### STORIES UNDER THE BIG TOP

By LORRAINE THOMPSON

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th># of Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RINGMASTER</td>
<td>story leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOG</td>
<td>member of the band, “The Bremen Town Musicians”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DONKEY</td>
<td>another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARMER</td>
<td>Dog’s owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABY GOAT</td>
<td>youngest of the Billy Goats Gruff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROTHER GOAT</td>
<td>middle Billy Goat Gruff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG GOAT</td>
<td>oldest Billy Goat Gruff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TROLL</td>
<td>owner of bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAT MAN</td>
<td>sells hats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONKEYS 1-11</td>
<td>silly; steal hats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LION</td>
<td>king of the jungle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOUSE</td>
<td>small but helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUNTERS 1-3</td>
<td>hunt the lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FISHERMAN</td>
<td>kind-hearted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHEL</td>
<td>selfish wife of Fisherman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAGIC FISH</td>
<td>wise and beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAID</td>
<td>works for Ethel; becomes Fisherman’s wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRAS (at least 6)</td>
<td>servants who work for Ethel; n/a additional monkeys; circus acts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The play can be performed with as few as 14 actors or as many as 36 or more. Most characters can be played by either male or female actors. Please see the PRODUCTION NOTES in the back of the playbook for tips on double casting.
SETTING

TIME: The present, past or future.
PLACE: The circus, a fabled place of possibility.
The set is very basic, consisting of a few versatile pieces that can serve various functions. Two ladders with a curtain hanging between them stand UP CENTER, hiding the UP CENTER EXIT from view. Two cubes, chair height, are DOWN LEFT and DOWN RIGHT. Pushed together, they represent a bridge. There are three EXITS—LEFT, RIGHT and UP CENTER. If desired, colorful banners or Christmas lights strung in the background can add to the circus atmosphere.
The action flows continuously from one story to the next, with no actual scene breaks. The narratives are “The Bremen Town Musicians,” “The Three Billy Goats Gruff,” “Monkey See, Monkey Do,” “The Lion and the Mouse” and “The Fisherman and the Magic Fish.”
STORIES UNDER THE BIG TOP

LIGHTS UP: The mood is of a carnival filled with excitement. CIRCUS MUSIC PLAYS as the RINGMASTER ENTERS. He bows deeply before he speaks. There is a DRUM ROLL.

RINGMASTER: Ladies and gentlemen! (Upon speaking the following lines, CAST MEMBERS ENTER one by one, from all directions.)

CAT: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!

DONKEY: Come one!

DOG: Come all!

BROTHER: Step right up!

TROLL: Sit right down!

RINGMASTER: Hear the greatest stories on earth!

FAIRMER: Stories of faith...

BIG: ...family...

BABY: ...greed...

FISHERMAN: ...magic...

LION: ...and bravery!

RINGMASTER: Stories to teach...

HAT MAN: ...bedazzle...

ETHEL: ...amaze...

MAGIC FISH: ...and entertain!

RINGMASTER: And where better to hear these stories but here...

ALL: ...under the Story Time Big Top!

RINGMASTER: Now, on with the show! (CAST scatters to take places.)

Let us begin with our very own Big Top Band, “The Bremen Town Musicians”! (EXITS UP CENTER. DOG, CAT and DONKEY cross to DOWN CENTER as OTHERS EXIT in all directions. The three MUSICIANS “sing” to the tune of classic circus theme music [e.g., “Entry of the Gladiators”].)

DOG: (Sings.) Ruff!

DONKEY: (Sings.) Ee-aw, Ee-aw!

MUSICIANS: (Sings.)

To AUDIENCE.) We weren’t always the Big Top Band, you know.

Before we came here, we were just three unhappy...

CAT: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!

DONKEY: Come one!

DOG: Come all!

BROTHER: Step right up!

TROLL: Sit right down!

RINGMASTER: Hear the greatest stories on earth!

FAIRMER: Stories of faith...

BIG: ...family...

BABY: ...greed...

FISHERMAN: ...magic...

LION: ...and bravery!

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DOG: (Sings.) Ruff!

DONKEY: (Sings.) Ee-aw, Ee-aw!

