# SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

# This Is Where We Came In

A play

Alan Ayckbourn

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## THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN

First performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 4th and 11th August 1990 with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Fred** | Danny McGrath |
| **Nell** | Kate Rhodes James |
| **Bethany** | Clare Clifford |
| **Talitha** | Cecily Hobbs |
| **Jenkin** | Robert McCulley |
| **Albert** | Timothy Kightley |
| **Great Aunt Repetitus** | Antonia Pemberton |
| **Uncle Erraticus** | Gordon Reid |
| **Uncle Oblivious** | Guy Nicholls |
| **Kevin on Keyboards** | John Pattison |

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn and Malcolm Hebden
Lighting by Jackie Staines
Original music by John Pattison

# CHARACTERS

**Fred**

*The Players*

**Nell**
**Bethany**
**Talitha**
**Jenkin**
**Albert**

*The Storytellers*

**Great Aunt Repetitus**
**Uncle Erraticus**
**Uncle Oblivious**
**Kevin on Keyboards**

Other plays by Alan Ayckbourn published by Samuel French Ltd:

Absent Friends
Absurd Person Singular
Bedroom Farce
Callisto 5
A Chorus of Disapproval
Confusions
A Cut in the Rates
Ernie's Incredible Illucinations
Henceforward ...
How the Other Half Loves
Intimate Exchanges Volume 1
Intimate Exchanges Volume 2
Joking Apart
Just Between Ourselves
Living Together
Man of the Moment
Mixed Doubles (with other authors)
Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays
Mr Whatnot
My Very Own Story
The Norman Conquests
Relatively Speaking
The Revengers' Comedies
Round and Round the Garden
Season's Greetings
A Small Family Business
Suburban Strains
Table Manners
Taking Steps
Ten Times Table
Time and Time Again
Time of My Life
Tons of Money (revised)
Way Upstream
Wolf at the Door
Woman in Mind

# ACT I

*Somewhere or other*

*A sign says "Stories told here today at 10.30 a.m." (Or whenever)*

*Fred, a young man, waits by the sign. His clothes, though not of the period as the other characters', should seem neutral and timeless*

**Fred** (*to no-one in particular*) I've been waiting here a very long time indeed. (*He reflects*) At least, I think I have.

*Nell, a young woman of about the same age, enters. She wears simple plain peasant-type, somewhat "fairy-tale" clothes. She carries a bundle containing her costumes and props as do all the StoryPlayers*

**Nell** (*seeing Fred*) Oh, hallo.
**Fred** Hallo.
**Nell** Why, it's ... Isn't it ... ? Yes. Aren't you ... ?
**Fred** Fred.
**Nell** No, you're not. Surely you're ... ?
**Fred** Fred. My name's Fred.
**Nell** Well. All right, then. I'm Nell.
**Fred** How do you do.
**Nell** Fred? (*She stares at him*) Are you sure that's your name?
**Fred** Don't start that again, please.
**Nell** Strange. It must have been another story, mustn't it?
**Fred** What?
**Nell** Another time. Yes. It was a happy time, I know that.
**Fred** (*suspecting she is slightly deranged*) Oh, yes? Good.
**Nell** So anyway what story are you in at the moment, Fred?
**Fred** Story? I'm not in a story.
**Nell** Oh, but you must be.
**Fred** What story?
**Nell** Whoever's telling it. The story by the person who made you up.
**Fred** Made me up? What are you talking about?
**Nell** Invented you. The reason you're here is because someone somewhere is telling a story about you. You knew that, surely?
**Fred** Someone's telling a story? About me?

**Nell** Yes. We're all a part of somebody's story.

**Fred** Really? That's your theory of life, is it?

**Nell** It's not my theory. How else did we get here? If you don't mind my saying so, you're not very well informed are you, Fred? You don't seem to know much.

**Fred** (*indignantly*) I know lots of things ——

**Nell** It's not your fault, I'm not blaming you. Please don't get angry. You can't help it, can you? No, I blame the person who's put you in their story. They've just invented a very, very ignorant character, that's all. It's very thoughtless of them.

**Fred** I'm not ignorant. I know plenty of things, never you mind.

**Nell** What, for instance? You don't even look as if you know what you're doing here.

**Fred** I know what I'm doing here.

**Nell** What?

**Fred** I'm doing here — waiting — waiting patiently for these stories to start.

**Nell** Stories?

**Fred** (*indicating the sign*) These stories, there. Those.

**Nell** Oh, those stories. I see.

**Fred** Are they anything to do with you?

**Nell** Oh, yes.

**Fred** Well when are they going to start? I've been waiting here for ages.

**Nell** How long? Exactly?

**Fred** (*puzzled*) I don't know. Exactly. Does it matter? Hours and hours? Days and days? I don't know. Years and years. For ever.

**Nell** For ever after. Fascinating. I'd love to know which one of them it is that's telling you. And why? It's a very weird story indeed.

**Fred** Never mind about my story. More to the point, what about your story, then?

**Nell** My story? Well, my story is your story. It must be. Or yours is mine, I'm not quite sure. I'm not certain yet if I'm appearing in your story or you're appearing in my story. But the fact is we're both in the same story now. Obviously. And the story is apparently that I should come on here ahead of the others in order to meet you alone. Presumably. Why?

