

Acting Edition

S Gunter Klaus & The Story Before

Written by John Heimbuch

Created in collaboration
with Jon Ferguson

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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S GUNTER KLAUS & THE STORY BEFORE was originally produced by Theater Forever at the Southern Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, opening on December 10, 2009. It was directed by Jon Ferguson, with set design by Erica Zaffarano, lighting design by Wu Chen Khoo, sound design by Tim Cameron, costume design by E. Amy Hill, and prop/puppet design by Chris Lutter-Gardella. The production stage manager was Molly-Margaret Johnson. The cast was as follows:

**TALL VILLAGER, TROLL KING, GNOME, ELF,
MASTER OF THE HUNT** Noah Bremer
**SHORT VILLAGER, TROLL, GNOME, ELF,
RAINBOW BRIDGE** Allison Vincent
JOVIAL VILLAGER, GUNTER Brant Miller
**CALM VILLAGER, RAVEN, DARKNESS, NORN,
TROLL** Piper Sigel-Bruse
FIERCE VILLAGER, GEIRS, FREKI, TROLL Damian Johnson
PROUD VILLAGER, YNGVILD, NORN, TROLL Isabel Nelson
WARM VILLAGER, ELF QUEEN, NORN, TROLL Ally Carey
**SWEET VILLAGER, YOUNG ELF QUEEN, GNOME,
TROLL** Tori Adams
HALLVEIG Elaine Patterson
HROLFR Braxton Baker
EYVINDR Keenan Schember

Based on an original idea by Jon Ferguson.

Inspired by the book *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas, Spanning 50,000 Years* by Phyllis Siefker.

CHARACTERS

VILLAGE CHILDREN

HALLVEIG – a curious child

HROLFR – a brave child

EYVINDR – a mischievous child

ENSEMBLE OF VILLAGERS

SHORT

TALL

JOVIAL

CALM

PROUD

FIERCE

WARM

The Villagers portray the following roles:

GUNTER – a charcoal seller

YNGVILD – the children's mother

GEIRS – the children's father

FREKI – a wolf

RAVEN

ELF QUEEN

TROLL KING

MASTER OF THE HUNT

TROLLS

ELVES

WOLVES

GNOMES

NORNS

REINDEER

STANDING STONES

RAINBOW BRIDGE

DARKNESS

This show was originally written for 10 actors (1 girl, 2 boys, 4 women, 3 men), but the cast can be as small or large as you'd like it to be. Many roles can be played by either child or adult actors, and the characters' genders can be adjusted to suit the needs of your production.

SETTING

In a village at the edge of the world.

TIME

A long time ago.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This show is about telling stories. And like all good stories, it should have tension, humor, digressions, and surprises. But just like any story, it doesn't always have to make sense, as long as everyone has fun with the telling!

The villagers should represent the characters, animals, creatures, and environments as simply and evocatively as possible. Props and costume pieces, when used, should feel like the villagers provided them. Puppetry elements could be fun.

Feel free to adjust the cast size, character genders, role and line assignments, or audience interaction moments to fit the needs of your production.

*The yarn that we spin of this midwinter Yule
Is woven from leavings of many a spool;
These strands have been hidden by legends of yore,
But as with all things there's a STORY BEFORE...*

Scene One The Story Before

(A stage. An audience.)

(Trees. Mountains. Snow.)

(Three little houses represent the village.)

*(Two villagers, **TALL** and **SHORT**, walk through the audience. **TALL** greets the audience. **SHORT** echoes **TALL**.)*

TALL. Hi, hello, hi there. (etc.)

SHORT. Hi, hello, hi there. (etc.)

*(**TALL** and **SHORT** walk onto the stage. **SHORT** picks up a twig.)*

TALL. What are you doing?

SHORT. What?

*(**TALL** takes the twig and hands it to an audience member.)*

TALL. Can you hold that?

*(**SHORT** and **TALL** run to a corner of the stage. Together they ring a small bell. Ding!)*

*(Three children – **HALLVEIG**, **HROLFR**, and **EYVINDR** – rush on.)*

*(**SHORT** and **TALL** depart.)*

*(The **CHILDREN** remove the roofs of the three tiny houses. One by one, they look inside:)*

*(**EYVINDR** removes a lump of charcoal.)*

*(**HROLFR** removes a mistletoe sprig.)*

*(**HALLVEIG** removes a black feather.)*

*(The **CHILDREN** replace the roofs.)*

*(The **CHILDREN** take the objects and depart.)*

*(A **JOVIAL** and **CALM** villager arrive.)*

JOVIAL. It begins...now.

