

The World of the Brothers Grimm

Adapted from Grimm's Fairy Tales
by Carolyn Lane

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THE WORLD OF THE BROTHERS GRIMM

CHARACTERS

(To be played by a cast of seven, with all assuming different roles in each of the three stories.)

STORY OF KING THRUSHBEARD

SERVANT
KING
PRINCESS
PRINCE
DUKE
EARL
KING THRUSHBEARD

STORY OF THE FISHERMAN AND HIS WIFE

FISHERMAN
FLOUNDER
FISHERMAN'S WIFE
SERVANT

STORY OF THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER

SHOEMAKER
HILDA, his wife
FIRST ELF
SECOND ELF
CUSTOMER

CURTAIN CALL

SERVANT
KING
FISHERMAN
SHOEMAKER
HILDA, his wife
FIRST ELF
SECOND ELF

SETTING

Bare stage, with props (See PRODUCTION NOTES) to be brought on as needed.

THE WORLD OF THE BROTHERS GRIMM

AT RISE: A fanfare is heard OFF STAGE. SERVANT, carrying a trumpet, ENTERS RIGHT, strides toward LEFT, importantly calling out in all directions.

SERVANT: The King! The King! All prepare for the King! Prepare for the Royal Majesty! The King, the King! All prepare for the entrance of the King! (EXITS LEFT, blowing a fanfare.)

KING: (ENTERS RIGHT, comes CENTER. Haughtily surveying the Audience.) Well? What are you waiting for? Don't you know enough to rise in the presence of a king? (Strides pompously back and forth, staring at various members of Audience.) Up, up! You, over there, and you . . . and you. All rise in the presence of the King! (Watches sternly as Audience rises.) There now, that's better. For a minute there I thought you had no manners.

SERVANT: (RE-ENTERS LEFT, MOVES toward RIGHT.) Prepare for the King! All rise in the presence of the King! All rise . . .

KING: (Impatiently.) They're already up . . . can't you see that? But I don't think they know what to do next.

SERVANT: Perhaps they've never seen a king before, Your Majesty. I've heard there are no kings in some parts of the world. Perhaps (name of community in which play is being performed.) is one of them.

KING: No kings in (Community.)? How uncivilized! No wonder they don't know what to do. Show them at once! I would like to get on with the stories I have come to tell, and I cannot very well do so until I have been properly greeted. Show them.

SERVANT: Yes, Your Majesty! (To Audience, importantly.) Now then, the very minute the King comes into view . . .

KING: I am already in view! Get on with it.

SERVANT: Yes, Your Majesty. The very minute the King comes into view, you rise to your feet . . .

KING: (Impatiently.) Which they have already done. Anyone can see that.

SERVANT: You stand straight and tall . . . no fidgeting, no slouching . . . and not a word must be spoken. Shhhh!

KING: Now comes the part I like best.

SERVANT: The gentlemen bow . . . like this . . . and the ladies curtsy . . . like this. *(Demonstrates.)* Now when I say three, I would like to see the most respectful bows and curtsies you can manage. Ready? All right, then . . . one . . . two . . . three! *(Bows and curtsies himself along with the Audience.)*

KING: Good. Very good. By Royal Command, you may now be seated, and I will tell you a story about another king. You will see him soon, and . . .

SERVANT: Beg pardon, Your Majesty, but need they rise for the next king?

KING: I think not. One king in a day is enough. Just so long as they remember to bid me farewell when the proper time comes.

SERVANT: I will see that they are reminded, Your Majesty. When they hear the sound of a fanfare on my trumpet . . . like this . . . *(Raises trumpet to lips, while fanfare is blown.)* they will know it is time to rise and bid a farewell to the King. Will there be anything else, Your Majesty?

KING: Only one thing. Prepare yourself to be a baron, so that I may tell my story properly.

SERVANT: Me, Your Majesty? A baron? But I am only a humble servant. I could not be . . .

KING: You could pretend, couldn't you? I need a baron for my story, and the real one is off on a hunting trip. Go now, and dress yourself as a baron. I will call you when I need you.

SERVANT: Yes, Your Majesty. I shall become a baron at once . . . and a splendid one at that! I shall find a handsome robe, fine shoes . . . perhaps even a horse to ride . . . *(SERVANT turns his back on KING, begins marching proudly OFF RIGHT.)*

KING: Stop! Have you forgotten that you must bow before a king, and that you must remove yourself from his presence backwards?

SERVANT: But, Your Majesty, if I am to be a baron . . .

KING: Even a baron must bow before a king . . . and remember, no matter what splendid robes you may find, underneath you are still my servant. Go now, and do my bidding.

SERVANT: *(Humbly, bowing low and backing slowly OFF RIGHT.)* Yes, Your Majesty. I shall be the most humble baron you ever saw.

KING: That's better. Pride is a quality important in its place, but it can be the downfall of lesser beings. My daughter, the Royal Princess, learned this lesson well. Foolish girl, she was always far more haughty and proud than even one of royal blood ought to be. Something had to be done about it. She had already turned down at least a dozen suitors, and I knew that I must take stern action, or the Princess would never marry at all . . . and I, of course, should have no heirs to the kingdom. And so, I gave her one final chance. One day I invited the very finest noblemen in the land to come to the palace . . .

