

SAMPLE PAGES FROM THE FROG KING BY BARBARA HOCKLEY.
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This is the beginning of the tale when Bardman catches up with Wordsmith in The Frog Inn.

SCENE 1: The Frog Inn

SOUND CUE: Before the play starts, music is playing in the Inn.

BARDMAN enters from outside, he is cloaked and hooded and has a bag over one shoulder. He takes up position in a corner of the Inn looking completely out of place. WORDSMITH enters from outside, dressed in flamboyant storyteller garb and immediately seeks attention. In fact, getting the audience's attention at this point is crucial if you are starting the play actually in the bar of your venue (recommended if possible).

SOUND CUE: Music fades slowly during the following.

W'SMITH Ah, an audience. Good evening my fine and wealthy people. My name is Chester Ulysses Wordsmith, storyteller extraordinaire at your service (*low theatrical bow*). I expect you have heard of me...yes? Then you will know that I am not just a common storyteller! No, I am a weaver of magical tales, romantic fables, heroic stories - a creator of impossible dreams and happy-ever-afters. Royalty and common folk alike, all fall under my spell. My reputation has doubtless reached you and you've spent days, weeks – maybe even months or years - waiting for me to arrive at your quaint little inn. Well, here I stand before you, ready to tell you a tale of such wonder that parting with a few coins - each - will seem quite trivial and barely enough to express your gratitude and appreciation. You may, of course, give more. Naturally I will also be requiring a good hot meal, some ale, a bath, a bed for the night and a good breakfast in the morning from our esteemed hosts. Such a small price to pay for the magic that you are about to experience. Now come, don't be shy, fill my hat with coins and I shall begin. (*Takes off his hat and passes it round**)

**Fake coins could be issued to your audience on their arrival for the passing of the hat.*

BARDMAN Do you know any stories about frogs?

W'SMITH Frogs?

BARDMAN Yes, little green things. Live in ponds. If they're lucky they get kissed. Most aren't.

W'SMITH Well, you've caught me out there, frogs are not in my repertoire. However, I have a lovely tale on the tip of my tongue concerning a princess, a duck and a giant.

BARDMAN *(Standing)* A giant you say? *(Feigning memory loss)* Now I heard something recently concerning giants ... what was it.

W'SMITH Maybe that's not a good story either. How about the story of the dragon who fell in love with a mermaid?

BARDMAN Dragon?

W'SMITH *(Getting nervous)* No... no... The pirate teddy bear?

BARDMAN Who fell in love with a mermaid?

W'SMITH No, no that's wrong. It was a ... a unicorn!

BARDMAN Stop! *(Consulting a notebook)* Chester Ulysses Wordsmith you say?

W'SMITH *(Getting more nervous)* The enchanted prince who liked to dance on the roof all night?

BARDMAN Enough! I have here a list of complaints regarding your 'magical tales, romantic fables and heroic stories'. You have a lot to answer for.

W'SMITH *(Places hat back on head)* Who are you?

BARDMAN I ask the questions! I am Grand Inquisitor Bardman, top man at the Story Correction Unit, a subdivision of The Plot Enforcement Department of the Storytellers Guild, and I intend, on completion of this inquisition, to remove your storyteller's coat, cut off the sleeves, cover it with jam and stamp on it in a muddy puddle.

W'SMITH *(Holding onto coat)* Jam? Muddy Puddle?

BARDMAN *(Menacingly)* It's what we do. Such will be your fate for daring to deviate from the approved and official guidelines for the telling of tales in this land.

W'SMITH You must have the wrong person...

BARDMAN *(Consulting notes as required)* Consider this complaint. For hundreds of years we have been telling the story of Snow White and the Seven Giants. *(Pause)*

W'SMITH Ah.

BARDMAN Then someone – *(accusingly)* a rogue storyteller we think – came along and changed it to Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!

W'SMITH Well...

BARDMAN Dwarfs? Have you any idea how ridiculous that is? You've made us look like fools – that's one story no one will ever want to tell again! Then there was Goldilocks. She was perfectly happy – perfectly happy meeting the wolf on the road to market. Goldilocks and the Wolf – it was snappy, it was a good title. But now, after your retelling, she meets three porridge eating bears who live in a little house in the woods! Porridge! And what do you think that did to the wolf? Kicked out of his story by a family of bears – he wasn't happy I can tell you. But it doesn't stop there. On no! Along comes Little Red Riding Hood and instead of meeting a huge troll under a bridge, she comes face to face with the wolf now dressed as her grandmother! She was unprepared for that. What were you thinking? These tales are ruined!

W'SMITH Well, just a few changes here and there... No real harm done.

BARDMAN Is that what you think? Well, I know seven giants who think differently. And now things have taken a much more serious turn. Much more serious. What happened when you told the tale of THE FROG PRINCE?

W'SMITH I thought that went rather well.

BARDMAN You thought it went rather well? Really? And the characters – the Princess, the King, The Queen, the Frog – not to mention all the other members of the royal household... they were all quite happy were they?

W'SMITH (*Evasively*) I thought they probably were.

BARDMAN But you couldn't tell could you?