*(**JOVIAL** snaps his fingers. A pool of light appears in front of them – illuminating no one. Oops.)*

*(**JOVIAL** and **CALM** step forward. They meant to do that.)*

*(**CALM** gestures while **JOVIAL** speaks. **JOVIAL** is an enthusiastic and confident storyteller, but **CALM** knows the tale better.)*

It all begins in an infinity of dreams and possibility called Ginnungagap.

*(**CALM** gestures, indicating it.)*

CALM. Ginnungagap.

JOVIAL. An ethereal land of magic and nothingness. No sooner than you can imagine it, Ginnungagap –

CALM. Ginnungagap.

JOVIAL. – is divided into two realms:

*(**CALM** gestures, indicating it.)*

CALM. Two realms.

JOVIAL. The cold dark Niflheim.

(CALM gestures, indicating Niflheim.)

CALM. Niflheim.

JOVIAL. Oh, so cold. It's icy. I'm freezing. (etc.)

CALM. Ahem.

JOVIAL. And the burning hot Muspelheim.

(CALM gestures, indicating Muspelheim.)

CALM. Muspelheim.

JOVIAL. Oh, so hot. It's spicy. I'm sweating. (etc.)

CALM. Ahem.

JOVIAL. On the thinnest ground between them sprouts a single ash seed.

(CALM gestures the planting of a seed.)

CALM. Ash seed.

JOVIAL. From where or when who can say, but fast as you can believe, it grows deep into the darkness and far into the light –

(CALM gestures the growing of a sprout.)

Tended by the Norns.

(CALM puts up three fingers.)

CALM. Norns.

JOVIAL. It grows larger than a house.

(CALM's sprout grows bigger.)

Larger than the sky.

(CALM's sprout grows even bigger.)

JOVIAL. Until it fills all creation.

(CALM's sprout grows as big as possible.)

The Yggdrasil tree.

CALM. Yggdrasil.

JOVIAL. Upon which stand nine worlds.

(CALM raises nine fingers.)

CALM. Nine worlds.

JOVIAL. Spanned below by the deepest ocean and above
by heaven's mighty Rainbow Bridge.

(JOVIAL and CALM gesture.)

At the center of these nine worlds is Midgard.

(CALM raises their thumb.)

CALM. Midgard.

(They gesture through the following together.)

JOVIAL. The human land. At the edge of which are high
mountains in which is a deep forest, near which is a
ford, through which is a river, along which is a village.

(They point at the tiny houses.)

JOVIAL & CALM. Our village.

*(JOVIAL and CALM whoop joyfully and
give each other a traditional congratulatory
gesture.)*

*(All the VILLAGERS and CHILDREN rush in to
join them.)*

(They stand together as a group. They smile at each other.)

(They rearrange themselves slightly.)

(They advance. They stop. They pause. They smile again.)

*(A **WARM** villager speaks up.)*

WARM. We have stories!

VILLAGERS. Ja! Ja! Ja!

(Pointing at each other.)

He has one and she has one and he has one and she has one. (etc.)

HALLVEIG. We're villagers. Can you tell?

(They all do the same playful gesture.)

EYVINDR. We live in the village.

HROLFR. A village with many stories!

WARM. I said that!

*(The **VILLAGERS** act out the stories as they speak.)*

HALLVEIG. Once there was a wild bear –

*(**SHORT** becomes a bear, with a very dopey face.)*

CALM. Who walked through our village –

*(**SHORT** steps forward sniffing the air.)*

HROLFR. And frightened the children –

*(**SHORT** looks at the **CHILDREN**. They cower.)*

HALLVEIG. And ate our garbage –

(SHORT picks something up. Sniffs it. Eats it.)

CALM. Until it wandered away.

(SHORT wanders back into the group.)

HALLVEIG. And that's how that one went!

VILLAGERS. Ja, ja, ja!

WARM. Once there was a boastful hunter –

(TALL becomes the hunter.)