SERVANT: *(Poking head eagerly in from RIGHT.)* Do you want me now, Your Majesty? I have found a magnificent robe to wear, and . . .

KING: And you will be the last to come in, since a baron is the lowliest rank of all noblemen . . . and certainly a make-believe one is lower yet. Be patient. Your turn will come. Now then, where was I?

SERVANT: The very finest noblemen in the land . . .

KING: Ah, yes. Now the first was a prince . . . *(PRINCE ENTERS LEFT, COMES CENTER, stands facing Audience.)* and after that a duke, an earl and a baron. *(DUKE, EARL ENTER LEFT to stand beside PRINCE.)* And a baron!

SERVANT: *(Once more poking his head in from RIGHT.)* Now, Your Majesty? Now?

KING: Now! And be quick about it. I hear the Princess coming.

SERVANT: The Princess? Oh, Your Majesty! You mean I am to be a suitor for the hand of the Royal Princess?

KING: *(pretend suitor only, and since my daughter is hard to please, I cannot imagine that she would have the slightest interest in a make-believe baron . . . and a rather chubby one at that. But come. Take your place at the end of the line, and we will see what she has to say.*

(SERVANT ENTERS RIGHT, takes his place beside EARL as the PRINCESS haughtily ENTERS LEFT, walks slowly up and down the line, inspecting the suitors one by one.)

PRINCESS: Oh, Father, is this the best you can do for me? Goodness, what a dreary looking lot, each one worse than the other. Surely you cannot expect me to choose one of these?

KING: Surely I can! This is your last chance, Daughter. You will choose one of these . . . or I will choose a husband for you. And you might be very sorry.

PRINCESS: Never! No one you choose could be any worse than this lot. Just look, Father. *(Stops before SERVANT.)* Look at this one. Fat as a tub. No, I'd say he's shaped more like a barrel. Probably he'd roll if you gave him a push! And this one . . . *(Stops to inspect EARL.)* skinny as a stick! Looks as though he'd blow away in the slightest breeze. *(Turns back to SERVANT.)* Too fat! *(Turns to EARL.)* Too thin! *(MOVES back and forth between DUKE and PRINCE.)* Too red! Too tall! Too pale! Too short! No, Father, not a one of them will do! Kindly remove them from my royal presence.

SERVANT: *(Hopefully, to PRINCESS.)* Do you suppose, Your Royal Highness . . . do you suppose that if I lost a bit of weight I might try again?

PRINCESS: Never! Imagine a Royal Princess marrying a lowly baron! Be off now, all of you! I have no further time to waste on mere noblemen. I shall have nothing less than a king for my husband . . . and he must be the richest, handsomest king in all the land.

KING: *(As SUITORS EXIT RIGHT.)* I do not understand you, Daughter. Only yesterday you turned down the richest king in all the land.

PRINCESS: Richest, yes . . . but, oh, Father, he was so funny looking! Remember that silly little pointed beard? It was so like the beak of a thrush, I almost expected him to chirp! Ha, ha, ha. King Thrushbeard!

KING: *(Furiously.)* Laugh at a king, will you? Remember, Daughter, you have had your last chance! I decree that you will marry the very next man whose voice is heard in the palace!

(Sound of a man's voice singing OFF STAGE.)

PRINCESS: I hear a voice now, Father. Rather a croaky voice, if you ask me. Surely you cannot expect me to marry anyone with a voice like a frog! Not even if he's the richest, handsomest king in the world. I demand nothing less than perfection.

KING: You may demand whatever you like, Daughter, but my word is final. You are going to marry the man who sings like a frog, whoever he might be . . . and you may consider yourself lucky if he doesn't look like a frog as well! *(Calling OFF STAGE RIGHT.)* You, out there! His Majesty, the King, commands your presence at once. You shall be handsomely rewarded for your serenade.

KING THRUSHBEARD: *(ENTERS RIGHT, disguised as a beggar. Bowing.)* I am glad my humble song has pleased Your Majesty, and I hope Her Royal Highness, the Princess, enjoyed it as well. I need no further reward than her pleasure . . . although, if Your Majesty wishes to spare me a few alms . . .

PRINCESS: Alms indeed! Send him to the kitchen for a few scraps, Father, and get him out of my royal sight. He is nothing but a beggar . . . ugh . . . and a filthy one at that!

KING: Really, Daughter! Is that a way to speak of your future husband?

PRINCESS: *(Aghast.)* My husband? Oh, Father, you didn't really mean . . .

KING: The word of the King is final. By Royal Command, you shall be married this very day . . . and then expelled from the palace forever.

PRINCESS: *(Horried.)* Expelled!

KING: You cannot expect me to claim a beggar's wife for my daughter, can you? Go now, and prepare for the wedding.

PRINCESS: *(Piteously.)* But, Father . . .

KING THRUSHBEARD: I am honored, Your Majesty. Perhaps the Princess would like another song in celebration of this happy occasion?

PRINCESS: *(Wretchedly.)* Oh!