**Fred** No idea.

**Nell** Why to meet you? There must have been a reason. We shall see, won't we? This must have an ending or they couldn't have started it. How exciting ... Which one of them could possibly have told it like this? It must have been one of them ...

**Fred** One of who?

**Nell** Well, either ...

*Before she can answer, though, the other StoryPlayers enter. They are, in no particular order, Bethany, Talitha, Jenkin and Albert. Each is dressed,*

*as Nell is, in the basic costume of the character each most often plays. It would seem thus that Talitha usually plays mothers and countrywomen; Jenkin, princes and noblemen; Bethany, witches and sundry villains; Albert, woodcutters, shepherds and assorted mechanicals. Like Nell, they each carry their own particular bundle of props and costume bits and pieces*

Ah! Here they are ...

**Bethany** Here we are.

**Jenkin** Here we are.

**Talitha** Here we are.

**Albert** Are we? Thank heavens.

**Nell** Everyone, this is Fred.

**Jenkin** (*coolly*) Oh, yes?

**Talitha** Oh, how lovely. Another character.

**Bethany** (*looking Fred up and down appreciatively*) Another character. Delicious.

**Albert** Not before time.

**Fred** Hallo ...

**Nell** Fred, this is Bethany ...

**Bethany** Hallo. He seems familiar, doesn't he?

**Talitha** Yes, he does rather. I'm Talitha, hallo.

**Fred** (*a bit overwhelmed*) Hallo.

**Talitha** But I can't think where we could have met him, Bethany, can you?

**Bethany** No. But he's not someone you'd forget, is he, Talitha?

**Talitha** Not at all.

**Bethany** (*to Nell*) What did you say his name was, Nell?

**Nell** Fred.

**Bethany** Fred?

**Talitha** Fred?

**Bethany** No.

**Talitha** No.

**Albert** I knew a Fred once.

**Nell** Did you?

**Albert** (*indicating Fred*) But it wasn't this one.

**Nell** No?

**Albert** No, this particular Fred died when he was fifty-seven. Eaten by a giant.

**Talitha** Sad.

**Jenkin** Personally, I have never known anyone called Fred, alive or dead. But you are familiar ... (*He walks away and starts to unpack his bundle in a distant corner*)

**Albert** (*offering Fred his hand*) I'm Albert. How do you do.

**Fred** How do you do.

**Albert** I'm usually a woodcutter. Sometimes a shepherd. Though I also do little tailors and I have a good line in loyal four-legged friends.
**Fred** Really.
**Albert** I'm flexible. Him over there. That's Jenkin. He does the nobs. Posh folk. Princes and noblemen and emperors and that.
**Fred** Oh.
**Albert** That's why he's like he is. He's done them so often he thinks he's a royal himself.
**Fred** Good. Well, are we ... ? Are you all going to tell us a story then? Now you're here?

*They all look at him blankly*

Please?
**Albert** Oh, no.
**Bethany** No.
**Nell** No.
**Talitha** No.
**Jenkin** Certainly not.
**Bethany** We're not the StoryTellers ...
**Nell** We're StoryPlayers.
**Bethany** Quite different.
**Talitha** Quite, quite different.
**Albert** Quite, quite, quite different.
**Jenkin** Utterly different.
**Fred** Oh. I'm sorry.
**Nell** You mustn't blame Fred. He doesn't know much. He's terribly, terribly ignorant, actually. It's not his fault. He just doesn't seem to have been given any brains.
**Fred** (*indignantly*) I've got plenty of brains. Don't you worry. All right then, who is telling these stories, if you're not?
**Talitha** They are, of course.
**Bethany** Who else?
**Fred** Who?
**Nell** Either Great Aunt Repetitus ...
**Albert** If you like hearing things twice ...
**Talitha** Or Uncle Erraticus ...
**Albert** When he can remember to get it right ...
**Bethany** Or Uncle Oblivious ...
**Albert** If he can remember anything at all.
**Talitha** He forgot on the way here.
**Bethany** That's why we're late.
**Nell** (*to Fred*) Don't worry, they'll be along shortly.

**Talitha** They're quite elderly.
**Bethany** Extremely elderly.
**Jenkin** They're all half dead. Well, I'm ready. I don't know about the rest of you.
**Talitha** Well, now you're going to have to wait, Jenkin, aren't you?
**Bethany** Because the StoryTellers aren't here, are they?
**Jenkin** Typical.
**Albert** We don't even know what story they're going to tell yet, anyway.
**Jenkin** I can guess what I'll be doing. Something royal. Bound to be.
**Bethany** Why don't you make one up yourself, Jenkin?
**Talitha** Yes, off you go, Jenkin.
**Nell** Come on, Jenkin ...
**Albert** Go for it, Jenkin.
**Jenkin** If you think I'm doing anything just so you lot can snigger ... I can wait. Anyway, we haven't even got ... Where is he?
**Bethany** (*alarmed*) Oh, no ...
**Albert** (*equally so*) Oh!
**Nell** (*alarmed*) Oh, no ...
**Jenkin** (*equally so*) Oh!
**Fred** What's the matter?
**Talitha** (*agitatedly*) Oh, oh, oh ... !
**Nell** (*to Jenkin*) What have you done with him?
**Fred** Done with who?
**Talitha** (*in panic*) Well, it wasn't me, you can't blame me this time.
**Bethany** (*likewise*) Well, it certainly wasn't me.
**Fred** What's the problem? Who's gone missing?
**Nell** Kevin on Keyboards, of course.
**Jenkin** They'll be livid. Remember how angry they were last time we lost him.
**Albert** What are we going to do? What do we do now? They'll be here in a minute. What'll they say?
**Nell** Now, don't panic. Listen everyone. He can't be far away. We just have to look for him that's all. Everyone spread out and look for him.
**Albert** Spread out!
**Talitha** Spread out!
**Bethany** Spread out!
**Jenkin** Spread out!

