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Thunder Mountain

Commissioned by Springfield Little Theatre
and funded by Kraft Foods Corporation Inc.

Winner of the Pittsburgh Playworks Festival

CHARACTERS

JOANNA, teenager, brave and determined

THOMAS (or GRETA), her younger sibling, close in age

BAKER'S APPRENTICE, m or f, preteen or teen

PETER (or BRIDGET), friend to Thomas and Joanna,
teenager, good-hearted, comical

ADDITIONAL VILLAGERS (optional), m or f

DRAGON, f, may be a puppet articulated by one or more
people

SILHOUETTES (optional), two or more, m and f; may be
shadow puppets

YOUNG DRAGONS, any number; may be puppets

BAKER'S APPRENTICE and PETER (BRIDGET) may be doublecast as SILHOUETTES and/or DRAGON for a smaller cast of 4, with or without shadow and YOUNG DRAGON puppets. If ADDITIONAL VILLAGERS are used and extras are desired, actors and/or audience members may create the obstacles that stand in the way of the journey up the mountain: wind, wild animals, tree limbs, vines, rocks, etc., as well as YOUNG DRAGONS and a fuller cast of SILHOUETTES. A montage of ADDITIONAL VILLAGERS may also open the play, scurrying across the stage from various directions, eyeing one another suspiciously, hiding the goods they're carrying.

TIME: When there were dragons...

SETTING: Thunder Mountain and the barren valley below.

The action moves from road to mountain trail to mountain top, distinguished by lighting. Sets may be minimal.

PLAYING TIME: about 40 minutes

Thunder Mountain

AT RISE: The stage is dark. There is a sudden flash of LIGHTNING, quickly followed by an ominous roll of THUNDER. Overlapping this is the fearsome sound of the Dragon's ROAR. LIGHTS come up very slightly, as if the world were bathed in cold starlight. PETER and BAKER'S APPRENTICE enter from opposite sides of the stage. They each carry a lighted candle or lantern. Both are cold, weak with hunger, and wary.

PETER. Baker's Apprentice! I've half a dozen eggs here. Will you trade for some of your bread?

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. My master forbids me to trade with anyone.

PETER. But why? We've always traded before.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. How can I be sure your eggs are fresh and good to eat? I've seen your chickens. Like everything else in this forsaken village, they're sickly and weak.

PETER. Perhaps that's because your master refuses to share even a cupful of his precious grain.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. And why should he? He needs it to bake bread for himself and his family.

PETER. We've had no bread or meat or milk for many weeks. My sister is ill—

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. Do you suppose there's no illness in my family?

PETER. What are we to do?

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. There's nothing we *can* do. But this I know: My master's bread is good. There's no telling about your eggs, which are very likely rotten.

PETER. Keep your bread, then. I've no doubt it's stale and grisly with mold.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. You'll never know, will you? For I have every intention of keeping it, and keeping it safe, where it won't be found by you or any of our meddling neighbors. You'd be wise to hide what little you have as well.

(BAKER'S APPRENTICE exits, huffily. There is another clap of THUNDER, followed by the Dragon's ROAR.)

PETER *(looks up, over audiences heads, toward Thunder Mountain, shakes his fist and shouts)*. Cursed dragon! Return the sun to its rightful place in the sky before my poor sister dies of your treachery—and the selfishness of this miserable village!

(As PETER sinks to his knees in despair, THOMAS and JOANNA hurry on, sharing the weight of a basket of apples between them. They also carry a candle or lantern.)

JOANNA *(running to PETER's side)*. Peter! What's wrong? Are you ill?

PETER. More sick at heart than in body. My sister is dying from lack of nourishment, and no one in this village will help her.

THOMAS. They're all worried about their own families. There's sickness everywhere since...

(Another clap of THUNDER and ROAR. They cringe.)

JOANNA. Since the dragon stole the sun.

THOMAS. Since our farms began to wither and rot.

PETER. Since our neighbors began to hoard everything
they have—the baker his bread—

JOANNA. The shepherd his flock—

THOMAS. The dairy maid her milk and cheese—

JOANNA. We still have some apples to share with you,
Peter.