KING: No, no. One was quite enough, thank you. But just think . . . you can now spend the rest of your life serenading the Princess.

PRINCESS: O-o-oh!

KING: Go. Find the parson and be married at once. And then, my Daughter, I shall bid you farewell forever.

PRINCESS: *(Sadly.)* Forever . . . oh!

KING THRUSHBEARD: *(Happily.)* Forever! I shall have a wife to work for me forever! Come, my sweetheart, you may begin at once. I have a tiny hut for us to live in, and it needs a thorough cleaning. *(As KING THRUSHBEARD and PRINCESS MOVE OFF RIGHT.)* After that, you can get on to scrubbing the pots and cooking the meals . . . and the fireplace is in need of a good sweeping out . . . and then there is some wool to be spun into cloth . . . and after that . . . *(THEY EXIT RIGHT.)*

KING: *(Gazing sadly after THEM.)* Poor haughty Princess! It was a cruel thing I did to her, wasn't it? But even a Princess must learn to be humble if she is to grow into a worthy human being. And she learned . . . oh, how she learned! On the very first day there was a long and tiring journey, all on foot . . . beggars, of course, do not own coaches and horses . . . and all along the way, the Princess was reminded of her foolishness.

(KING EXITS RIGHT, as KING THRUSHBEARD and PRINCESS ENTER LEFT.)

PRINCESS: *(Looking about.)* What a beautiful forest! Oh, husband, may we rest here? I am so weary. I am not at all accustomed to walking, you know, and it is so cool and lovely here. May we . . .

KING THRUSHBEARD: Certainly not. The lord of this fine forest, King Thrushbeard, as you call him, would be greatly angered to find a pair of lowly beggars resting here.

PRINCESS: All this belongs to King Thrushbeard?

KING THRUSHBEARD: All this and more. Do you see that beautiful city gleaming at us through the trees?

PRINCESS: King Thrushbeard is lord of a whole city?

KING THRUSHBEARD: That, and several others. You can see one of his palaces there on top of the highest hill.

PRINCESS: A golden palace! Oh, how beautiful it is. And to think that I might have married King Thrushbeard! I might have been queen of all this. I might have lived in a golden palace, high on a hill.

KING THRUSHBEARD: You might indeed have lived in a palace, but you were foolish enough to mock the king, and so you are going to live in a beggar's hut instead. Come. Let me take you there at once. There is work to be done. *(KING THRUSHBEARD leads PRINCESS DOWNSTAGE CENTER. BOTH stoop to ENTER imaginary doorway. PRINCESS stares in horror.)*

PRINCESS: But I can't live here! I am a princess!

KING THRUSHBEARD: You are a beggar's wife, and this is a proper place for a beggar's wife. It needs a bit of cleaning, as you can see, but first I would like a bit of supper. The kettle is over here . . .

PRINCESS: But, where are the servants?

KING THRUSHBEARD: Beggars are their own servants, dear wife, didn't you know that? Now, if you'll just scrub the cooking pot, dig a few potatoes out of the ground, chop some wood for a fire . . .

PRINCESS: But I don't know how to do any of those things!

KING THRUSHBEARD: Then you'll have to learn. I will not have a lazy wife. Get to work, please, and scrub the cooking pot. Here. *(Picks up imaginary pot, hands it to PRINCESS, who dabs gingerly at it with a tiny handkerchief.)* No, no, not like that, you silly girl. Give it to me and I'll show you. *(Seizes pot and begins vigorously scrubbing.)*

PRINCESS: But scrubbing will ruin my delicate hands!

KING THRUSHBEARD: They will toughen in the garden soil, my dear, while you are digging up the potatoes. Come. They are just outside the door. Three or four will do nicely, I think, at least until tomorrow. *(PRINCESS obediently follows THRUSHBEARD out the door, sinks to her knees and begins daintily digging with her fingertips.)* Not like that! You have to take a pitchfork . . . like this . . . and plunge it into the ground . . . like this . . . and then you dig. There. *(Lifting out potatoes.)* I've done another job for you. And I can see that I'll have to chop the wood as well. What a useless creature I have married.

PRINCESS: My hands are not strong. They have never been used for work . . . though I did try a little embroidery one day.

KING THRUSHBEARD: Embroidery! Not much use to a beggar's wife! But perhaps you could weave baskets, and then sell them in the marketplace. Here . . . take these willow twigs and twine them together. That's it . . . just bend them in a circle.

PRINCESS: I can't! They bruise my hands. I can't make baskets.

KING THRUSHBEARD: Then you can try spinning. Just sit down over here, take this yarn and feed it into the wheel, like this. Then . . .

PRINCESS: *(Clumsily trying.)* This yarn is so harsh it cuts my fingers. Look . . . they're bleeding.

KING THRUSHBEARD: Then put it away for now and start peeling the potatoes. I want my supper.

PRINCESS: I don't know how to peel potatoes. And I don't know how to cook.

KING THRUSHBEARD: Then you'll have to learn! I shall take you to the palace of your father, and there you will become a kitchen maid.

PRINCESS: Kitchen maid? But I cannot be a servant in my own palace! I am the daughter of the King!