TALL. I am a boastful hunter!

WARM. Who accepted any challenge –

(FIERCE becomes the challenger.)

FIERCE. I challenge you!

TALL. I accept!

(TALL hits FIERCE. FIERCE is defeated.)

WARM. Until someone dared him to kill a troll –

(EYVINDR steps up to TALL.)

EYVINDR. I dare you to kill a troll.

TALL. *(No problem.)* Troll.

EYVINDR. With a table knife –

TALL. *(No problem.)* Table knife.

(TALL holds out a table knife.)

EYVINDR. And one hand tied behind your back.

(TALL puts a hand behind his back.)

(Problem.)

(He takes a breath, about to fight.)

*(The **VILLAGERS** know it won't go well.)*

WARM. And that's how that one went!

VILLAGERS. Ja, ja, ja!

*(**PROUD** and **FIERCE** villagers step forward.)*

PROUD. Once there was a herd of reindeer –

*(The **VILLAGERS** become a herd of **REINDEER**.)*

FIERCE. Who grazed along the forest edge –

PROUD. Until one by one they disappeared –

*(One by one, the **REINDEER** disappear.)*

FIERCE. Leaving the wolves to go hungry –

PROUD. And the forest to grow wild with abandon.

*(The **VILLAGERS** return, beaming.)*

And that's how that one went!

VILLAGERS. Ja, ja, ja!

*(**HALLVEIG**, **HROLFR**, and **EYVINDR** step forward.)*

*(They look to the other **VILLAGERS**.)*

*(The **VILLAGERS** encourage them.)*

HALLVEIG. Once there was a lonely old man

Who lived at the edge of the forest –

HROLFR. And pulled a sleigh to the village once a year

Laden with charcoal and pine tar –

EYVINDR. And toys for the children.

*(The **VILLAGERS** point to **JOVIAL**. He smiles and runs off.)*

HALLVEIG. Once there was a raven
Who could fly across the nine worlds.

*(**CALM** circles and departs.)*

EYVINDR. Once there was a wolf
Who was always hungry.

*(**FIERCE** crouches and departs.)*

HROLFR. Once there was an elf queen
Who could not bear the touch of iron
But knew the language of magic.

*(**WARM** makes an elvish gesture and departs.)*

EYVINDR. Once there was a troll king
Who only wanted a child.

*(**TALL** makes a trollish gesture and departs.)*

*(The story picks up its pace. The remaining **VILLAGERS** depart one by one after each of the following lines.)*

HROLFR. Once there was a great Darkness –

EYVINDR. A snowfall deeper than any other –

HALLVEIG. A sharp wind that ripped the warmth from
your bones.

HROLFR. Once there was a great battle –

EYVINDR. A Wild Hunt –

HROLFR. That tore through the heavens!

(One last flurry of motion, and all the

VILLAGERS *are gone.*)

HALLVEIG. Once there was a mountain –

EYVINDR. Once there was a valley –

HALLVEIG. Once there was a river –

HROLFR. Once there was a village –

HALLVEIG. Our village, remember?

EYVINDR. Once there was a herd of reindeer!

*(The three **CHILDREN** run out together.)*

Scene Two

Down The Mountain

*(One by one, **VILLAGERS** emerge as **REINDEER** until an entire herd stands together. They nuzzle, they clash, they hoof the earth for lichen, they graze, they look about.)*

*(**GUNTER** enters, dragging coal pots and toys on his sled.)*

*(**GUNTER** passes through the herd of **REINDEER**. He stops and touches a **REINDEER** on the muzzle. It nuzzles him.)*

*(**GUNTER** continues walking. He departs.)*

*(Suddenly, the **REINDEER** sniff the air. The smell of danger.)*

*(The **REINDEER** dart off as a herd.)*

Scene Three The Village

(HALLVEIG, HROLFR, and EYVINDR play outside in the snow.)

GUNTER. CHARCOAL!

(GUNTER drags his sled into the village.)

(The CHILDREN stop playing and watch him. The other VILLAGERS look at GUNTER with fear and uncertainty.)

Charcoal for a cold winter night! Charcoal!

(GUNTER turns to an audience member.)

Charcoal, sir? Sir, charcoal? Charcoal-charcoal-charcoal. Long-burning, hearth-warming charcoal! You, yes? Sir, you need charcoal? Yes, no? Yes?