PETER. I'll gladly trade for a few of our eggs. The baker's
apprentice claims they're no good, and perhaps they
could be fresher, but they're all we have left.

THOMAS *(as they trade a few eggs and apples)*. We'll
bring these right home to Father.

JOANNA. Perhaps they will help him feel better.

PETER. Is your father ill, too?

JOANNA. He grows weaker every day.

PETER. Like my poor little Tanya.

THOMAS. The very young and the old feel the suffering
most.

PETER. The rest of us will feel it soon enough. And every-
one says there's nothing we can do.

THOMAS *(after exchanging a glance with JOANNA)*.
We've come to a decision, Joanna and I.

JOANNA. We're going to climb Thunder Mountain—

THOMAS. And confront the dragon.

PETER. Thomas! Joanna! How can you think of such a
thing?

JOANNA. We're willing to beg or bargain.

THOMAS. Or reason with the creature, if we can.

PETER. No one has ever returned alive from the top of Thunder Mountain. Bones have been found. Scraps of clothing—

JOANNA. What choice do we have, Peter?

PETER. They say this is the last dragon on earth, and it needed the sun to preserve its own fire. It will never give up the sun while it lives.

THOMAS. No one knows that for sure—

PETER. They say we must wait. The dragon will die eventually and its power over the sun will die with it.

THOMAS. Our father cannot wait much longer.

PETER. Nor can my sister.

JOANNA. Will you come with us?

PETER (*backing away nervously*). To the top of Thunder Mountain?

THOMAS & JOANNA. Yes!

PETER. To confront the dragon?

THOMAS & JOANNA. Yes!

PETER. Oh...my...it's really very kind of you to invite me, but...Mother and Father would never permit such a thing. They've lost all hope. If they lose me, too—

JOANNA. It's all right, Peter. Stay and take care of your family as best you can, especially dear little Tanya.

THOMAS. And send us your good thoughts, to warm us on our way.

PETER. I will! But how will you find strength to climb the mountain and face the dragon when you've nothing to eat but the last of your apples?

THOMAS. We'll eat few of those. We plan to offer the dragon as many as we can in return for the sun.

PETER. It won't be enough!

JOANNA. It's all we have.

PETER. No one else would even dream of climbing Thunder Mountain!

JOANNA. That's why Thomas and I must be the ones to try.

PETER. When will you go?

THOMAS. Very soon. We'll take our leave of Father—

JOANNA. And give him the eggs you've been kind enough to share—

THOMAS. Then we'll be on our way.

PETER (*hugging each of them*). Be careful, my friends.

THOMAS. We will, Peter. We will.

(PETER watches sadly as JOANNA and THOMAS exit. LIGHTNING THUNDER. The Dragon's ROAR. BAKER'S APPRENTICE enters at opposite side of stage. BAKER'S APPRENTICE and PETER speak directly to audience rather than to one another. If ADDITIONAL VILLAGERS are used, BAKER'S APPRENTICE's lines may be divided among them, or they make speak as a chorus.)

PETER. Such courage!

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. Such foolishness!

PETER. It makes me feel hopeful again.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. I can't imagine why.

PETER. They may save all our lives.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. They may die a quicker death.

PETER. At least they're trying to do something.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. It won't be enough.

PETER. We've been helpless so long.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. We're helpless still.

PETER. We have one another.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. We have only ourselves.
(*LIGHTNING. THUNDER. Dragon's ROAR. ALL cringe in response.*) And that—the voice of our doom.

PETER. There is always hope.

BAKER'S APPRENTICE. There is no hope. No hope at all.

(PETER and BAKER'S APPRENTICE—and VILLAGERS blow out their candles and exit. MUSIC begins. The stage takes on an eerie glow, as if a very bleak dawn were approaching. THOMAS and JOANNA enter. They no longer need their candle, but the air grows colder as they ascend the mountain. MUSIC fades. A harsh WIND blows.)

THOMAS. Do you want to stop, Joanna? We could eat an apple or two and rest a while.

JOANNA. We must save as many apples as we can for the dragon. But I would like to sit down—for just a moment.

THOMAS. Of course. We can stop here. *(They find a place to sit, huddled together, and listen to the WIND for a moment.)* That wind is fierce.