MUSICIANS: (Sings.)

To AUDIENCE.) We weren’t always the Big Top Band, you know.

Before we came here, we were just three unhappy...

DOG: ...unwanted...
DONKEY: …animals.

DOG: You see, it all started one day when my master came to me and said...

FARMER: (ENTERS RIGHT.) Dawg, 'fraid I’m gonna have to let you go.

You just ain’t the dawg you used to be. Yer too old to run, too old to fetch and yer certainly too old to hunt. Let’s face it, yer purty much good fer nuttin’… ’cept howlin’ at the moon. I’m afraid I’m gonna have to ask you to leave. (EXITS RIGHT.)

DOG: (Exchanges glances with DONKEY and CAT. ALL shrug their shoulders. DONKEY and CAT EXIT LEFT. To AUDIENCE.) So I started down the road… feelin’ a bit sorry for myself. “Ain’t the dog I used to be… good for nothing, ’cept howling at the moon,” and who wants to hear that? (Gets an idea.) Who, indeed?! Why, I bet a lot of people would love to hear me howl. (Howls.) It might just be music to their ears. (To AUDIENCE.) Everybody give it a try. When I count to three, let’s all howl. One, two, three! (Howls, encouraging AUDIENCE to howl along with him.) That was great. Howling is a lot like singing, don’t you think? Say, that’s what I’ll do! I will go into town and become a musician! I may be too old to run, fetch or hunt, but I am certainly not too old to sing! (Howls, then EXITS LEFT.)

RINGMASTER: (ENTERS UP CENTER.) Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the Story Time Big Top arena the Brothers Gruff! (The THREE BILLY GOATS ENTER RIGHT one at a time, coming out when they are introduced as if they are gymnasts.) Welcome Baby Goat Gruff! Brother Goat Gruff! And the leader of the Brothers Gruff, Big Billy Goat Gruff! (They take their bows and set up the “bridge” CENTER by pushing the two cubes in front of the ladder curtain. They take their places RIGHT.) This family of brothers once lived in a meadow far away where they would spend their idyllic days…

BABY: …nibbling…

BROTHER: …chomping…

RINGMASTER: …on the green, green grass. (EXITS UP CENTER.)

BABY: (Whines.) I’m tired of eating this grass. (Looks around, sees the grass on the other side of the bridge, STAGE LEFT.) I want some of that grass. (Starts to go over to the bridge but is stopped by BIG.)

BIG: How many times do I have to tell you? You need to be happy with the grass you have. You need to stay over on this side of the bridge with the rest of your family!

BABY: (Whines.) But why? That grass looks sooooo much better than this ol’ nasty stuff. I don’t see what the big deal is.
BROTHER: (To AUDIENCE.) He doesn’t see what the big deal is! (Realizes that he is not sure himself what the deal is. To BIG.) Tell him what the big deal is, Big.

BIG: The big deal is that this grass is safe and that grass is dangerous!

Got it? Goats that eat together… keep together.

BROTHER/BABY: Eat together… keep together. (BROTHER says this with military-like zest. BABY says this with teenager-like attitude.)

Got it!

BIG: Good.

BABY: (Sarcastic.) Lucky us. We all get to eat safe grass. Safe, nasty grass. But if we have to be miserable, at least we are miserable together.

BIG: Fine! You want better grass? I will go and find us some better grass. Some better, safe grass! (EXITS RIGHT.)

BABY: Wow, what’s his problem? Was it something I said?

BROTHER: You and your picky eating… that’s what’s his problem.

BABY: I can’t help it if I have a sophisticated palette for fine flora. Call me a lawn specialist, a garden connoisseur, a—

BROTHER: —picky eater who talks too much! I am going to see if Big needs any help finding you some greener pastures. (Starts to EXIT, then turns to give warning.) And while I am gone, you stick to eating the grass right where you are! Understand?

BABY: Okay! Okay! I will eat the grass where I am. (BROTHER EXITS RIGHT. To AUDIENCE.) And while I am gone, you stick to eating the grass right where you are! Understand?