(And so on until an audience member says "yes.")

You do! Wonderful. Now, you have options. It comes in three flavors:

(Indicating.)

Smoky. Extra Smoky. And Sweet.

(The audience member chooses one.)

Good choice.

(GUNTER takes a piece. He is about to give it to the audience member when he stops.)

BUT! First you have to give me something for it. Anything, anything you can think of. Anything. Anything at all.

(The audience member offers something.)

GUNTER. Oh, wow, that's much too nice. But how about, instead, you give me a nice big smile?

(The audience member smiles.)

Oh, thank you. That was lovely.

(GUNTER gives the charcoal to the audience member.)

And here's your change.

(GUNTER smirks at the audience member.)

(GUNTER turns back to the sled. The CHILDREN whisper.)

HALLVEIG. Look at that. The charcoal seller. He lives by the edge of the woods.

HROLFR. Father says he's touched in the head.

HALLVEIG. Touched in the head?

EYVINDR. Cursed by the elves and talks to the trolls!

(EYVINDR mimics a troll.)

(YNGVILD runs outside in a panic, rolling pin in hand.)

YNGVILD. Troll! Troll!

(But she sees no troll, just the CHILDREN.)

What are you children yammering on about?

HALLVEIG. Mama, the charcoal seller is here.

YNGVILD. You're not to speak to him. Go inside and get your father.

(YNGVILD sends the CHILDREN into the house, but they peek out and watch the following interaction anyway.)

GUNTER. Good winter, Yngvild. Charcoal for the hearth.
To keep the darkness away.

YNGVILD. Good winter, Gunter. What do you want for it?

GUNTER. Hmm, well, I could use a few buttons. For the dolls.

YNGVILD. One moment.

(YNGVILD goes inside. The CHILDREN sneak back out.)

GUNTER. Good winter to you.

HALLVEIG. To you as well, sir.

EYVINDR. Is it true you speak to trolls?

(GUNTER mimics a troll. EYVINDR mimics a troll in return. They laugh.)

HROLFR. Are those toys?

GUNTER. Would you like one?

(GEIRS arrives from inside the house.)

GEIRS. Hallveig, Eyvindr, Hrolfr. Inside now.

HALLVEIG. But Papa.

GEIRS. NOW.

(HALLVEIG, HROLFR, and EYVINDR go inside.)

GUNTER. Ah, good winter, Geirs. Help me with this, do you mind?

(GEIRS doesn't move. He glowers at GUNTER.)

You know, that's okay, I've got it.

(**GUNTER** *turns the sled.*)

GUNTER. Now this takes me back. Geirs, remember how your father would invite me in for a large bowl of soup while you and your sister would climb all over my sled? How filthy you would get. Times how they change, eh?

GEIRS. Yes.

GUNTER. Your children have grown so much. It's probably three winters since I saw them last.

GEIRS. If you lived in the village, you would see them more often.

GUNTER. I wonder if they'd like some of these toys I made.
To drive away the dark spirit of winter.
When there's so little to do.

GEIRS. There's always something to do, Gunter.

(**YNGVILD** *returns. She glares at GEIRS.*)

YNGVILD. Here are those buttons.

GEIRS. (*Under his breath to her.*) Sorry, I didn't see him coming.

(**YNGVILD** *tosses the buttons to GUNTER.*)

GUNTER. Ah, yes, thank you, Yngvild. And here you go.

(**GUNTER** *gives YNGVILD a bag of charcoal.*)

I don't suppose I could come in and warm up for a bit –

GEIRS. See you next winter, Gunter.

(**YNGVILD** *and GEIRS go inside. GUNTER picks up the buttons.*)

GUNTER. That's alright. I should get going. Thanks anyway. Charcoal! Charcoal for a cold winter's night! Charcoal!

(GUNTER leads his sled away. The CHILDREN watch him go. A doll drops from the back of GUNTER's sled.)

HALLVEIG. Hey, wait!

(HALLVEIG rushes out, but GUNTER is gone.)

(She picks up the doll. EYVINDR and HROLFR join her.)

HROLFR. What is it?

HALLVEIG. A doll.

EYVINDR. Looks like a troll. Should we keep it?