JOANNA. The light is so strange.

THOMAS. It is an odd sort of glow.

JOANNA. It's even colder here than down in the village, and that was cold enough.

THOMAS. I know. I'm beginning to forget what it was ever like to be warm, what it was like at all—before.

JOANNA. You must remember, Thomas. There was sunshine—warm on our faces. It came streaming through the windows of our cottage, making golden patterns on the floor.

THOMAS (*trying to remember*). When you speak of it, I can almost feel it. It woke me every morning.

JOANNA. Yes! And birds sang in the trees.

THOMAS. Peter brought us fresh eggs sometimes—

JOANNA. And always found a way to stay for breakfast.

His second breakfast, I believe, though he would never admit it.

THOMAS. After breakfast, we helped Father in the orchard.

JOANNA. The two of us, not Peter.

THOMAS (*laughing*). Peter always found a way *not* to stay for hard work.

JOANNA. And when we walked to school, wildflowers bloomed in the meadow—

THOMAS. I remember! All purple and red and blue and gold!

JOANNA. And people smiled at one another when they met on the road.

THOMAS. Yes. They did.

JOANNA. Do you remember even before that, Thomas, when we were very young—and Mama was alive?

THOMAS. Of course.

JOANNA. What would she think of us now, leaving Father and climbing Thunder Mountain alone?

THOMAS. She would be afraid for us, but more afraid for Father. She would want us to do what we could to save him.

JOANNA. Do you remember Uncle Joseph's stories about the dragon? I think Mama was more frightened of those stories than we were.

THOMAS. No, she wasn't. She just pretended to be frightened because it pleased Uncle Joseph.

JOANNA. I suppose so.

THOMAS. Would you pretend to be frightened just to please me?

JOANNA. Maybe. I'm pretending to be brave, right now!

THOMAS. So am I.

(The WIND whistles fiercely.)

JOANNA. Oh, that wind! I think it wants to blow us right off this mountain!

THOMAS. We'd better get on with our journey.

(MUSIC plays as JOANNA and THOMAS exit. After a brief pause, PETER enters, out of breath, lugging a heavy basket. MUSIC fades. WIND blows.)

PETER. Thomas? Joanna? Oh, how could anyone hear anything in this wind? *(He puts down basket, rummages around in it, pulls out a piece of cheese and nibbles at it nervously and guiltily. WIND whistles louder.)* I really must find them soon! Joanna? Thomas?

(He snatches up basket and hurries off. WIND blows. MUSIC begins again as LIGHT grows a bit brighter—and more eerie. THOMAS and JOANNA enter, very weary now. MUSIC fades.)

THOMAS. It's no use. We'd better eat something. We've got to keep up our strength.

(As they speak, they find a place to sit, gather sticks, and light a small fire.)

JOANNA. There's not a berry left anywhere on this mountain.

THOMAS. Everything's dried up and blown away in this awful wind.

JOANNA. My hands and feet are frozen.

THOMAS. Mine, too. I can hardly feel my nose.

JOANNA (*holding up an apple*). I suppose one or two apples less won't make any difference to the dragon.

THOMAS (*quickly choosing an apple for himself*). It will lighten our load. (*They each bite into their apples and sigh in relief. THOMAS looks around.*) Has it grown brighter, do you think?

JOANNA. Yes. Brighter, but no warmer.

(LIGHTNING. THUNDER. The Dragon's ROAR, closer than before. They react with alarm.)

THOMAS. Those were only stories that Uncle Joseph told us, weren't they? About the dragon—and the men who climbed this mountain and never returned?

JOANNA. Only stories.

THOMAS. They seemed real!

JOANNA. They did. But they were just for fun! (*Recalling her uncle's words and his spooky storytelling style.*) Once there was an ancient and mighty dragon who lived in a cave on the highest peak of Thunder Mountain.

(As the story is told, MUSIC plays. SILHOUETTES may be seen, flickering as if in the shadows cast by the fire, acting out the characters in each episode of the story, as do JOANNA and THOMAS. SOUND appropriate to the story action may also be added including the Dragon's

ROAR, but instead of cowering, JOANNA and THOMAS are completely caught up in telling one another the familiar story now and relish the scare.)

