

It Takes a Village

By Whitney Ryan Garrity

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*Dedicated to Izzy Baker.
Thank you for creating the role of "Trudy."*

STORY OF THE PLAY

"Now, my friends... do you like stories about rousing sword fights? Do you like stories about fire-breathing dragons? Well, this story has absolutely none of that!" says Christophe as the townspeople of a small European village gather to hear this itinerant storyteller. Soon the villagers clamor to tell their own stories. And the seeming silly and simple tales infused with the villagers' personalities, become important lessons of patience ("No More Than a Tiger's Whisker"), friendship ("Birds of a Feather"), and love ("A Ring of Truth"). The villagers add not only action but humor and heart, making the tales and folklore come alive for all. Simple staging and an even distribution of parts.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ensemble casting: 4 m, 6 w, extras

ERIK (M)
ARVID (M)
JACOB (M)
CHRISTOPHE (M)

DAGMAR (W)
REVA (W)
INGA (W)
BECCA (W)
TRUDY (W)
SOFIA (W)

VILLAGERS (*as needed*)

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SETTING

The outdoor gathering place of a small European village.
Morning. Circa 1800.

SET

A footbridge dominates USC, while a series of platforms, adorned with large rocks and floral shrubs, occupy the remainder of the playing area.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Prologue

Scene 1: Birds of a Feather

Scene 2: Feathers in the Wind

Scene 3: Better Off Dead

Scene 4: Nerves of Steel

Scene 5: No More Than a Tiger's Whisker

ACT II

Scene 1: No One Here But Us Chickens

Scene 2: The Princess and the Stonecutter

Scene 3: A Ring of Truth

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ACT I
Prologue

(AT RISE: The LIGHTS fade up to half, revealing the gathering place of a small European village circa 1800. In the stillness, SFX: a rooster is heard crowing in the distance, signifying daybreak. Suddenly, the LIGHTS come up to full and the forlorn spot is rife with noise and activity as the VILLAGERS enter from all directions. Some gather to sell their wares and others to buy.)

DAGMAR: *(Proffering a basket as she samples her own wares.)* Dates and pistachios for sale!

(ERIK enters, pulling a large cart. REVA and INGA approach him with interest.)

ERIK: Rags, here!

DAGMAR: Delicious dates and— *(Producing fruit from her basket.)* Oh my! But these dates are delicious!

ERIK: Rags for any occasion!

(DAGMAR slips the date into her apron pocket.)

DAGMAR: Pistachios for sale!

REVA: *(Rummaging through the cart; to INGA.)* Perhaps you can make another dress like the rag you're wearing. *(REVA wanders off.)*

ARVID: *(Dragging on a plywood palm tree.)* Palm tree... any takers for a palm tree?

INGA: *(Hurt.)* Well ... that was just plain mean!

JACOB: *(Examines the tree.)* It's fake!

ERIK: *(Offering a rag.)* Handkerchief for the lady?

INGA: *(Touched; taking the rag.)* Why, thank you, sir.

ERIK: That'll be a penny, ma'am.

(INGA angrily gives back the rag and moves away. ERIK wrings out the rag, returns it to his wares, and pulls his cart USC, below the footbridge.)

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JACOB: This is a plywood tree!

BECCA: *(Peddling her basket.)* Apples, fresh apples here!

ARVID: *(Shrugs.)* It's real plywood.

DAGMAR: Ooh! How much are your apples?

BECCA: One penny!

TRUDY: Only a penny? *(Grabs the apple and holds it up.)*

Fresh apples, only two pence!

BECCA: Hey!

(CHRISTOPHE enters with a satchel on his shoulder. He raises up a sheaf of papers as he makes his way to the footbridge.)

CHRISTOPHE: Tales for sale!

DAGMAR: Ooh! Still a bargain.

(DAGMAR pays TRUDY for the apple.)

TRUDY: Thank you! Here's your apple... *(Handing a penny*

to BECCA.) Here's your penny... *(Flips her coin in the air.)*

And here's my penny!

(TRUDY and DAGMAR wander off, happy with their items, leaving BECCA bewildered. CHRISTOPHE has made it to the top of the footbridge.)

CHRISTOPHE: Tales to tell and tales to sell!

BECCA: What just happened here?

(The VILLAGERS begin to squabble with each other. CHRISTOPHE yells above the din.)

CHRISTOPHE: I said, tales for sale!

(The VILLAGERS stop arguing abruptly. They all turn and stare at CHRISTOPHE for a moment, then resume squabbling.)

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CHRISTOPHE: *(Cont'd. Attempts to be heard again.)* Anyone want to hear a story?

SOFIA: *(Subduing the VILLAGERS.)* Wait a minute. Wait a minute! *(To CHRISTOPHE.)* Are you saying that you're actually selling stories?

ARVID: Who buys a story?

SOFIA: We *all* have stories! Why, there was this one time when I—

ARVID: Heard it!

SOFIA: *(Annoyed.)* No, this is different. I was on my way to—

ARVID: Heard it!

ERIK: I have stories!

DAGMAR: My grandmother has stories!

REVA: My father has stories about *her* grandmother!

(VILLAGERS begin to squabble again, taking sides.)

CHRISTOPHE: My stories are better! *(This gets the VILLAGERS to be quiet.)* Folks, tell you what I'm gonna do. I'll tell you all a story... for free! If you think you've got a better one, there won't be a penny charge. But if you can't come up with a tale to compete with mine, well then, I guess I get a penny from each of you!

(VILLAGERS deliberate noisily for a moment. They turn to CHRISTOPHE and exclaim in unison...)

