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*Dramatic Publishing*

# ONCE, IN THE TIME OF TROLLS

A Play in One Act  
Inspired by Norwegian Folk Tales

By  
SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER



**Dramatic Publishing**  
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(ONCE, IN THE TIME OF TROLLS)

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to Harvey Asher, the Bear/Prince

Development of this script benefitted greatly from a 1994 touring production by East Central College, Union, Missouri, as the winner of their playwriting competition. workshopping and rehearsed readings by The Open Eye: New Playworks, Denver, New York, and rehearsal and performance attendance made possible by the Seem-to-Be Players of Lawrence, Kansas.

The playwright would especially like to thank Dr. Faythe Thureen of the University of North Dakota and Lisa Lunge-Larsen, storyteller extraordinaire, for reintroducing her to the folk tales, Joan Kunsch for her help and enthusiasm, the AATE Unpublished Plays Project, Vincent Neihaus, Jr., Amie Brockway, Ric Averill and their colleagues and families for their support and guidance on the journey.

The first full, professional production of this script (under the title “The Troll Princess”) was presented on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1995, by the Seem-to-Be Players of Lawrence, Kansas, under the direction of Ric Averill with the following cast:

KATRINA . . . . . Susanna Pitzer  
TROLL PRINCESS, ENSEMBLE . . . . . Preston Girard  
BEAR/PRINCE, ENSEMBLE. . . . . Jason Ware  
WOMAN #1, ENSEMBLE. . . . . Jennifer Glenn  
WOMAN #2, ENSEMBLE . . . . . Beth Dearing  
WOMAN #3, ENSEMBLE . . . . . Anneikit Bonnel

## PRODUCTION NOTES

A musical note: Original incidental music was composed for the Open Eye: New Playworks performances by David Irving. Inquiries should be directed to Mr. Irving at 100 West 67th Street, Apt. 5NW, New York, NY 10023 (212-580-0007).

Additional selections of incidental music appropriate to the play may be found in the Norwegian folk music adapted by Edvard Grieg. Some sources follow:

Edvard Grieg.. Lyrical Pieces for the Piano. op. 47.  
Schirmer's Library of Musical Classics

Grieg, an Introduction to his Piano Works..  
Margery Halford, ed., Alfred's Masterwork Series for the Piano

Edvard Grieg, Norwegian Dances..  
Dover Publications

The Norwegian word *daler* is pronounced "dollar."

# ONCE, IN THE TIME OF TROLLS

A Play in One Act

For 2 men, 4 women or a flexible cast of 30+\*

## CHARACTERS

KATRINA, youngest daughter of a peasant

also plays DAUGHTER in Old Woman's Story

MOTHER and SERVANT in Second Woman's Story

FARMER'S WIFE in Third Woman's Story

BEAR/PRINCE, bewitched by a troll princess also plays

GUDBRAND in Old Woman's Story

FARMER in Second Woman's Story

FARMER'S SON in Third Woman's Story

FATHER, of Katrina

SISTER #1

SISTER #2

OLD WOMAN, a comfortable farm wife

COW

MAN

HORSE #1

PIG

ROOSTER

WOMAN WITH FOOD

NEIGHBOR

SECOND WOMAN, a strong-willed peasant

PARSON

LAD

HORSE #2

WEDDING GUESTS, if desired

ADDITIONALSERVANTS, if desired

THIRD WOMAN, young and pretty  
MAID, young and mean-spirited  
FIRST AUNT, with a nose three ells long  
SECOND AUNT, with a very broad bottom  
THIRD AUNT, with eyes like red-lined saucers  
WEST WIND, shimmering in raindrops  
SOUTH WIND, bedecked with flowers  
EAST WIND, harsh as the desert  
NORTH WIND, cold, proud, and strong  
TROLL PRINCESS, vain, mean, and ugly

TIME: When there were trolls.

PLACE: A cottage, two castles, and the farms, mountains,  
and forests of Norway. Set pieces are minimal as time and  
place change fluidly.