KING THRUSHBEARD: True. But you are also the wife of a poor beggar man, and must earn your keep. If you work hard, good wife, perhaps the cook will let you bring home a few scraps, and then you will be of use to me. Come. You will be just in time.

PRINCESS: *(Apprehensively.)* In time . . . for what?

KING THRUSHBEARD: To wash the royal dishes, my love. There was a great banquet in the palace today, with five hundred noble guests, and . . .

PRINCESS: Five hundred guests! Oh! Would that not mean . . . five hundred dishes?

KING THRUSHBEARD: Of course. And five hundred cups, and five hundred goblets. And a kitchen-full of blackened pots and pans. Really nothing any capable kitchen maid couldn't finish in a dozen hours or so.

PRINCESS: *(As THRUSHBEARD drags her out of the hut and OFF LEFT.)* A dozen hours! Five hundred plates! Oh, how low my foolish pride has brought me!

(PRINCESS and THRUSHBEARD EXIT LEFT as KING ENTERS RIGHT, stares after them, comes CENTER.)

KING: Poor Princess! It was a long, long time before her work was done, and oh, how weary and sad she was as she gathered up the few scraps the cook had given her and prepared to take them home. See her now in the doorway, *(PRINCESS ENTERS LEFT, wearing an apron full of food.)* peering in at the great banquet hall, remembering her days as a Princess. To think . . . she might have been a queen . . . and now she is nothing but a ragged kitchen maid with an apron full of scraps! Alas . . . I cannot bear to look upon her sorrow!

(Sadly KING EXITS RIGHT as PRINCESS slowly CROSSES toward RIGHT, KING THRUSHBEARD eagerly following, not in disguise.)

KING THRUSHBEARD: There you are, lovely lady! From the moment I saw you enter the kitchen door, I knew I must have you for my queen. Come dance with me now, and then the wedding may begin.

PRINCESS: Oh, Your Majesty! My humble thanks to you, but I am no more than a lowly kitchen maid. Surely you have made an error. I could not presume to dance with a king. I could not possibly . . . *(As KING THRUSHBEARD takes her hand.)* Please! Let me go! My husband is awaiting me, and . . . oh! *(Suddenly her scraps of food fall from her apron, clattering to the floor. Loud laughter is heard OFF STAGE.)* They are all

mocking me! I am so ashamed! Please, Your Majesty! *(Turns to flee, but THRUSHBEARD pulls her back.)*

KING THRUSHBEARD: It is not a dancing partner I seek . . . it is a queen! Come! Let the music play, let beautiful robes be brought for the new queen, let the wedding begin!

PRINCESS: But I am married already, Your Majesty. I am the wife of a poor beggar, and I . . .

KING THRUSHBEARD: You are my wife, too.

PRINCESS: I do not understand, Your Majesty. I am the wife . . .

KING THRUSHBEARD: Of a beggar and a king! For we are, dear lady, one and the same. It was for love of you that I disguised myself and made you believe yourself the wife of a lowly beggar. It was all for love . . .

PRINCESS: *(Puzzled and angry.)* Love? What kind of love could it be that brought me nothing but humility and shame?

KING THRUSHBEARD: Only one who loved you could see the kind heart that lay beneath your foolish pride. You have grown strong now, through your efforts to please others, and you will be a wise and loving queen. Can you understand now what I have done? And can you forgive me for what you took to be cruelty?

PRINCESS: Forgive . . . oh, yes! It was not cruelty at all. It was kindness. I know now that a true queen must be humble enough to serve her people as well as to rule them. I shall try to do both.

KING THRUSHBEARD: Let us begin our new life together then. Go, now, and prepare yourself for our proper wedding. I will summon the court musicians, and there will be a great ball in the palace . . . and for the rest of our days . . .

PRINCESS: We will live happily ever after. *(EXITS LEFT.)*

KING THRUSHBEARD: *(MOVES DOWN CENTER to address Audience.)* And that is exactly what happened. The haughty Princess mended her wicked ways, and so she was rewarded with a long and happy life. But not all the characters in Grimm's Fairy Tales are as good as our Princess turned out to be, and sometimes they do not mend their wicked ways. And then . . .

do you suppose they live happily ever after just the same? Not at all. Let me tell you what happened to another haughty woman . . . not a princess, this time, but a simple fisherman's wife. She and her husband lived in a dreadful little cottage at the edge of the sea, and every day the fisherman went down to the sea to catch fish for their supper and to sell in the marketplace. *(Sea wall flat appears UP STAGE RIGHT, with FLOUNDER hidden behind it, as FISHERMAN ENTERS LEFT, CROSSES to sea wall, and begins to fish.)* One day, when he had caught not so much as the tiniest fish in all his nets, he flung a line over the sea wall, hoping to catch at least one fish to take home to his hungry wife. Suddenly, to his great surprise and delight, there was a mighty jolt on the end of his line . . . the mightiest jolt he had ever felt. What huge creature could this be? He pulled and pulled . . . and, oh, what a struggle! And then, just as he felt he could pull no more, the biggest flounder he had ever seen suddenly reared its head out of the water and flopped across the sea wall. *(EXIT KING THRUSHBEARD RIGHT as head of FLOUNDER appears over the top of the sea wall.)*

FLOUNDER: Let me go, fisherman, let me go!