*They all spread out*

**Fred** (*still mystified*) I'm still not quite certain who we're looking for.
**Nell** Kevin on Keyboards. Who do you think? Honestly! Don't you know anything?

**Albert** Kevin on Keyboards! Come on call him, you lot.
**Bethany** Kevin on Keyboards!
**Nell** Kevin on Keyboards!
**Talitha** Kevin on Keyboards!
**Jenkin** Kevin on Keyboards!
**Fred** Kevin on Keyboards! (*To Nell*) What does he look like?
**Nell** Well, obviously he looks exactly like ...
**Bethany** Shh!
**Talitha** Listen!
**Albert** Shhh!
**Jenkin** Shh! Everyone.

*A distant squeaking noise can be heard approaching, off*

**Nell** That's him. (*Calling*) Kevin on Keyboards!
**All** (*shouting*) Kevin on Keyboards!

*There is the roar of an engine, the squeal of tyres and Kevin on Keyboards arrives. He (or it) is a strange assemblage of wires and machinery mounted on an apparently self-propelled trolley. This carries a keyboard with accompanying hardware which controls — or maybe is even controlled by — a battered life-size mechanical figure. From Kevin emanate all the noises and musical sounds that we hear from now on. Overall he looks as if he's seen better days. He screeches to a halt at the edge of the stage*

**Fred** (*recovering from the sight*) What is it?
**Nell** Kevin on Keyboards.
**Albert** This is Kevin. This is his keyboard.
**Fred** Is he a StoryTeller?
**Bethany** Not really, no.
**Talitha** But he does help tell the stories, don't you, Kevin?

*Kevin presses a note and a voice from somewhere says "You bet I do, honeychile"*

**Nell** Kevin, this is Fred.
**Fred** Hallo, Kevin, how do you do.

*Kevin presses a key and plays a chorus of "Hallo"s*

**Bethany** That's just his way of saying hallo.
**Talitha** I think he likes you.
**Fred** (*to Kevin*) You know, he seems familiar. I've met him before.

**Nell** Have you? That's interesting. Where?
**Fred** I can't think where.
**Nell** Try and think, Fred. It could be important.
**Albert** (*to Fred*) Were you ever a woodcutter? Maybe that's where we've met?
**Fred** No. I don't think so.
**Albert** A miller? A blacksmith? A magic shoemaker?
**Fred** No. I'm sure I'd have remembered.
**Nell** He doesn't remember anything, Albert. Who is he? Why do we all know him?
**Talitha** Someone should have given him some thoughts, surely?
**Bethany** And memories ...
**Talitha** And ideas.
**Bethany** Careless. It wouldn't have taken long, would it?
**Albert** As the Swineherd once said to me ... Ideas cost nothing.
**Nell** (*touching Fred lightly on the cheek*) You poor thing. We'll find out about you. Don't worry.
**Fred** (*frowning, taking her hand*) Nell ...?
**Nell** Yes? What is it, Fred?
**Fred** Nell ... Oh, Nell ... (*He looks round the group*) Bethany ...?
**Bethany** Yes.
**Fred** Talitha?
**Talitha** Yes.
**Bethany** He's remembering ...
**Nell** Sssh!
**Fred** Albert ...?
**Albert** That's me.
**Fred** Jenkin ...?
**Jenkin** Yes.
**Nell** Who are you? Who are you really, Fred ...
**Fred** I'm ... I'm ... I'm ... (*He stops*)
**Bethany** It's no good, he can't remember ...
**Talitha** Maybe there's nothing to remember ...
**Albert** Maybe he wanted to forget ...
**Jenkin** He's probably nobody anyway ....
**Nell** He must be somebody. Everybody's somebody. If only we ...

*Kevin plays a fanfare*

**Albert** Here they come!
**Bethany** Here they come!
**Talitha** Here they come!
**Jenkin** Here they come!

**Nell** They're coming!

*The StoryPlayers all stand back respectfully. Fred follows suit*

*Almost immediately three incredibly old people arrive. They appear to be supporting each other. They stop in the doorway, exhausted. They are Great Aunt Repetitus who, predictably, tends to repeat herself and tell circular tales. Supporting her (or maybe supported by her) on either side: Uncle Oblivious who falls asleep a lot and forgets where he is in his stories and Uncle Erraticus who stays wide-awake but gets it all wrong. They all stare round looking rather startled for a second. During the following they rest, motionless*

*The Players also stand motionless, waiting*

**Fred** (*in a normal voice*) Are they the one's who'll be telling —— ?
**Players** (*sharply*) Sssssshhh!
**Fred** (*more quietly, to Nell*) Are these the ones who'll be telling the stories?
**Nell** (*whispering*) Yes, of course. They're telling this story now.
**Fred** (*whispering*) Are they?
**Nell** (*whispering*) Yes.
**Fred** (*whispering*) I can't hear them.
**Bethany** (*whispering*) In their heads. It's in their heads.
**Talitha** (*whispering*) All this is going on in their heads.
**Albert** (*whispering*) We mustn't disturb their concentration.
**Fred** (*whispering*) Mustn't we?
**Nell** (*whispering*) No.
**Fred** (*whispering*) Why not?
**Jenkin** (*whispering*) Because we'd all disappear, you fool.
**Albert** (*whispering*) We're only pigments of their imagination, you see.
**Fred** (*whispering*) I'm not a pigment.
**Bethany** (*whispering*) Figments not pigments.
**Fred** (*whispering*) I'm not a figment, either.