\*All roles may be played by six actors, four female and two  
male, as follows:

KATRINA, as above

BEAR/PRINCE, as above

OLD WOMAN, also plays FIRST AUNT, SOUTH WIND,

HORSE #2

SECOND WOMAN, also plays SISTER #1, COW, PIG,

WOMAN WITH FOOD, THIRD AUNT, MAID,

WEST WIND

FATHER, also plays MAN, NEIGHBOR, LAD,

SECOND AUNT, EAST WIND, TROLL PRINCESS

THIRD WOMAN, also plays SISTER #2. HORSE #1,

ROOSTER, PARSON, NORTH WIND



# ONCE, IN THE TIME OF TROLLS

AT RISE: *KATRINA and the BEAR are sitting side by side on thrones at R. At L is a curtain or screen hiding part of the stage. A moment passes in stillness, except for the loud ticking of a CLOCK. She sighs. He sighs. More ticking. Finally, KATRINA speaks. CLOCK fades.*

KATRINA. Tell me a story, Bear.

BEAR. I'm no good at stories, Katrina. You tell me a story.

KATRINA. Very well. Which one?

BEAR. Do you know more than one?

KATRINA. Of course. I love stories. I'd like to hear more.

But I don't see how that's possible, if we're to be alone together in this castle, day after day. Don't you know any stories at all?

BEAR. No, I don't. So tell me one of yours. Tell me the one you know best.

KATRINA. The one I know best?

BEAR. Yes.

KATRINA. All right.

*(MUSIC. She walks to C, reaching out toward L as she speaks. FATHER and SISTERS enter L, holding hands. KATRINA takes FATHER's hand and swings them across to R, "crack-the-whip style, where they strike a tableau showing hunger and cold.)*

KATRINA. Once there was a poor peasant who had many children, so many he could barely afford to feed and clothe them—

BEAR. Your father?

KATRINA. Yes. My father. The story I know best is my own.

BEAR. I think I know something of this story myself!

KATRINA. I thought you might.

BEAR (*moves toward tableau*). Pretty children the peasant had, every one of them. But the prettiest of all was the youngest daughter, a child so fair, there was no end to her loveliness.

FATHER (*as KATRINA moves into tableau and FAMILY huddles together, shivering*). It was on a Thursday night—

SISTER #1. In the late fall—

SISTER #2. And it was raining—

SISTER #1. Yes, a blustery night!

KATRINA. The walls of the cottage creaked and moaned with the wind. (*FAMILY sways to and fro, creaking and moaning.*)

FATHER. It was an evening one could not easily forget. As the family sat 'round the fire busy with this and that— (*KATRINA and SISTERS form tableau, mending, reading, etc.*)

BEAR (*tapping*). Tap-tap. Tap-tappity-tap.

FATHER. There came a tapping on the windowpane.

BEAR. Tap-tap. Tap-tappity-tap.

FATHER (*crossing to BEAR, mimes opening a door*). The farmer went outside to see what was tapping so, and what should he behold but a large, white bear!

BEAR (*to FATHER*). “Good evening, sir.”

FATHER. “Good evening to *you*—bear!”

BEAR. "I'm sorry to trouble you on so unpleasant a night, but I wonder if you would be so kind as to give me your youngest daughter."

FATHER (*as SISTERS shield KATRINA*). "Give you—? My youngest daughter?"

BEAR. "Yes. If you would, please. Do, and I'll make you as rich as you are now poor."

FATHER. "As rich as I am now poor? (*Considers, but only briefly.*) "But to give up my daughter—to a large, white bear?" (*At a loss, looks from BEAR to FAMILY and back again.*)

KATRINA (*steps forward boldly*). "I'll gather my things."

FATHER. "You would do this? You would leave your family and live with a bear?"

KATRINA. "I would make you rich as you are now poor, yes. And I've often wondered what lay beyond our humble cottage. This is our chance, our only chance: yours to want for nothing, and mine to see the world."

FATHER. "No! *NO!* I cannot let you do this."

KATRINA. "But I want to go."

FATHER. "The world is a dangerous place."

KATRINA. "A daring place—"

FATHER "There are witches and werewolves—"

KATRINA. "Marvels and wonders—"

BEAR. "And rubies—"

FATHER. "Giants and trolls—"

KATRINA. "Secrets and surprises—"

BEAR. "Emeralds—"

FATHER. "Evils of every kind!"

KATRINA. "Adventures of every kind!"

BEAR. "Diamonds—"

FATHER (*succumbing, to BEAR*). “Of every kind?” (*BEAR nods slowly, several times, until FATHER finds himself nodding also, mesmerized.*)

KATRINA. “I will go, Papa.” (*She kisses FATHER on cheek. Turns to SISTERS.*) “I must.” (*Hugs SISTERS, crosses to BEAR.*)

FATHER (*as KATRINA takes BEAR’s hand and moves toward thrones with him*). And she did.