FISHERMAN: *(Amazed.)* It talks! A fish that talks! What is it I have caught? Surely this is no ordinary flounder!

FLOUNDER: I beg of you, fisherman, let me go! I am no common fish to take home for supper. I am an enchanted prince, and ruler of the deep. Let me return now to the bottom of the sea and you will never be sorry.

FISHERMAN: *(Quickly unhooking the FLOUNDER.)* At once, Your Highness, at once! I am only a humble fisherman. I would do no harm to a prince! Go now, back to your ocean kingdom, and be forever free.

FLOUNDER: You have a good heart, fisherman. I shall remember what you have done. *(FLOUNDER sinks down behind wall, as FISHERMAN stands staring.)*

FISHERMAN: It was the right thing that I did . . . but now I will have to go home emptyhanded. *(As WIFE ENTERS LEFT, comes CENTER appearing to be sweeping the floor.)* I see my wife in the doorway, waiting for her supper and there is an angry look on her face. *(MOVES reluctantly DOWN CENTER to face his WIFE.)*

WIFE: There you are at last! The fire has been going for an hour and I have nothing to cook. What did you catch for me today?

FISHERMAN: Only one fish, dear wife, I am sorry. It was a flounder, the very biggest flounder I have ever seen, and . . .

WIFE: But where is it? I see no flounder.

FISHERMAN: Alas, I had to put him back.

WIFE: Put him back? Why? When we are near starvation . . .

FISHERMAN: Because he spoke to me, and told me he was an enchanted prince. How could I bring an enchanted prince home for our supper?

WIFE: But didn't you ask him for anything? An enchanted prince can grant wishes. Anyone knows that. And if you did a kindness for him, surely he would grant you whatever you asked. Go back now, you foolish man, and ask him for something.

FISHERMAN: For what? All I did was let him go. It was a simple deed of kindness, no more.

WIFE: It was enough. Go, now, and ask him . . . ask him for a pretty cottage. I am tired of living in this hovel. Go . . . and be quick about it. *(WIFE stands with arms folded, watching, as FISHERMAN sadly approaches sea wall UP STAGE RIGHT, leans over and calls to FLOUNDER. WIFE turns her back and begins angrily sweeping.)*

FISHERMAN: Enchanted flounder! Oh, Prince of the Deep! Will you speak with this poor fisherman?

FLOUNDER: *(His head appears above wall.)* I will speak with you. A prince does not forget a kindness. Just tell me what you wish in return, and it shall be yours.

FISHERMAN: If it would not be too much, Your Highness, my good wife would like a pretty cottage to live in.

FLOUNDER: She has one. Turn around and see for yourself.

(FLOUNDER disappears behind sea wall as FISHERMAN turns to MOVE slowly DOWN CENTER, watching his WIFE who has suddenly stopped sweeping and begun turning slowly about, looking

surprised and delighted as her hovel apparently changes before her eyes.)

WIFE: Oh! How lovely it is! Flowers in the garden . . . a sitting room full of furniture . . . a beautiful kitchen . . . a larder full of food . . . chickens and ducks in the yard . . . pretty curtains . . . oh! This is all I have ever wanted. *(As FISHERMAN returns.)* Isn't it nice?

FISHERMAN: *(Awestruck.)* There could be no grander house anywhere. To me it's a castle.

WIFE: A castle! What a fine thing that would be! Just think, husband, if the flounder could grant you a cottage . . . then surely he could make it a castle instead. Yes! Go back at once, and ask him for a castle. And then . . . you can be king!

FISHERMAN: I have no wish to be a king. I am a humble fisherman, and that is quite enough for me.

WIFE: Then I will be king! Go now, and wish a castle for me . . . with servants, and a throne, and a crown. Everything a king should have. Hurry!

FISHERMAN: *(With a resigned shrug, he MOVES once more to sea wall, as WIFE impatiently watches.)* Oh, mighty Prince of the Sea! Ruler of the Deep! Will you speak with me once more?

FLOUNDER: *(Appearing over sea wall, looking angry.)* What now, fisherman? Is not the pretty cottage enough for you?

FISHERMAN: Oh, quite enough, mighty prince, quite enough for me. But my wife is not contented. She would like to be a king with a castle instead, if that would not be asking too much. A small one would do, I am sure . . .

FLOUNDER: Go home now, fisherman. Go home to your castle . . . and to your wife, the king. *(FLOUNDER disappears behind wall. FISHERMAN turns to watch in amazement as WIFE delightedly discovers her cottage turning into a castle.)*

WIFE: Oh! Just look! Marble floors . . . furniture all made of gold . . . walls hung with tapestries! Long tables laden with food and wine, all for me. Servants to do my bidding . . .

and oh, best of all, a throne! My throne! *(With back to Audience, she climbs imaginary steps to throne, turns, claps her hands imperiously.)* Fetch me my royal robes and my crown. I am the King! *(A SERVANT ENTERS LEFT, bearing robe and crown. Climbing the steps to the throne, he places the robe over WIFE'S shoulders, crown on her head. He then descends, bows, EXITS LEFT, backward, as FISHERMAN approaches.)*

FISHERMAN: I hope you will now be satisfied, wife. With a whole kingdom of your very own, what more could you possibly want?