*The elderly trio suddenly animate again*

**G-Aunt R** Here we are, then.
**Uncle E** Here we are.
**Uncle O** Here we are.
**G-Aunt R** Time for stories!
**Uncle E** Stories!
**Uncle O** Stories!

*A fanfare from Kevin on Keyboards. The three StoryTellers hobble to their positions outside the acting area where they seat themselves. The Players gather at the edge of the stage, and wait expectantly. Fred stands with them*

**Albert** (*as they do this*) Here we go then.
**Fred** Great!
**Talitha** I hope it's one with a pretty princess ...
**Bethany** (*sourly*) One that falls asleep for a hundred years if I've anything to do with it ...
**Albert** Oh, now you two, don't squabble.
**G-Aunt R** And the first story will be told by ... (*She pauses dramatically*)
**Nell** Wait for it!
**G-Aunt R** Uncle Erraticus!

*A groan from the Players*

**Jenkin** Oh no, really.
**Bethany** Oh!
**Talitha** Oh!
**Nell** Oh, dear!
**Albert** (*cheerily*) Never mind. We'll muddle through. We usually do, don't we?
**Jenkin** Muddle's the word.
**Fred** Is there a problem?
**Nell** Uncle Erraticus always gets everything wrong ...
**Fred** How do you —— ?

*But before he can ask another question, Kevin on Keyboards plays another fanfare*

**Uncle E** This is the story of Grethel and Hansel ...
**Nell** See what I mean?
**Talitha** (*disappointed*) Oh ...
**Jenkin** Oh, Lord ... There's nobody royal in this at all.
**Bethany** There's a great witch ...
**Albert** Great story! Great story!

*The Players scramble to gather up their props and bits of costume. Albert puts on a hat and holds a woodcutter's axe. Talitha puts on an apron. Bethany goes and lurks in one corner of the stage and dons her witch's attire. Jenkin and Nell sit on the floor and attempt to look like children*

**Fred** (*to Nell* )What shall I do?

**Nell** You'd better sit and watch. They'll call you if they need you, I expect.
**Uncle E** Once upon a time, on the edge of a large forest ——

*Kevin plays a few bird noises*

— lived a very poor couple — and their two children, Grethel and Hansel ...

*The Players adopt a family group*

**Nell** (*softly*) So far so good.
**Uncle E** The father was a plumber ...
**Albert** A what?
**Uncle E** And every day he'd go off to work ...
**Albert** Excuse me! I say, excuse me ...
**Uncle E** (*irritably*) What? What is it?
**Albert** Excuse me, it's just that he's usually a woodcutter ...
**Uncle E** Who is?
**Albert** The father — he's generally a woodcutter ... at least that's ——
**Uncle E** Well, he's not. He's a plumber.
**G-Aunt R** Don't argue, that person ...
**Albert** Right. I'm sorry. I'm ever so sorry. Just a second. Plumber. That's a very good idea.

*Albert dives into his bundle and swaps his axe for a plumber's tool bag. He also changes his woodcutter's hat for a plumber's cap*

Right. Ever so sorry. Carry on.
**Uncle E** Are you ready, then?
**Albert** Yes, yes, sorry.
**Uncle E** I've had trouble with you before, haven't I? Now, where was I?
**G-Aunt R** ... lived a very poor couple ——
**Uncle E** Oh, yes ... and their two children, Grethel and Hansel. The father was a plumber ...

*Uncle Oblivious has fallen asleep and starts snoring*

**G-Aunt R** (*sharply*) Stop!

*The Players freeze as they always do whenever one of the StoryTellers says this*

Oblivious!

**Uncle O** (*wakening*) Uh-huh!
**G-Aunt R** Oblivious, you mustn't keep falling asleep like that ...
**Uncle O** I'm very sorry. I'd no idea I had ...
**G-Aunt R** Erraticus is telling a story ...
**Uncle O** Oh, Lord, is he really ...?
**Uncle E** May I be allowed to continue?
**G-Aunt R** Yes ...
**Uncle E** Have I everyone's permission to continue ...?
**Uncle O** Yes, get on with it ...
**Uncle E** Thank you ... On the edge of this forest lived a very poor couple — and their two children, Grethel and Hansel. The father was a plumber ... and every day he'd go off to work in the forest to cut down plum trees.
**Albert** Oh, flipping heck. (*He goes back to his bundle and swaps his plumber's bag for the axe again. He retains his cap*)
**Uncle E** (*furious at this further interruption*) What are you doing now?
**Albert** Just a minute, I'm doing my best. Just make up your mind that's all.
**Uncle E** Listen, I've had enough of you ...
**Albert** Look, it's not my fault, is it? First I'm a woodcutter, then I'm a plumber, then I'm a fruit surgeon. I mean, it's not my fault if you keep changing your mind ...
**Uncle E** (*shouting him down*) Not only was the plum tree cutter very poor indeed, but he'd lost his voice as well ...