THOMAS (*taking his cue from JOANNA, as MUSIC plays*). No one had ever seen this dragon, and yet no one ever doubted that it was there. Whenever lightning and thunder exploded in the sky above the mountain—

JOANNA. Villagers in the valley below swore they could hear the dragon's terrible roar—

THOMAS. And see the fire that flamed in its breath.

JOANNA. Once—

THOMAS. Twice—

THOMAS & JOANNA. Three times—

JOANNA. Men from the village climbed to the highest peak of Thunder Mountain—

THOMAS. To track the dragon to its secret lair.

JOANNA. Where, it was said, gold leaf covered the walls—

THOMAS. Diamonds dripped from the ceiling—

JOANNA. And pearls paved the floor.

THOMAS. In search of these riches, three men ventured forth—

JOANNA. For the sake of these riches, three men dared the dragon's wrath—

THOMAS & JOANNA. Once, twice, three times—

THOMAS. And no more.

JOANNA (*imitating the young man's strut*). The first was a young man, brash and brave, and stronger, people said, than any who had ever lived.

THOMAS (*indicating JOANNA as she continues to strut*). Before he left the village, he bragged of his strength to

all who would listen and claimed he would wrestle the dragon with his own bare hands.

JOANNA (*in a deep voice*). “The creature will give up its treasure,” he cried, “and I shall force it to carry everything back to the village for me like a common beast of burden.”

THOMAS. And so he began his climb. Days passed—

JOANNA (*becoming “sweetheart”*). And then weeks. His sweetheart gazed toward the mountain from dawn till dusk.

THOMAS & JOANNA (*intoning the words ominously*).

But he was never seen again.

THOMAS (*hands fluttering the imaginary “scrap” toward JOANNA*). On the anniversary of the day he left, a cold wind carried a scrap of his shirt across the village green and laid it to rest at his sweetheart’s feet.

JOANNA (*kneeling and picking up “scrap” tenderly*). It was black as coal, they say, charred by the dragon’s fiery breath.

THOMAS. Still, tales of the dragon’s riches grew.

JOANNA (*as herself again*). A second adventurer came forward to challenge the mountain—this one a man of middle age, an experienced soldier of fortune.

THOMAS (*brandishing “sword” as middle-aged man*). In his hand, he held a silver sword that glistened in the sunlight.

JOANNA. There were those who believed this sword had magical powers, powers mighty enough to defeat all enemies, even a dragon.

THOMAS. “I will slay the beast,” the soldier declared, “and make its fortune my own.”

JOANNA. And so he began his climb. Weeks passed—

THOMAS (*becoming child at window*). —and then months. The soldier's wife and children gazed toward the mountain from dawn until dusk.

THOMAS & JOANNA (*as before, enjoying the shiver*). But he was never seen again.

JOANNA (*pointing to imaginary sword*). On the anniversary of the day he left, his sword was found at the foot of the mountain—

THOMAS (*kneeling to touch "sword" gingerly*). Mangled, they say, by a single blow from the dragon's tail.

JOANNA. But, in time, the villagers forgot this, too, and again craved the dragon's fortune.

THOMAS. Bent with age, but still eager to gather gold and jewels, a third man brewed a poisonous potion.

JOANNA (*bent over and speaking in a cracked, aged voice*). "This will subdue the dragon," he believed, "and force it to do my bidding."

THOMAS. And so he began his climb. Months passed—

JOANNA (*becoming a "grandchild"*). And then years. His grandchildren gazed toward the mountain from dawn to dusk.

THOMAS and JOANNA (*as before*). But he was never seen again.

THOMAS (*hands fluttering toward JOANNA as a "stream"*). And every year, on the anniversary of the day he set forth, a stream poured down from the mountain top to the village gates, dark with a poisonous brew.

JOANNA (*cowering away from "stream"*). At last, the villagers gave up their dreams of wealth and power. Not one of them ever again dared to scale Thunder Mountain and face the dragon in its lair—

(A pause. MUSIC, SOUNDS and SILHOUETTES fade.)

THOMAS *(as himself, frightened and serious again)*. Until today.

(LIGHTNING. THUNDER. Dragon's ROAR.)