WIFE: An empire!

FISHERMAN: *(Dismayed.)* What?

WIFE: An empire! Yes! I should now like to be emperor over all the world, so that even kings will bow down before me. Go, husband, and ask the flounder to make me emperor.

FISHERMAN: No! The flounder is growing angry, wife . . .

WIFE: *(Correcting him.)* Your Majesty!

FISHERMAN: He is growing angry . . . Your Majesty! The sea turns dark and strange when he appears, and on his face is a terrible look. I can ask him no more.

WIFE: Then I command you! Go, lowly fisherman, and do the king's bidding at once!

FISHERMAN: Yes, Your Majesty! I will try. *(Sound of wind. FISHERMAN struggles toward sea wall.)* It is too much, too much! Just feel how the wind is beginning to blow! I can barely make my way to the sea. *(Battling the wind, FISHERMAN reaches the sea wall.)* I call you once more, might Prince of the Deep, just once more. The King commands me. *(Wind continues to blow, as FISHERMAN shivers. Again there is a sound of thunder, louder this time, and a flash of lightning.)*

FLOUNDER: *(Appearing over seawall, looking agitated.)* Your wife is a foolish woman, fisherman. What more could she possibly want than to be king? What is there that is any grander than that?

FISHERMAN: Only one thing, oh Master of the Seal. There is just one thing grander than a king. My wife now wishes to be Emperor.

FLOUNDER: But your wife has already been made a king.

FISHERMAN: Ah, yes, Your Highness. But she found the kingdom rather small, and . . .

FLOUNDER: And now she wants an empire! Is a kingdom not big enough for her?

FISHERMAN: Oh, it's a very sizeable kingdom, good prince, indeed it is. But it's only a kingdom. My wife now wishes . . .

FLOUNDER: *(Ominously.)* Yes?

FISHERMAN: To . . . to . . . rule the earth. My wife now wishes to be . . . Emperor of the whole world.

FLOUNDER: *(Furiously.)* Go home, fisherman, go home! And just see what you will find.

(Thunder crashes violently as FLOUNDER disappears. Lightning flashes. FISHERMAN heads back to his WIFE, battling a vicious wind. SERVANT snatches crown from WIFE'S head, EXITS LEFT. WIFE finds herself descending stairs. Royal robe falls to the floor revealing same ragged dress in which she began. As FISHERMAN reaches his WIFE, thunder and lightning suddenly cease. There is a long moment of shocked silence as FISHERMAN and WIFE stand staring at each other.)

FISHERMAN: Everything is as it was. We are home.

WIFE: No! *(Looking about in dismay.)* I live in a palace, not this awful fisherman's hut! Where are my fine robes? My crown? My servants? And why are you not bowing before me?

FISHERMAN: Why would I bow before my wife?

WIFE: Wife? But I was king! I had a castle, servants, a royal throne . . . and then . . .

FISHERMAN: And then you asked too much. You asked what no one ever asked before, and so you ended with nothing.

WIFE: Oh! If only I'd been satisfied with that little kingdom. It was a nice castle. It would have done.

FISHERMAN: The little cottage would have done, too. There were chickens and ducks, and a larder full of food. All we ever needed. And now we haven't so much as a scrap to eat. Go now, greedy wife, and mend my nets. Perhaps I can catch some fish for our supper.

WIFE: *(Humbly, starting toward LEFT.)* I will go. But, husband, *(Turning briefly, looking hopeful.)* if you happen to catch a flounder, and it happens to be an enchanted prince . . .

FISHERMAN: No!

WIFE: Just the cottage. Only the cottage?

FISHERMAN: Go! And never let me hear you make another wish! *(To Audience, as WIFE EXITS LEFT.)* Poor, foolish woman. If she could have been grateful for what was given to her, and not greedy for the impossible, she might have lived happily ever after. But in the world of the Brothers Grimm, it is only the good who are rewarded, and my wife never learned the meaning of gratitude, or even simple human kindness. If she had, then we might both have lived as happily as our good neighbors, the shoemaker and his wife. *(SHOEMAKER ENTERS LEFT, carrying a workbench and stool which he places UP CENTER. He seats himself and begins to work.)* They were good, hardworking people, both of them, but they were just as poor as we. One night, when he had sold the very last pair of shoes in his shop, the shoemaker discovered a dreadful thing. At once he called his wife. *(FISHERMAN EXITS RIGHT.)*

SHOEMAKER: Hilda, Hilda, come here!

HILDA: *(ENTERS RIGHT.)* Yes, husband, I am here. Is it your supper you want?

SHOEMAKER: Alas, yes. But there is no money to buy food, and so we shall have to do without. I have spent our last pennies buying leather to make more shoes . . . and look! *(Holds up two scraps of leather.)* This is all I have. Just enough for one pair!