*Albert mouths on silently, then stops as he realizes*

And he lived quietly with his wife, who was the children's stepmother — and was secretly very wicked ——

*Talitha smirks*

— but he had two pretty little children to make up for it.

*Nell and Jenkin do their best to oblige*

But as time went by, they became poorer and poorer and the food grew less and less. And the stepmother said to the husband:
**Talitha** Husband, how can we possibly feed our poor children when we have nothing left for ourselves?
**Uncle E** And the husband said ——

*Albert opens and shuts his mouth*

— nothing at all. And the wicked stepmother said:

**Talitha** I'll tell you what, I've got one hell of an idea. Tomorrow morning take the children out early into the woods and leave them in the thickest part of the forest. They're so stupid they'll never find their way back so we shall be rid of them. More food for us.
**Uncle E** And their father, who was appalled by this, said ——

*Albert opens his mouth*

— nothing very much. But little did the couple know that upstairs their little boy who was called Grethel ——
**Jenkin** Grethel ...?
**Uncle E** — Grethel had his ear to the floorboards and could hear every word that his parents said. He told his sister Hansel, who wept bitterly.

*Nell weeps bitterly*

**Jenkin** (*in an undertone*) I thought I was Hansel ...
**Nell** (*similarly*) Don't argue, keep going ...
**Jenkin** I'm not strolling around with a name like Grethel ...
**Uncle E** What's happening there?
**Nell** (*swiftly*) Nothing.
**Jenkin** (*equally so*) Nothing.
**Uncle E** And Grethel comforted his sister Hansel ...
**Fred** Excuse me. I think you've got them the wrong way round ...
**Uncle E** (*sharply*) What?
**G-Aunt R** Stop!

*The Players freeze*

**Fred** It's just their names, I think you've ...
**Uncle E** (*very sharply*) WHAT?
**Fred** Sorry. Carry on.
**Uncle E** And Grethel had a bright idea and he went out into the moonlit garden ——

*Jenkin picks up a handful of white pebbles*

*Kevin produces the sound of an owl*

— and he gathered up from the ground a handful of bright, shiny saucepan lids ...
**Jenkin** Saucepan lids. I should have guessed ... Hang on ...
**Uncle E** What are you doing now?

**Jenkin** (*rummaging in his bag*) Just a second. (*He finds and holds a pile of saucepan lids*)
**Uncle E** Everyone's being extremely difficult today ...
**Jenkin** Sorry to keep you. Here we are.
**Uncle E** (*glaring at Jenkin*) Unfortunately, as Grethel was gathering them, he banged his leg rather hard ...

*Kevin makes a leg banging noise. Jenkin yells and drops the lids with a clatter*

And poor Grethel limped for weeks afterwards. Indeed we shall find out later in the story whether his leg ever got better at all ...

*Jenkin gathers up the lids and limps back to his place, scowling*

**Fred** Excuse me ...
**Uncle E** (*sharply*) What?
**G-Aunt R** Stop!

*The Players freeze*

**Fred** I don't think they were saucepan lids ——
**Uncle E** (*sharper still*) What?
**Fred** They were stones. Hansel — I mean Grethel — he picked up small white stones ...
**Uncle E** Who's telling this story ... ?
**Fred** I ——
**Uncle E** Me or you?
**Fred** You.
**Uncle E** Then shut up!
**Fred** Right.
**Uncle O** Who is that chap?
**G-Aunt R** No idea. He seems familiar somehow ...
**Nell** (*to Fred in a whisper*) I shouldn't argue. It's dangerous to argue. They can do terrible things ...
**Jenkin** (*rubbing his leg*) They certainly can ...
**Uncle E** And morning came ...

*Kevin plays the dawn chorus*

And the wicked stepmother gave each of the children some bread.
**Talitha** Much against her better judgement ...
**Uncle E** And said goodbye to them for the last time. And the father with heavy heart led the two children deep into the forest. But little did he know

that even as they went, every few yards Grethel would cleverly contrive to drop a saucepan lid ——

*Jenkin does so with a clatter*

**Jenkin** This isn't half as good with saucepan lids ...
**Uncle E** (*viciously*) Even though the brave little chap's leg still hurt him a good deal ...
**Jenkin** (*with renewed limping*) Ow!
**Uncle E** When they reached the middle of the forest, Grethel and Hansel gathered up some wood and their father lit them a fire ——

*Kevin makes a fire crackling noise*

— and made them sit there whilst he went off further into the wood, pretending to look for plum trees. But secretly, he crept home.

*Albert returns to Talitha leaving Jenkin and Nell sitting on the ground*

And soon it got dark ——

*Kevin's owl noise again*

— and the fire died down ——

*Kevin's fire noise stops abruptly*

— and the two children huddled together waiting for the moon to rise — which it soon did ——

*Kevin makes a moon rising noise*

— and when this happened, Grethel took his sister's hand and followed the trail of saucepan lids that were gleaming so brightly in the moonlight — and they made their way home.

*Nell and Jenkin gather up the lids as they retrace their steps*

And their father, who had never thought to see the children again, was overjoyed to see them.