HALLVEIG. Papa would be mad. Besides, it's not ours.

HROLFR. So let's give it back.

HALLVEIG. Hrolfr, are you crazy? He lives on the edge of the forest.

HROLFR. So he'll be glad to have a few visitors for once.

EYVINDR. I bet he gives us a whole armful of toys.

HALLVEIG. And how will we find him?

HROLFR. We'll follow the tracks of his sled, knock on his door, and give back the doll. Then we'll come home. No one will even know we're gone.

EYVINDR. Unless you're scared of the trolls.

HALLVEIG. I'm not scared. I just don't think it's a good idea.

HROLFR. I'm going. Come with or not. Your choice. Eyvindr?

EYVINDR. I'm coming.

(The BOYS go.)

HALLVEIG. Hey! Wait up.

(She follows after them.)

Scene Four Up The Mountain

*(The **VILLAGERS** create the mountainous terrain. **GUNTER** drags his sled up the mountain. He reaches a steeper section of the mountain.)*

GUNTER. Incline.

(He climbs. The terrain evens out.)

Plateau.

(He walks. He reaches an even steeper part.)

Incline.

(He climbs and departs. The terrain changes.)

*(The **CHILDREN** follow, bickering their way up the mountain.)*

HALLVEIG. It's getting darker. We should go back.

EYVINDR. We've made it this far. How much farther can it be?

HROLFR. Go back if you want, we're going on.

HALLVEIG. I'm not leaving you.

HROLFR. Then you'd better keep climbing.

*(The **CHILDREN** follow the track of Gunter's sled out.)*

*(Across the mountain, at the edge of the forest, two strong **REINDEER** stand along the path. The **RAVEN** flies past.)*

(GUNTER walks along the path. He waves to the RAVEN. The REINDEER bow toward him. He passes them and departs.)

(The CHILDREN arrive. The REINDEER turn to face them.)

HROLFR. *(Shouting.)* Gunter, we have your doll!

(HROLFR holds the doll up. The RAVEN flies up the mountain. The REINDEER run off as it flies past.)

EYVINDR. Come on!

(HROLFR and EYVINDR climb on. HALLVEIG follows behind.)

Scene Five

The Edge of The Forest

(**GUNTER** arrives at his house.)

GUNTER. Ah, home at last.

(**GUNTER** places the toy bag outside.)

Here I leave these gifts of tribute. One for stinky. One for smelly. And one for dirty. And another midwinter done.

(**GUNTER** enters his house and lights the hearth.)

There. A roaring fire.

(The fire roars. **GUNTER** warms his hands.)

(The **CHILDREN** arrive outside. They see the bag of toys.)

HROLFR. There it is.

EYVINDR. Look, he left the bag for us.

HALLVEIG. How would he know we were coming?

HROLFR. Don't worry, we'll go in a minute. Just put the doll in the bag. Unless you're scared.

EYVINDR. I'll do it.

(**EYVINDR** sneaks up to the bag. He opens it. There are two more dolls inside. He takes them out.)

There, you see? Toys for everyone!

HALLVEIG. They aren't for us.

EYVINDR. Who else would they be for?

(Suddenly, there are loud footfalls from deep in the woods. It grows darker.)

*(Three **TROLLS** thunder out of the forest.)*

*(**HROLFR** and **HALLVEIG** hide. **EYVINDR** ducks behind the house.)*

*(The **TROLLS** shout and jibber in trollish.)*

TROLLS. *(Dropping character, as **VILLAGERS**.)* We're trolls now.

(They shout in trollish again. They sniff and taste the air.)

(They smell something human, and lumber toward the bag. They open the bag.)

*(Two of the **TROLLS** remove dolls and claim them –)*

(But the third troll can't find a doll. He sniffs the air again, and picks up a scent. He follows it around the house.)

*(The troll sniffs the doll in **EYVINDR**'s hand. He snatches it, and shouts triumphantly.)*

(But he smells something even better.)

*(The **TROLL** drops the doll.)*

*(The **TROLL** turns and grabs **EYVINDR**.)*

*(**EYVINDR** shouts as he is taken away.)*

EYVINDR. Help!

HALLVEIG. Eyvindr!

HROLFR. Hey! Hey uglies! Leave him alone!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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