a time.

*(MAMA and GRANDMA exit. The scene returns to the schoolyard.)*

EDVARD. That sounds just like one of your fairy stories. But your father wasn't there. He didn't say goodbye.

HANS CHRISTIAN. No...but I knew my papa was with me in spirit because I had this present... (*He takes out the copy of 1,001 Arabian Nights, the book from the opening.*)

EDVARD. Did he give it to you?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Yes. (*Reading the cover of the new book.*) 1,001 Arabian Nights!

EDVARD. Is it a fairy story?

HANS CHRISTIAN. Not fairies, genies. One is trapped inside a lamp, and when a boy named Aladdin finds the lamp, he rubs it and frees the genie. In thanks, he grants him three wishes and Aladdin becomes...

*(PAPA enters. For a moment the schoolyard becomes PAPA's workshop in Odense, 1816.)*

PAPA. A prince among men! Yes, that's what you'll become if you learn from those stories, Hans Christian.

HANS CHRISTIAN. My papa was only a shoemaker, but to me he seemed like the richest man in the world.

PAPA. For no matter how silly or strange or different a thing may seem, it surely has a lesson that we can learn from. Now, I wish I could stay and read with you, but I must be off to deliver Ilsa... *(He takes out a pair of red dancing shoes and lifts each shoe with each name.)*

ILSA THE RED DANCING SHOE *(voiceover)*. Pleasure to meet you!

PAPA. ...and Ilka...

ILKA THE RED DANCING SHOE *(voiceover)*. Why, hello!

PAPA. ...to the Duchess Von Franz.

ILSA THE RED DANCING SHOE *(voiceover)*. I do hope our new owner treats us well!

ILKA THE RED DANCING SHOE *(voiceover)*. I hope we get along with her stockings.

ILSA THE RED DANCING SHOE *(voiceover)*. I hope she washes her stockings!

*(PAPA and the boys laugh. PAPA kisses the top of HANS CHRISTIAN's head and exits. HANS CHRISTIAN then talks to EDVARD.)*

EDVARD. Those were talking shoes.