*Albert opens and shuts his mouth*

Even though he couldn't say it in so many words. Whilst their stepmother was secretly very angry that they'd found their way home.

**Talitha** (*sourly*) Oh goody, it's you two.

**Uncle E** A few days later they were again so short of food and the wicked stepmother said to the plumber:

**Talitha** We've hardly any food at all. You must take those kids back into the woods. And this time lose them properly.

*Albert opens and shuts his mouth*

**Uncle E** And their father, who was an extremely weak character, said nothing though he was very unhappy about all this. And again Grethel was listening at the floorboards upstairs and heard every word their parents said. And he told Hansel who wept bitterly.

*Nell weeps bitterly*

But Grethel said to her:

**Jenkin** Fear not, little sister. We can pull the old saucepan lid trick again ...

**Uncle E** And he went to creep out into the garden but this time their stepmother had been too clever and had locked the door so he couldn't get out.

*Jenkin tries the door. Kevin makes the sound of a rattling lock. Talitha laughs*

**Jenkin** (*as he tries the door: to himself*) Oh, help.

**Uncle E** And when the dawn came ——

*Kevin repeats the dawn chorus again*

— the stepmother gave the children each a piece of bread ——

*Talitha gives them each a tiny piece of bread*

**Talitha** — very much against her better judgement ——

**Uncle E** — and their father with heavy heart led the children back deeper still into the forest. And this time Grethel, having no saucepan lids, crumbled his piece of bread and left behind a trail of breadcrumbs so that he and Hansel might later find their way home. And when they reached the very thickest part of the wood, Grethel and Hansel again gathered sticks and their father lit them a fire ——

*Kevin repeats the fire crackling sound*

— and again he made them sit there whilst he went further into the forest to search for plum trees.

*Albert leaves Nell and Jenkin as before*

And soon it grew dark ——

*Kevin makes his owl noise*

— and their fire died down ——

*Kevin stops the crackling sound*

— and the two children waited for the moon to rise so that they could see the trail of bread crumbs and find their way home. And soon the moon rose ...

*Kevin's moon rising noise*

But when the children went to search for the breadcrumbs, they found that the birds had eaten them all. They were well and truly lost. Hansel wept bitterly ...

*Nell weeps bitterly*

**Jenkin** Hallo, she's off again ...
**Uncle E** And Grethel — despite the fact that his poor little leg still hurt like mad ——
**Jenkin** Ow! Sorry.
**Uncle E** — comforted her.
**Jenkin** (*doing so*) There, there, Hansel old thing.
**Uncle E** And they curled up under a pile of leaves and waited till the dawn came ...

*Kevin brings up the dawn chorus*

And when they awoke they started to walk again but they soon realized they were hopelessly lost. And then suddenly they came to a clearing and there stood a little cottage all on its own, looking so cosy and inviting. And the children drew closer and saw that the cottage was made not from bricks or stones but from delicious things to eat. And the hungry children rushed forward ...
**Jenkin** Come on, little sister ——

**Uncle E** — cried Grethel ——
**Jenkin** You tuck in to the roof. I'll start on the walls.
**Nell** Yum-yum ...
**Uncle E** And indeed the house was delicious. The roof was made of snakes and the walls were made of fingers ——
**Nell** (*in mid mouthful*) Yerrk!
**Jenkin** (*likewise*) Uugg!
**Uncle E** What's the matter now?
**Fred** Excuse me ... I say ...
**Uncle E** What?
**G-Aunt R** Stop!

*The Players freeze*

**Fred** I'm sorry to interrupt again — but I think the roof was made of cakes — not snakes ...
**Uncle E** What? What?
**Fred** And the walls were ginger not fingers ...
**Uncle E** Oh, it's you again, is it?
**Fred** Sorry.
**Uncle E** I won't tell you again.
**Uncle O** Who is that chap? Do we know him?
**G-Aunt R** I've no idea at all.
**Uncle E** And as they were both nibbling they heard a gentle voice from within calling:

**Bethany** Nibbling, nibbling like a mouse,
Who's nibbling at my little house?

**Uncle E** And suddenly the door opened and a kindly old woman appeared and startled them ——
**Nell** Oh!
**Jenkin** Ah!
**Bethany** Don't be frightened, children. Come inside. I mean you no harm.
**Uncle E** And she led them inside and gave them a huge meal and later on, when it was dark ——

*Kevin's owl sound again*

— she took them both upstairs to two little white beds. And they slept and slept. And as they slept the kindly old woman crept upstairs to look at them and laughed to herself. For she was really not a kindly old woman at all but a wicked witch. And when children strayed into her part of the wood she lured them into her cottage and then fattened them up to eat. For she liked eating children best of all ...

*Bethany cackles*

And she seized Grethel and dragged him downstairs and locked him in a cupboard with bars on the door. And then she woke Hansel ...

**Bethany** Come on, you lazy slut, fetch some water and cook something nice for your brother. I'm fattening him up to eat.