BABY: Okay! Okay! I will eat the grass where I am. (BROTHER EXITS RIGHT. To AUDIENCE.) And if I cross the bridge, where I am will be over there! And I will be happy to eat the grass right where I am. Good taste and brains, what can I say? (Begins to cross the bridge, but stops in the middle.) I don’t see what the big deal is…

TROLL: Just then, the troll who owns the bridge came home and saw the little goat. He was none too pleased.

BABY: (Peeks out from behind ladder curtain UP CENTER. To AUDIENCE.) Who is that standing on my bridge?

TROLL: Who said that?

BABY: A troll bridge? Pay to get across? But I don’t have any money. (Tries to look pitiful.) I’m just a sweet little hungry goat weak from lack of food. (Coughs.) I just want to nibble on that grass over there before I waste away from malnutrition.
BABY: Okay, Mr. Greedy Pants, I have had just about enough of you and your troll bridge. I want some of that grass, so you need to move out of my way! (Tries to run past the TROLL, who stops him by putting his hand on BABY’S forehead. BABY runs in place.)

TROLL: Look, I don’t want any trouble. Pay the troll and you can pass. (BROTHER ENTERS RIGHT.)

BABY: (Sees BROTHER returning.) I can’t pay you, but my big brother can. Brother! Give the troll some cash! (Runs past the TROLL to LEFT.)

BROTHER: (Runs onto the bridge, confused. TROLL stops him. Speaks to BABY, who is hiding behind TROLL.) Why, you! You were supposed to stay on this side of the bridge! You better come home before Big comes back, or you are really in trouble!

BABY: Okay! Okay! Don’t get your britches in a wad! I’m on my way. (Tries to pass, but TROLL will not move.) Excuse me, Mr. Troll, but I have to go home, so if you will just let me pass…

TROLL: Look, kid, you already owe me for the first time you passed over my bridge. You ain’t gettin’ by again unless…. (Looks at BROTHER.) …someone pays the troll. You want to be with your kid brother, pay the troll!

BABY: He’s right. Why don’t you come over here? The family that eats together… keeps together. Besides, if we have to pay the troll anyway, we might as well pay him so you can eat good grass, too! The grass over here is so much greener.

BROTHER: It does look greener… and thicker… and…

TROLL: Are you coming over or not?

BROTHER: I’m coming over!

TROLL: Then you gotta pay the troll. Pay for yourself and pay for your bratty brother.

BROTHER: About that…, I only have enough to pay for one of us. (Hears BIG coming.) But if you let me pass, I promise you our big brother will take care of everything.

TROLL: Promise?

BROTHER: (Shows AUDIENCE his fingers crossed behind his back.) Goat’s honor.

TROLL: I’m getting too old for this job! All right, go across. I should have listened to my mother and become a dentist. (BROTHER passes TROLL and joins BABY at LEFT. BIG ENTERS RIGHT, looks around.) Looking for your brothers? They’re over there, on the other side of my bridge.
BIG: What?! And just what are they doing on the other side? (To BROTHERS.) You were clearly told to stay put on this side!

TROLL: Well, they didn’t. They crossed my bridge, and since I have been assured that you will want to cross over to be with them, you will have to pay the troll... that’s me. (Holds out hand.) I take local checks and credit cards, of course.

BIG: I’m not paying any troll!

TROLL: Well, you can’t cross over to them without paying a troll, and they can’t cross over to you without paying a troll. So if you want to be together, it seems that someone will be paying the troll!

BIG: I’m not going anywhere! This side is just fine with me! In fact, I found a very nice meadow of grass just over the hill. I think I’ll go there instead! If they want to come home, they can figure out how. (Turns to walk away. BROTHERS start to panic.)

BABY: You can’t just leave us here!

BROTHER: What are we to do?

BABY: Forget the us! Who is going to take care of me?

TROLL: What I want to know is who is going to pay the troll?! I gotta lie down. (Lies down on the bridge. Everything settles down.)

BABY: (Starts to eat the grass. Makes a horrible face and pretends to spit it out.) This grass is nasty! I liked the other grass better.

BROTHER: (Chases BABY towards LEFT EXIT.)

BIG: (ENTERS RIGHT.) And just because the grass on the other side is greener...