VILLAGERS: Deal!

CHRISTOPHE: *(Making his way from the footbridge to CS.)* Now, my friends... do you like stories about rousing sword fights? *(The VILLAGERS respond excitedly.)* Do you like stories about fire-breathing dragons? *(VILLAGERS respond even more excitedly. HE shrugs.)* Well, this story has absolutely none of that! But it does have birds!

SOFIA: Birds? *(Derisively.)* You mean, it's *for* the birds!

(VILLAGERS laugh.)

INGA: Quiet, the man is trying to tell a story!

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CHRISTOPHE: Thank you, good woman. Perhaps you'd like to join me?

INGA: *(Elated.)* Me? *(Turns to one of the VILLAGERS, beaming.)* He asked me to join him.

(INGA joins CHRISTOPHE CS. As Christophe narrates the story, the VILLAGERS become its characters. This continues with all of the tales that are told. Whatever props or costume pieces the villagers may need are taken from, and returned to, the "rag" cart from story to story. Although each story title is denoted in the text, there should be no blackouts or breaks in the action except for the intermission.)

Scene 1: Birds of a Feather

CHRISTOPHE: This is a story about a flock of quails. This particular flock was led by its sage elder quail... *(Turns to INGA.)* Um...?

INGA: *(Assuming an older demeanor.)* Wise Old Inga.

CHRISTOPHE: Yes... Wise Old Inga led the rest of the flock and believe me...

(REVA, DAGMAR, ARVID, and ERIK begin to walk around aimlessly, like birds, occasionally comically bumping into one another.)

CHRISTOPHE: *(Cont'd.)* These birds needed leadership! Especially because these birds were in... *(Dramatically.)* danger! *(Prodding INGA.)* Danger!

INGA: Oh, yes of course! *(Addressing the QUAILS.)* Attention! Attention! It has come to my... *(Shrugs, unable to come up with another word.)* attention... that a dangerous hunter is in our midst.

CHRISTOPHE: Indeed! Now I shall need a volunteer to play the handsome hunter.

JACOB: *(Coming forward.)* I volunteer to be handsome! *(JACOB poses then realizes his faux pas. He turns sheepishly to the CHRISTOPHE.)* I mean, be the hunter.

BECCA: My, he is handsome!

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CHRISTOPHE: (*Matter-of-factly.*) Yes, yes, he is. So anyway, this particular hunter—

BECCA: (*Taking JACOB's arm.*) And his wife.

CHRISTOPHE: The hunter in this story doesn't have a wife.

JACOB: (*Disentangling himself from BECCA.*) It's not me, babe. It's the story.

BECCA: (*Huffily.*) Fine! But if you need me, I'll be at home... in our hunter's cottage... that we share!

(*CHRISTOPHE prods INGA to get on with the story.*)

INGA: Fair birds of the flock, gather around! Are we all here?

DAGMAR: I am here, Anna Quail.

ARVID: And her husband, Dan Quail.

ERIK: I am... um... Quail the quail.

CHRISTOPHE: (*Derisively.*) Very original, birdbrain.

REVA: And it is I, Quintessa Quail. The fabulous star of the flock! Crows caw for me, robins warble for me, hummingbirds... hum for me! Nightingales—

INGA: (*Placing her hand over REVA's mouth.*) They "gale" for you, we get it. You're very popular! (*Assuming the older demeanor.*) Please listen! We must all be wary of this hunter!

ARVID: We hear you, Old Wise Inga, and shall be careful of this hunter's gun.

INGA: No! He needs no gun.

JACOB: (*Disappointed.*) No gun? Well, shoot! I mean, *no* shoot! I mean, shoot!

CHRISTOPHE: This crafty hunter uses only a net.

JACOB: (*To the VILLAGERS, full of himself.*) I'm all crafty and stuff.

INGA: The trick is to stay together
We'll be safe as birds of a feather.

ARVID: (*Impressed.*) Hey, that rhymed! Did you mean to...?
'Cause it totally...

DAGMAR: (*Hits ARVID on the back of the head.*) We hear you, Old Wise Inga.

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(The QUAILS salute INGA and then begin wandering aimlessly again.)

CHRISTOPHE: But the birds did not heed the warning. Soon enough, along came the handsome hunter.

JACOB: *(Flirty with SOFIA.)* Yeah, I got a thing now. *(JACOB makes the “call me” gesture but then looks at his hand curiously. He turns to Sofia.)* Uh ... shout out your window at me, babe.

(JACOB lurks around the BIRDS, stalking his prey. He pantomimes tossing his net over REVA, who freezes.)

DAGMAR: *(Pointing in distress.)* He's got Quintessa!

(REVA performs an elaborate death scene. CHRISTOPHE attempts to move the story along, but to no avail. Finally, Reva “dies.”)

CHRISTOPHE: The other birds mourned as the hunter dragged away poor Quintessa Quail.

(JACOB makes a grab for REVA who jumps to her feet, miffed.)

REVA: I'll do it, I'll do it. You know, it's bad luck to rile the dead, bird-breath! *(REVA joins the VILLAGERS haughtily.)*

INGA: What's come to pass can't be undone.

Our fearsome flock is minus one.

Now, this time, listen to me. If we stay together and beat our wings in unison—

ERIK: That's a stupid plan.

ARVID: He's right! Who died and left you boss?

DAGMAR: Well, actually, Quintessa kind of— *(Imitates REVA's death scene.)*

INGA: *(Interrupting.)* Listen! If we don't stick together, we shall surely be captured separately.

End of Freeview

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