HILDA: But it is fine leather. Perhaps, if you make a truly beautiful pair of shoes, then tomorrow you can ask a higher price. Perhaps . . .

SHOEMAKER: No. My hands shake from hunger, and my work is not good any more. No one pays high prices for the poor shoes I make. Besides, I am too weary even to try. I shall just leave the scraps here, and in the morning I will do the best I can.

HILDA: In the morning you will be refreshed. And all night long we can dream of the beautiful shoes you will make tomorrow. Come, husband, let us rest now. Soon it will be morning.

(SHOEMAKER and HILDA EXIT RIGHT, as FIRST ELF peeks in from LEFT, then cautiously ENTERS. He is barefoot, and dressed in rags.)

FIRST ELF: *(Beckoning OFF STAGE LEFT.)*

Come quick, my brother,
There's no one about!
The shop is empty,
The lights are out.
Come quick before
The rising sun
Will peek in the window
And spoil our fun!

SECOND ELF: *(ENTERS, also ragged and barefoot. Joining FIRST ELF at workbench.)*

Here's hammer and nails
And needles and thread.
It's all we need
For the task ahead. *(ELVES hook arms, dance about.)*

FIRST ELF: I will hammer,
And you will sew.
Pick up your needle . . .

BOTH ELVES: To work we'll go!

FIRST ELF: *(As BOTH go merrily to work at workbench.)*

Cut out the leather,
And give it a pat . . .

SECOND ELF: You do this,
And I'll do that.

FIRST ELF: Hammer the heels,
Stitch up the soles.
You make the laces . . .

SECOND ELF: I'll make the holes!

FIRST ELF: Sew up the seams,
And sew them up tight.

SECOND ELF: You do the left,
And I'll do the right.

FIRST ELF: Did ever you see
A more beautiful shoe?

SECOND ELF: As fine as the very best
Cobbler could do!

FIRST ELF: Now finish the other,
And then there's a pair.

SECOND ELF: Of shoes that a king
Would be happy to wear!

FIRST ELF: But what is that light?

SECOND ELF: The rising sun!
The night is over . . .

FIRST ELF: And we must run!

*(BOTH EXIT swiftly, LEFT, as SHOEMAKER and HILDA
ENTER RIGHT.)*

SHOEMAKER: *(CROSSING to workbench.)* What is this? Look,
Hilda, look! A beautiful pair of shoes, all finished and ready to
be sold! Where did they come from?

HILDA: Oh, poor husband! You got up in the night and worked
until dawn, didn't you?

SHOEMAKER: I did not! And if I had, I could never have made
so beautiful a pair of shoes as these. Just see the fine stitching
. . . far too fine for my tired eyes. I wonder . . .

HILDA: Quick, hold them up, husband. A customer is looking in
at your door. Let him see what fine shoes he will find here.

*(SHOEMAKER does so as prosperous-looking CUSTOMER ENTERS
LEFT, approaches workbench.)*

CUSTOMER: *(Inspecting the shoes.)* Beautiful, beautiful! Never
did I think to find handsome shoes like these in such a tiny
village. I shall take them at once. And I should like to order
two more pairs exactly like these if you can make them by
tomorrow morning, when I must be on my way.

SHOEMAKER: But when you pay, sir, I shall have money enough
only to buy leather for one pair.

CUSTOMER: Then I shall pay you twice what they are worth.
Two more pairs by dawn tomorrow. Here. *(Dropping coins
on workbench.)* Will this be enough?

SHOEMAKER: Oh, yes, sir. I shall buy new leather at once, and
work all night if need be.

CUSTOMER: Good day then, and Godspeed. *(EXIT LEFT.)*

HILDA: What good fortune! But husband, can you do the work in
time? Will you have strength enough to sit up through the night?

SHOEMAKER: I must try! A miracle happened last night. Perhaps
it will happen again.

HILDA: If we have faith in ourselves, perhaps it will. Go now
and buy leather. I will tidy the workbench while you are gone.
*(SHOEMAKER EXITS LEFT, while HILDA begins straightening
tools and dusting. She then MOVES DOWN CENTER to talk to
Audience.)* My poor, hardworking husband! He was gone a long
time, buying just the right leather, new thread, sharper needles . . .
and when he returned, he began his task as once. But, oh, how
his hands shook as he worked. He had spared not a single copper
for food, and so he was weak with hunger. But he worked just
the same, all through the day, and on into the night. But he
could not finish. Long after midnight, the shoes were barely
begun, and my husband came sorrowfully to bed, knowing that he
had failed. But while we both slept, a miracle happened once more.
*(HILDA EXITS RIGHT, as ELVES ENTER LEFT, begin working at
once at workbench.)*

FIRST ELF: Hammer and sew,
Hammer and sew,
You do the heel . . .

SECOND ELF: And I'll do the toe!

FIRST ELF: Sew as fast
As you can, my brother!
When one pair's done,
We'll need another!

SECOND ELF: Hammer and sew,
Hammer and sew,
Finish them now . . .

FIRST ELF: And off we go!

(ELVES quickly EXIT LEFT, as HILDA ENTERS RIGHT, goes to pick up shoes, showing them to Audience.)