**Uncle E** Hansel began to cry bitterly ...

*Nell cries bitterly*

**Bethany** And you can cut that out for starters.

**Uncle E** So whilst Hansel was fed on bones and leftovers, Grethel was fed all the best food in the house. And every day, whilst little Hansel hurried about, the witch would say:

**Bethany** Grethel, put your finger out for me to feel how fat you are.

*Jenkin produces a chicken bone from his bag*

**Uncle E** And Hansel instead of sticking out his finger would stick out a phone instead ——

**Jenkin** A what?

**Uncle E** — a phone instead ——

**Jenkin** Yes, that's what I thought you said. Just a minute.

*Jenkin goes to his bag and finds an old fashioned candlestick phone*

**Fred** Excuse me ——

**G-Aunt R** Stop!

*The Players freeze. Uncle Erraticus looks at Fred*

**Fred** Nothing.

**Uncle E** And Hansel instead of sticking out his finger would stick out a telephone instead —

*Kevin gives a quick phone ring*

**Jenkin** (*offering the phone*) I think it's for you ...

**Uncle E** (*glaring*) And even as Grethel was doing this, the poor little fellow banged his other leg on the bars.

**Jenkin** Ow!

**Uncle E** And the witch whose eyes were dim, could not see that it wasn't his finger and was amazed that Grethel would not get fat ...

**Fred** I'm not surprised if she's feeding him telephones ...
**Uncle E** And how little Hansel wept ...

*Nell weeps*

Night and day ——

*Kevin gives a very swift owl followed by a dawn chorus*

— day and night ——

*Kevin repeats the same in reverse*

— until one day the wicked old witch said to Hansel:
**Bethany** Shut up! All right, child, today is baking day. I can't put up with that din a moment longer. I've already heated the oven. Creep inside and tell me if it's warm enough.
**Uncle E** She intended of course, as soon as Hansel was inside, to shut the oven door and roast her. But Hansel pretended not to understand what the witch meant and said:
**Nell** I don't know how to get in. How do I get in?
**Bethany** You stupid goose!
**Uncle E** Said the witch.
**Bethany** It's perfectly simple. You get in like this. See?
**Uncle E** And as soon as the witch was halfway into the oven, Hansel gave her a mighty push ——

*Bethany cries out*

— slammed the oven door ——

*Sound from Kevin*

— and switched it up to gas mark seven. Then Hansel ran and released her brother, crying:
**Nell** Grethel, we are saved, saved. The old witch is dead.
**Uncle E** And Grethel said:
**Jenkin** Good!
**Uncle E** And they found that the witch's house was filled with jewels and precious stones that she had stolen during her wicked life. And they loaded themselves up with these. And Grethel saw it was time to go home and said to his sister:
**Jenkin** It's time to go home.

**Uncle E** And they picked their way back through the enchanted wood. And because it was no longer enchanted it was much easier to find the path. Until that is they came to a stream which looked too deep to cross.
**Jenkin** Ah!
**Nell** Oh!
**Jenkin** Looks too deep to cross.
**Uncle E** But fortunately there was a chicken swimming past ——

*Kevin makes a splash/chicken noise*

**Fred** It was a duck ——
**Uncle E** What?
**G-Aunt R** Stop!

*The Players freeze*

**Fred** It was a duck not a chicken ...
**Uncle E** Now listen. I don't know who you are but I've had enough from you.
**Fred** Sorry.
**Uncle O** Who is that chap?
**G-Aunt R** I keep telling you, I've no idea. And yet ...
**Uncle O** Any more arguments?
**Nell** No ...
**Jenkin** No, no. Looks exactly like a chicken to me.
**Nell** Oh, look ——
**Uncle E** — cried Hansel ——
**Nell** Maybe that chicken will give us a ride on its back.
**Uncle E** And the chicken said ——

*There is a chicken noise from Kevin*

And the children cried:
**Nell** } (*together*) Oh, thank you, thank you, chicken!
**Jenkin** }
**Uncle E** And they clambered, each in turn, on the bird's back and she swam with them to the other side of the stream.

*Nell and Jenkin both do this with appropriate noises from Kevin*

And once safely across they were able to see their own little cottage and they both scampered home and through the gate. And there to welcome them, who else but ——

*Albert stands beaming at them, arms extended. Talitha stands beside them looking appalled*

— their dear father who had wept bitterly from the day he had left them. As for their wicked stepmother, as soon as she saw them both, she choked on the bread she was eating and dropped dead on the spot ——

*Talitha gurgles and falls on the floor*

— and good riddance to bad rubbish. So the children went inside with their father and showed him all the jewels and precious stones they had brought back with them. And the old plumber cried:

**Albert** Kids, we're rich ...

**Uncle E** And although money isn't everything, it's a lot better than nothing. And although it didn't make them happy all by itself, it certainly helped. It certainly helped Grethel and Hansel and their father, the plumber, to live happily ever after.

*A final chord from Kevin*

*Fred applauds*

**G-Aunt R** And now — a story from Uncle Oblivious ...

*Another chord from Kevin. They all look towards Uncle Oblivious who seems unaware of them, lost in his own thoughts ...*

Oblivious ...

**Uncle O** Mmmm?

**G-Aunt R** It's your turn ...

**Uncle O** My turn for what?

**G-Aunt R** Your turn to tell a story ...

**Uncle O** Oh, yes. Right. Here we go.

*Kevin repeats his chord*

Yes ...

**Nell** (*softly, to Fred*) This could take some time.

**Jenkin** (*softly*) This could take all night.

**Fred** (*softly*) Why?

**Nell** (*softly*) He sometimes can't remember ...

**Bethany** (*softly*) He can never remember a thing.

**Talitha** (*softly*) He's hopeless ...

**Uncle O** Here we go then ...

*Kevin plays his chord*

This one's called the ... oh, dammit ... er — whatjamacallit ... thingy .. the thing thingy ... what's it called now?