JOANNA *(reassuring herself and THOMAS)*. They were only stories Uncle told.

THOMAS. Only stories.

(WIND whistles.)

JOANNA. We'd better go on.

(They put out fire, hurry offstage. WIND blows. MUSIC begins. PETER drags on, panting heavily, still carrying his basket. MUSIC fades.)

PETER *(seeing remains of fire)*. They've come this way. These ashes are still warm from a fire. *(He puts down basket, pulls out a loaf of bread, tears off a piece and gnaws on it, with less guilt than before.)* But I can't keep chasing after them much longer. If Mother and Father discover I'm gone— *(Snatches up basket, tries to go forward.)* A hundred paces more. *(WIND whistles.)* No, I can't do it. *(Turns back, hesitates.)* But how can I turn back—and face our friends in the village? *(Starts up mountain again.)* A hundred paces, then. *(WIND whistles.)* Fifty. Fifty's enough. *(LIGHTNING. THUNDER. Dragon's ROAR.)* Oh, please let me find them soon!

(He hurries off. WIND whistles, MUSIC plays. Strange LIGHT becomes even brighter. THOMAS and JOANNA enter, exhausted. MUSIC fades.)

THOMAS. A few more steps. There's shelter from the wind here. We can rest.

JOANNA. I don't think I can go on, Thomas.

THOMAS. I don't suppose another apple would help. *(He offers her one; she waves it away.)*

JOANNA. I have never in my life turned down an apple from Father's orchard, but it's not what I need now. I'm exhausted and frozen!

THOMAS. I suppose we could turn back.

JOANNA. No. There's only sickness and sorrow waiting for us back there. Besides, it's farther down the mountain now than up.

THOMAS. It's even brighter here.

JOANNA. But no warmer somehow.

THOMAS. No. It's that same strange glow. Could it be the sun—buried somehow?

JOANNA. It doesn't seem very much like the sun. It's so cold.

THOMAS. Still we must be getting closer.

JOANNA. Closer to what, I wonder?

THOMAS *(hearing a rustling noise offstage)*. What was that?

JOANNA. Where?

THOMAS. Something's moving in the brush!

JOANNA. Hide! Hurry!

(As they try to gather their things and start off, PETER's voice is heard, calling:)

PETER (*offstage*). Thomas? Joanna? Halloooooo!

JOANNA. Peter?

(*PETER staggers onstage, gasping, the basket in one hand, a half-eaten carrot in the other.*)

THOMAS. Peter! What are you doing up here?

PETER (*collapsing to his knees at the sight of them*). I've been asking myself the same question for the last...two thousand, three hundred, and sixty-seven paces. Oh, Joanna! Thomas! I'm so glad I've found you!

JOANNA (*as she and THOMAS rush to PETER's side*).

But what are you doing here? (*PETER waves the carrot to ask for a moment to catch his breath.*) And where did you get that carrot? I can't remember when I last saw a carrot. Look at that! (*PETER gives it to her.*) Oh, thank you! (*She breaks off a piece for THOMAS, who takes a bite.*)

THOMAS. This is the best carrot I have ever tasted.

JOANNA. You've never even liked carrots.

THOMAS. That was...before. When I could afford not to.

(*Suddenly curious, uncovers PETER's basket.*) Bread!

JOANNA. And cheese!

THOMAS. And walnuts!

JOANNA. And more carrots!

THOMAS (*to PETER*). You haven't been stealing food, have you?

PETER. Not exactly.

THOMAS. How can you "not exactly" steal?

PETER. When I told our friends what you were doing—climbing Thunder Mountain to confront the dragon for all of our sakes—they agreed we needed to help you.

We dared not ask our parents—they've given up all hope that things will ever get better and feel they must help no one outside their own families. But we, the older children—not the little ones like Tanya—we could each manage to share our own portions of food with you. Our families will be no worse off for the loss. We may go a little hungrier ourselves, but that's nothing compared to what you're willing to do. So—here it is, not a lot, but something from every household. *(A pause, and then:)* Except for the little bit I've eaten myself to keep up my strength while I searched for you. I'd better go back now, before Father and Mother discover I've gone.