HILDA: See? It happened again! And when the customer paid for them, there was enough money to buy leather for four pairs of shoes! And when they were sold, there was enough for eight! My husband worked as hard as ever, but when he left his work undone at night, it was always finished in the morning. Soon my husband found his old skills magically restored, and although he had no further need of help, every morning there were twice as many shoes as he had finished himself! How did they come there? We didn't know . . . and so one night we hid ourselves behind the curtain to watch. Suddenly they came . . . two sprightly little elves, singing as they worked, sewing new shoes until dawn. And, oh, what ragged little creatures they were! At once my husband and I decided to reward them for all they had done. For many days we worked, sewing little jackets and trousers and shirts, and of course my husband made them each a brand new pair of shoes, with little leather hats to match. *(SHOEMAKER ENTERS RIGHT with little boxes, leaves them on workbench, EXITS RIGHT.)* And then we left our gifts on the workbench, and hid ourselves behind the curtain to see their happiness. *(HILDA EXITS RIGHT as ELVES ENTER LEFT, discover the new clothes, and put them on during the following lines.)*

FIRST ELF: Oh, look, my brother,
Look and see.
What's waiting here
For you and me.
Two pairs of shoes . . .

SECOND ELF: Oh! Just our size!

FIRST ELF: And clean new shirts . . .

SECOND ELF: What a fine surprise!

FIRST ELF: Trousers and jackets,
All made of leather . . .

SECOND ELF: And here's a hat
With a bright red feather!
One for you,
And one for me . . .

FIRST ELF: Was anyone ever
As happy as we?

SECOND ELF: Two others, yes.
It's very clear . . .
Our work has pleased
The good folks here.
There's nothing more
To do, my brother . . .

FIRST ELF: And so we'll go
And help another!

(ELVES begin skipping OFF LEFT, stop suddenly as fanfare is blown OFF STAGE. SERVANT ENTERS RIGHT, begins MOVING ACROSS stage.)

SERVANT: The King! The King! All prepare for the King! Prepare for the Royal Majesty! The King, the King! All prepare for the entrance of the King! *(EXIT LEFT as fanfare is again blown, and ELVES come DOWN CENTER to address Audience.)*

SECOND ELF: The royal fanfare . . .
Do you hear?
Reminding us
The King is near.

FIRST ELF: Can you recall
The thing to do
Whenever a king
Comes into view?

SECOND ELF: That's right . . . all rise
To greet the King.
I see you know
The proper thing.

FIRST ELF: Up, up, each one . . .
He's coming now . . .

SECOND ELF: Ladies curtsy . . .

FIRST ELF: Gentlemen bow.

SECOND ELF: That's good, that's fine.
You learned, I see.
I now announce . . .
His Majesty!

(Fanfare once more as KING ENTERS RIGHT, comes CENTER to address Audience, as ELVES bow themselves backward, FIRST ELF to RIGHT, SECOND ELF to LEFT, and EXIT.)

KING: Thank you, good friends and loyal subjects. You may be seated once more while I tell you what happened to all of the people you met today. Remember my daughter, the haughty princess who married a beggar and found that he was a king? Well, my daughter never forgot the humiliation her false pride brought her, and to this very day she has never spoken an unkind word to anyone. She is loved by all her subjects, and by her husband as well. But what of the fisherman's wife? *(Calling OFF STAGE RIGHT.)* Come, fisherman, tell us whether your wife mended her wicked ways, and was rewarded by a life of happiness.

FISHERMAN: *(ENTERS RIGHT, bows before KING.)* Alas, Your Majesty, my poor wife has not fared so well as your daughter . . . but she is content just the same. She has learned that nothing in this world is given to those who merely wish, and do not work, and so she has labored uncomplainingly at my side for many long years. Soon we will have enough money saved to build ourselves a pretty cottage, and I know that it is all we will ever want. For all the rest of our days, we will live as happily as our good neighbors. *(Beckoning OFF RIGHT.)* Come, Shoemaker, tell us how you and your wife have prospered.

SHOEMAKER: *(SHOEMAKER and WIFE ENTER RIGHT, come CENTER.)* As well as we ever dreamed.

HILDA: And all because of those kind little elves who helped us in our time of need.

(FIRST ELF skips in from RIGHT, comes CENTER.)

SECOND ELF: Because of you,
Our lives are bright . . .

FIRST ELF: And everything
Has ended right!

KING: How sad, how sad!

HILDA: But why sad, Your Majesty? When all our stories have ended so happily?

KING: I am sad because they have ended at all, and endings mean farewells. It is time for us to go . . . and that is what makes me sad.

SERVANT: *(ENTERS LEFT.)* Would a fanfare cheer Your Majesty? Just one more before we go? Shall all rise to bid farewell to the King?

KING: A fanfare would be a splendid way to say farewell . . . but wait! *(Holding up his hands.)* This time there will be a difference. *(To Audience.)* Even a king may learn the meaning of kindness and respect for others . . . and you, my friends, have been most kind to me today. And so it is now my turn . . . to bow to you.

(SERVANT blows fanfare as KING and OTHERS bow low before Audience and CURTAIN CLOSES.)

THE END