BABY. (Being chased by BROTHER.) ...doesn’t mean it’s better! (EXITS LEFT with BROTHER. BIG pushes a cube to DOWN RIGHT and TROLL pushes a cube to DOWN LEFT as he and BIG EXIT LEFT.)

HAT MAN: (ENTERS RIGHT, carrying a sack with 11 hats in it. He wears a hat, of course. Calls out.) Hats for sale! Get your hats! (To AUDIENCE.) One day, the Hat Man was out selling his hats. (Calls out.) I’ve got big hats, small hats, short hats and tall hats. I’ve got hats for one and hats for all—no head too big, no head too small! (To himself.) Whew! I’ve been selling hats all morning. I think I will have a seat and eat my lunch. (Approaches the cube DOWN RIGHT.) This looks like a good spot! (To AUDIENCE.) So the Hat Man sat down to eat his lunch. (Sits, facing out to the AUDIENCE angled DOWN RIGHT. Takes imaginary lunch out of his sack and sets the

End of script preview.
DONKEY: The circus! We could play for the circus!
(The PARADE marches to stand behind the MUSICIANS.)

DOG: And that is how we came to be here. We heard the…

RINGMASTER: Ladies and gentlemen!
CAT: Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!
DONKEY: Come one!
FARMER: Come all!
BROTHER: Step right up!
TROLL: Sit right down!
RINGMASTER: Hear the greatest stories on earth…
ALL: …here under the Story Time Big Top!

DOG: The end!

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES
ONSTAGE: Two ladders with a curtain hung between them, two chair-height cubes (pushed together to make the bridge).
BROUGHT ON:
- Sack with 11 hats (HAT MAN)
- Net, tiny cage (HUNTERS)
- Cardboard or plastic knife (FISHERMAN)
- A few fish [several in a net, or maybe just a couple of big fish] (MAGIC FISH)
- White picket fence [optional] (MAID, ETHEL)

COSTUMES
The basic costume for all consists of colorful overalls or some other brightly colored, stylized, uniform look. Additional pieces such as aprons, hats and jackets can be added for character changes. Animal masks or floppy ears and mittens as well as clip-on tails can be used for the LION, MOUSE, CAT, DOG, DONKEY and GOATS. The HAT MAN obviously wears a hat. The RINGMASTER might have a top hat and glittery vest. ETHEL changes dresses with the help of the SERVANTS behind the curtain, so it should be easy to put on over her current costume for a quick change. Clown costumes (or some representation thereof) are needed for the final scene for any or all actors except DOG, CAT and DONKEY.
SOUND EFFECTS
Circus music, drum roll.

FLEXIBLE CASTING
The play can be performed with as few as 14 actors or as many as 36 or more. Many characters can be played by either male or female actors, but ETHEL and the MAID must be female and the FISHERMAN must be male. There are various combinations for the players, but one possibility is as follows:

PLAYER 1:  CAT/SERVANT 1
PLAYER 2:  DONKEY/MONKEY 4
PLAYER 3:  FARMER/MONKEY 2/HUNTER 2
PLAYER 4:  BROTHER/MONKEY 4/HUNTER 1
PLAYER 5:  TROLL/MONKEY 10/HUNTER 3
PLAYER 6:  DOG/SERVANT 3
PLAYER 7:  BIG/MONKEY 11/SERVANT 6
PLAYER 8:  BABY/MAID/MONKEY 9
PLAYER 9:  FISHERMAN/MONKEY 5
PLAYER 10: LION/MONKEY 6/SERVANT 2
PLAYER 11:  HAT MAN/SERVANT 4
PLAYER 12:  ETHEL/MONKEY 7
PLAYER 13:  MAGIC FISH/MOUSE/MONKEY 8
PLAYER 14: RINGMASTER/MONKEY 3/SERVANT 5

For a cast larger than 36, the players who introduce and conclude the show can be played by separate actors dressed in circus costumes. Add as many extras as desired—you might even have students with special talents show their stuff (e.g., juggling, acrobatics, etc.). While this alternative does not create substantial speaking roles, it greatly enhances the circus theme of the play.
We hope you’ve enjoyed this script sample.

We encourage you to read the entire script before making your final decision.

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