JOANNA. Oh, Peter, what a brave thing you and the others have done. Thank you!

THOMAS. Yes, give them all our thanks. And tell them they must not give up hope. There's always hope—especially if we can depend on one another.

PETER. I'll tell them.

JOANNA. Hurry home now.

PETER. The way down will seem much shorter than the way up. And easier, without the basket and all that food to carry— *(He eyes the basket longingly. THOMAS and JOANNA look at each other, then hold the basket out to him.)*

THOMAS. Take what you need.

PETER. Oh, I couldn't—

JOANNA. You must keep up your strength.

PETER *(takes an item from basket)*. Very well. *(And another.)* If you insist. *(And maybe just one more.)* Many thanks. *(One more? No, he resists.)* Goodbye. And good luck!

THOMAS. Goodbye, Peter.

JOANNA. For now. Thank you!

(THOMAS and JOANNA wave as they watch him descend for a moment. Then the LIGHT suddenly grows even more intense and strange.)

THOMAS. Something's happening. Do you see it? The light has grown stronger.

JOANNA. It's not the sun. It's not at all like the sun!

THOMAS. It's the dragon!

(LIGHTNING. THUNDER. The Dragon's ROAR, closer than ever. MUSIC. THOMAS and JOANNA huddle in fear, shielding their eyes from her brightness as the DRAGON appears. She is both terrifying and magnificent. Her voice should be electronically amplified. MUSIC fades as she speaks.)

JOANNA *(uncovers her eyes and is dazzled by the sight)*.

Thomas, look! She's beautiful!

DRAGON. Who dares approach my lair?

JOANNA. Joanna—

THOMAS *(uncovering his eyes more hesitantly than JOANNA)*. And Thomas—

JOANNA. From the village below.

DRAGON. Have you come to do battle with me?

JOANNA. No!

DRAGON. You carry no swords?

THOMAS. We have no swords to carry.

DRAGON. No poisonous potions?

JOANNA. No potions at all. *(After a moment's thought:)*
Are they true then, the terrible stories we've heard?

DRAGON (*unfamiliar with the word “stories”*). I know no “stories.”

THOMAS. And the gold leaf that lines your cave? Is that true? And the pearls that carpet your floor?

DRAGON. What use have I for these things you speak of? (*Noticing baskets.*) What do you carry in those baskets?

THOMAS. Food.

DRAGON (*amazed and tempted*). Food?

JOANNA. Yes! And we would gladly share it with you—

DRAGON (*draws back, emitting a roar of uncertainty and impatience*). You seem harmless enough. Return to your village while you still can. No one is allowed even one step closer to the top of Thunder Mountain. Woe to those who try.

JOANNA. We’ll come no closer. We promise. But we can’t return to our village. Not before we speak to you.

THOMAS. We’ve come to beg you to return the sun to its rightful place in the sky, so that we may all share in its warmth and light.

DRAGON. Never! I need the sun to remain exactly where it is—buried deep in Thunder Mountain.

JOANNA. But why?

THOMAS. What good is it doing you to live—like us—in eternal cold and gloom?

DRAGON. It is not for myself that I stole the sun. Like you, I grow weaker every day, but I know that cannot be helped. Death comes to all—

JOANNA. Then you are the last of your kind?

DRAGON. I am not the last! But when the threats came from below—once, twice, three times!—the others moved on—a few at first, then many, then all. I chose to stay, rather than abandon my brood.

JOANNA. Your brood?

DRAGON. It was for my young that I stole the sun. Our little ones need the fire of an entire dragon clan to keep them warm until they hatch, and there was no one left to help me.

THOMAS. How sad!

DRAGON. Sad it was, and sadder it grows with every passing day. There is nothing left on the mountain for me to eat. It is nearly time for the eggs to hatch, and I fear I will not live long enough to raise those I've tried so hard to save.

THOMAS. But we've brought food!

JOANNA. Apples, bread, cheese and more. Take what you need.

DRAGON. You are most kind. But even this bounty will not last long. And many years are required to raise young dragons. I fear we are doomed. I wish I knew why.

THOMAS. Then you don't understand what you've done?