**Uncle E** Oh, get on with it, man ...

**Uncle O** I'm going to ... just a tick. Oh, what are they called? Hopping things ...?

**Uncle E** Kangaroos?

**Uncle O** Certainly not. Kangaroos? What a stupid suggestion.

**G-Aunt R** Oh, do get on with it, Oblivious ...

**Uncle O** I'm trying to. People keep interrupting me ... er, Prince. Prince. That's the word.

**G-Aunt R** Prince? The Prince Who Hopped?

**Uncle O** No, no ...

**Uncle E** The Hopping Prince?

**Uncle O** No, no, no. The something Prince. The something-that-hops Prince.

**G-Aunt R** Grasshopper?

**Uncle O** The Grasshopper Prince? No, no, no ... What else hops?

**Uncle E** A three-legged dog?

**Uncle O** The Three-Legged Dog Prince? No, no, no ...

**Fred** Frog?

**Uncle O** What? No, I've just said not dog. Didn't you hear me?

**Fred** No, Frog.

**Uncle O** Frog?

**Fred** Prince. The Frog Prince.

**Uncle O** The Frog Prince. Exactly. What about it?

**Fred** Well, was that the story you wanted to tell?

**Uncle O** Well, of course it was if you'll only let me get on with it. (*To the others*) Who is he?

**Uncle E** No idea.

**G-Aunt R** (*looking keenly at Fred*) I've seen you before, haven't I?

**Fred** No, I don't think so ...

**Uncle O** The Frog Prince. In olden times when wishes actually meant something, unlike today when you can wish for things till the cows come home and you might just as well whistle for all the good it'll do you ... there lived a king ——

**Jenkin** (*donning a crown and steps forward*) Hallo, there. This is a better part.

**Uncle O** And this particular king had an especially fine line in daughters.

*Talitha and Bethany don crowns and step forward*

**Jenkin** Hallo, kids.
**Talitha** } (*in chorus*) Hallo, Daddy.
**Bethany** }
**Uncle O** But it has to be said that it was the youngest of them that was the real cracker ——

*Nell steps forward*

**Jenkin** Wotcha, nipper.
**Nell** Hi, Daddy.
**Uncle O** Now, near the king's palace there was a large forest ...

*Kevin produces more birdsong*

There always is. And in this forest, under an old lime tree, was a deep well ...

*Kevin makes a water-plopping sound*

Now, when it was a very hot day, this youngest princess used to go and sit by this cool well. And when she got cheesed off with doing that she used to play with this golden ball she'd had given to her. Chucking it in the air and generally giving it a few brisk overs of right arm spin.

*Nell produces the golden ball and leaps about with it*

Now, on this particular afternoon, she was prancing about as usual — the way girls do when they think no-one's watching them — and, of course, the inevitable happened, she dropped one slightly short of a length and before you could say Ray Illingworth the ball had gone and dropped straight down the — oh —— (*He breaks off abruptly*)

*The action freezes. A pause*

**Fred** (*to Talitha, in a whisper*) What's happening?
**Talitha** (*whispering*) He's forgotten the next word. We can't go on till he remembers it.
**Fred** How long's he going to be?
**Bethany** No idea. Hours, sometimes. He usually falls asleep.
**Fred** He can't fall asleep now. I want my dinner. (*Loudly*) Down the well.
**Uncle O** Eh?
**G-Aunt R** Stop!
**Fred** Well.

**Uncle O** Well, what?
**Fred** Down the well. The ball. Down the well. Fell.
**Uncle O** Down the well, yes. Who's telling this story. Who is he?
**G-Aunt R** We've definitely seen him before, you know ...
**Uncle E** Yes, I think we have seen him before ...
**Uncle O** If I may continue. And before you could say Ray Illingworth the ball had gone and dropped straight down the well.

*A splash from Kevin*

**Nell** Oh, botheration!
**Uncle O** Cried the princess. And she began to weep bitterly.

*Nell weeps bitterly*

And after a bit, out of the well pops this frog.

*Albert dons frog headgear and emerges*

**Albert** Hallo. What's all this ghastly racket about?
**Uncle O** Asked the frog.
**Nell** I've lost my golden ball down the well.
**Uncle O** Wept the princess.
**Albert** Well, you ought to learn to pitch 'em up, then.
**Uncle O** Cried the frog. Who, it has to be said, could turn his arm over himself, if asked to do so ...
**Albert** Line and length, girl. Line and length. Did your mother teach you nothing? Tell you what. If I dive in and fetch it for you, what'll you give me?
**Nell** Oh, anything — practically anything.
**Uncle O** Wept the princess.
**Nell** My pearls and diamonds. Even the golden — golden ——
**Uncle** — golden ... thingy ——
**Nell** — golden ... thingy — on my head.
**Uncle O** And the frog said:
**Albert** I care not for your pearls or your diamonds. Or for the golden thingy on your head. But if you'll be fond of me, let me be your best friend, sit by you at table, eat out of your plate, drink out of your cup and doss down beside you in your little milk-white bed, if you promise me this, I'll fetch your ball for you.
**Uncle O** And the princess replied:
**Nell** Oh, yes. Anything, anything you like, if you'll only rescue my ball.
**Uncle O** But secretly she thought:

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