BEAR. “Are you afraid?”

KATRINA. “No, I’m not afraid.”

BEAR. So her father’s hut became a beautiful white house—

FATHER (*proudly surveying his land*). Overlooking a prosperous farm—

SISTERS #1 & #2. And her sisters rejoiced! (*SISTERS exit, skipping; FATHER follows them off.*)

KATRINA. And Katrina went to live with the bear, in a castle locked deep inside a mountain—

BEAR. Where every room glittered with gold and silver— (*He hands her a bell.*)

KATRINA. And everything she asked for magically appeared at the tinkling of a tiny silver bell— (*She rings bell. He escorts her to her throne. She sits. He kisses her hand and takes his seat.*) And he was always gentle and kind—

BEAR. But she could not leave him for one full year—

KATRINA. And she must not look upon his face—

BEAR. At night, while he slept—

KATRINA. Not once in all that time.

BEAR. And so they lived—

KATRINA (*a beat*). Ever after.

BEAR (*a beat*). The end?

KATRINA (*a beat*). Apparently. (*They sit, as at the opening. She sighs. He sighs. CLOCK ticks loudly.*)

BEAR. Another day.

KATRINA. Yes.

BEAR. I think I'll go to bed now.

KATRINA. All right.

BEAR (*kisses her hand*). Good night.

KATRINA. Good night.

BEAR (*crosses to curtain at left then pauses, his back to her*). You're not at all happy here, are you? I'm sorry.

KATRINA (*sorry for him*). I'm sorry, too. It's not that I'm unhappy. You're very kind. And you've done everything you possibly could—for me and for my family. It's just that I had something else in mind—something a bit more adventurous.

BEAR. I understand. I, too, had something else in mind.

KATRINA. Did you?

BEAR. Yes. From the first moment I saw you, I've dared to hope you would find it so pleasant here that you would choose to stay with me all day, every day—

KATRINA. But it is pleasant, and I have stayed—and I will—for one full year.

BEAR. No, I meant...I hoped...forever. Forever. (*He pulls back the curtain, revealing a bed. He steps toward it and pulls the curtain closed behind him. For a moment, KATRINA is too stunned to speak. Then she rises, outraged and panicky. But she can't follow BEAR behind curtain, so she paces and fumes alone.*)

KATRINA. Forever! Does he mean to keep me here forever? Oh, what sort of mischief have I gotten myself into? (*Goes to curtain, resists opening it, backs away.*) Who are you, Bear? And why must I stay with you for a full year? Why must I never look upon your face while you sleep? (*Taunting.*) Does it become the horrible face of a troll? (*Suddenly aghast—this might be true!*) Are you a troll in disguise and your kindness nothing more than an evil trick?

*(The lights slowly dim as KATRINA ponders her situation a moment longer, then—as the CLOCK tolls midnight—she lights a candle, and goes to the curtain. She holds up her silver bell, rings it, and the curtain parts at her bidding. She leans toward the sleeping form during the last three, slow, loud chimes. The PRINCE leaps from his bed.)*

PRINCE *(an anguished cry)*. What have you done? *(Offstage, TROLL PRINCESS laughs triumphantly.)*

KATRINA. I've dripped tallow on your shirt! From the candle. It's only three drops. I'm sorry— *(She attempts to brush drops from his shirt; he pushes her hand away.)*

PRINCE. Never mind that! You have sealed my doom. *(TROLL PRINCESS laughs as before.)*

KATRINA. Your doom? But you're a prince—

PRINCE. Yes, a prince. But I'm bewitched by a troll princess, forced to live as a bear by day and myself only by night. Had you kept your promise, her spell would have been broken. But now, I belong to her, and to her I must go. *(TROLL PRINCESS laughs a third time.)*

KATRINA. I will follow you—

PRINCE. Impossible. Her castle lies east of the sun and west of the moon. No human soul has ever been there except under her wicked spell.

KATRINA. I can try. I will search for you—

PRINCE *(calmer, touched by her concern)*. It will do no good. I must leave you now. Forever. *(He pauses, as a look of what could have been but is now lost, passes between them. Then he kisses her hand and exits behind the curtain, which falls, separating them.)*

KATRINA. Forever!