DRAGON. I found the warmth my brood needs to hatch. And everything since has gone wrong. No, I do not understand.

JOANNA. Hiding the sun has caused the mountain to die—and all your food with it.

THOMAS. It's the same with us in the village. Hiding what we have from one another, we grow ill ourselves.

DRAGON. My clan has always shared its fire for the good of the young.

JOANNA. Then you see what must be done. The earth will grow more for you to eat only when you return the sun to the sky—for all to share.

DRAGON. What I see and what I can do are not the same. I was strong when I captured the sun and buried it deep within my mountain. Now I am weak.

THOMAS. Then eat what we've brought you! And use the strength it gives you to save us all—including yourself.

JOANNA. Your little ones will need you to be strong.

DRAGON. Yes. For their sake, I must accept your kindness, and I thank you for it. *(MUSIC plays, as THOMAS and JOANNA happily share their food with the DRAGON. Her energy renewed, DRAGON roars joyously. MUSIC fades.)*

Oh, I do feel better than I have in a long, long while.

THOMAS. Do you think you can manage now—to return the sun to the sky?

DRAGON. I don't know—but I will try.

(She exits. LIGHTNING. THUNDER. A long and arduous ROAR as DRAGON releases the sun, bathing the stage in glorious light. MUSIC. THOMAS and JOANNA whirl and dance to gether in the sun light.)

THOMAS. The sun!

JOANNA. Oh, I'd for got ten what a joy it is to feel warm!

(DRAGON re enters. MUSIC fades.)

JOANNA. Thank you for what you've done!

THOMAS. You'll see now—everything will mend, here on the moun tain top and down in our vil lage be low.

DRAGON. The mending began when you shared your food with me.

THOMAS. The mending began when Peter carried it to us from all of our friends.

JOANNA. The mending began with the first step of the journey that brought us together.

DRAGON. Now you must return to your home.

THOMAS. We'll come back to visit you—

DRAGON. No! You must never come back!

JOANNA. Not even to see the young dragons when they hatch?

DRAGON. Especially not for that. Others will follow you, and they will not be so kind.

JOANNA. They can be cruel at times—

THOMAS. But not all of them.

DRAGON. The risk is too great. I must be left in peace to raise my young. We have met and we have helped one another. Let that be enough.

JOANNA. Very well.

DRAGON. Promise me you will never return!

THOMAS & JOANNA. We promise.

DRAGON. Promise you'll tell no one you found me!

THOMAS. No one at all? Not even our friend Peter?

DRAGON. No one!

THOMAS & JOANNA. We promise.

DRAGON. Thank you. Goodbye, then. I must return to my brood.

THOMAS. Goodbye.

JOANNA. We'll still listen for your roar.

(With a last, mighty ROAR, DRAGON exits.)

THOMAS. Only now, we won't be afraid. *(He and JOANNA pick up baskets, but are reluctant to go.)* No one would ever believe we saw her—and spoke with her. Or that she was beautiful—and nice.

JOANNA. It's just as well. Let them believe the worst stories they've ever heard. That way, they'll leave her alone.

THOMAS. She never denied those stories, did she? Or the treasure in her cave. Could it all have been true?

JOANNA. We'll never know. *(A loud cracking NOISE off-stage.)* Listen!

(More noises follow, and something like cheeping, only much louder.)

THOMAS. What was that?

(DRAGON ROARS joyfully.)

JOANNA. The eggs! They're hatching!

THOMAS. Let's go see—!

JOANNA. No. We mustn't disturb them.

THOMAS. We could hide. They'd never know. Just one peek?

JOANNA. I suppose—

THOMAS. What harm would it do?

JOANNA. We promised never to return and never to tell—

THOMAS. But we haven't left yet!

JOANNA *(with a conspiratorial grin)*. That's true!

THOMAS *(grabbing her hand and pulling her to the side of the stage)*. Over here. Quick!

JOANNA. Shhhhhhhhhhh!

(THOMAS and JOANNA hide where they can peek in as MUSIC plays and DRAGON and YOUNG DRAGONS enter and dance in the sunlight. At some point during the dance, JOANNA and THOMAS exit. DRAGONS dance on as LIGHTS and MUSIC fade. Curtain. End of play.)