W'SMITH Not exactly or precisely, no.

BARDMAN I wonder why that was.

W'SMITH Well, they all... they went... into another room. I couldn't find them.

BARDMAN You fool! They all left the story! They no longer had a part to play, so they left. You've changed fairytale-land so much you can no longer keep control. Stories are out of hand. Everyone in the story of the Frog Prince disappeared! Do you know what that means?

W'SMITH They're invisible?

BARDMAN No! They're wandering somewhere – presumed lost and alone, trying to find their way. The number of characters wandering around trying to find a story to be in has now reached a critical level. By now many have probably fallen into a 'wrong' story.

W'SMITH A 'wrong story'? No, they'll be fine.

BARDMAN You don't get it do you. They are unprepared for events outside of their own stories. They don't have the necessary skills to adapt. It's chaos in fairytale-land and it is all your fault!

W'SMITH I thought Red Riding Hood did quite well.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD could wander past at this point – looking more like a gunslinger...

BARDMAN She's not the sweet girl she used to be, her grandmother will never be the same again and the wolf's reputation is ruined. You have a lot to answer for and there is only one way to solve this now.

W'SMITH I could tell another story...

BARDMAN No!

W'SMITH But...

BARDMAN No! *(Heroically)* We're going in.

W'SMITH In?

BARDMAN In – to fairytale-land. Into the story.

W'SMITH Will it be safe?

BARDMAN Almost certainly not, but someone has to try and find the lost characters and restore at least one tale to its rightful plot. *(Ominously)* It will be perilous. Many succumb to fairytale-land sickness, some after just a few hours. But don't worry, if the sickness takes and you start acting as if you're in another story, far far away beyond fairytale-land, I'll soon knock it out of you. It's painful, but it's the only cure.

W'SMITH Peril... Sickness... Pain... Is this necessary? Maybe I should stay here until you restore a few plots with your .. inquisiting skills.

BARDMAN You don't get to wriggle out of it that easily. It's your mess, you're coming with me.

W'SMITH *(Nervously)* Oh dear. What did happen to the giants? Has anyone spotted the troll yet?

BARDMAN The troll is the least of your problems. Now, don't forget, apart from the sickness, there's magic in there - spells, enchantments, strange music, evil things, cupboards, monsters. Keep your wits about you, don't touch anything, don't open any doors, don't talk to anyone, don't fall in love at first sight and no new stories. *(Bravely)* Follow me!

SOUND CUE: Suitable music to introduce the audience to the magical realm they are now entering.

WORDSMITH and BARDMAN lead the way into the Castle.

Use GUARD/S and/or FoH to get the audience in and seated – if your production is able to move about.

SCENE 2: The Castle

The CASTLE is deserted. There are two curtained areas at either end of the space – one of these is guarded by a sleeping GUARD (or GUARDS).

LIGHTING is dim – it looks eerie.

WORDSMITH and BARDMAN explore the room and BARDMAN becomes very affected by the 'sickness' (music could help here – the original production used sound to demonstrate the 'magic' of fairytale-land sickness). When the music fades...

SOUND CUE – Spaceship background noises

BARDMAN It's worse than I thought.

W'SMITH Look though – the guards! They stayed. That's a good sign, isn't it?

BARDMAN What happened here? Where are the rest of the crew?

W'SMITH The crew? What crew?

BARDMAN is staring around as in a trance.

BARDMAN We must find the captain. Let's hope they didn't get her as well. We can signal for help from a passing spaceship. Laser guns at the ready... *(searches for laser gun in bag)*. My laser gun... it's gone... quick, give me yours.

W'SMITH Laser gun? No, no, wrong story. The Frog Prince... Once upon a time in a land far far away...

BARDMAN Noooooooo! They'll never take us alive. Quick, we need to find the central generator thingy that controls all the shields and switch it off.

W'SMITH Why?

BARDMAN Because we can't escape until the shields are down. It's always the same. It'll be somewhere obvious but tricky to reach. *(Starts searching)*

W'SMITH But, we've only just arrived. Why are we escaping? What are we escaping from?

BARDMAN Quick, hide the plans somewhere safe.

W'SMITH Ah! This is fairytale-land sickness! Now, what was the cure? Pain I believe. Pain ... let me see ... something that might cause pain... *(He reaches into BARDMAN'S bag and takes out his book)*

BARDMAN Too late, they're coming!

W'SMITH Bardman! Look! *(He rips a page from the book having decided not to hit him over the head with it)*

BARDMAN *(Suddenly coming to his senses)* No! My book. What have you done Wordsmith, defacing an Inquisitor's book, destroying evidence! You are in so much trouble.

W'SMITH But, the sickness, it was taking you. I had to act.

BARDMAN Sickness? How many days have we been here?

W'SMITH Days? Just a few minutes.

BARDMAN An Inquisitor is never affected by the sickness.

W'SMITH But I saved you from certain death trying to climb the generator thingy.

BARDMAN What nonsense! Don't try that one again. I'm making a note of this. Now, look around you. The place is deserted. We need to act fast. You will begin by re-telling the original tale exactly as you told it so we can see what happened.

W'SMITH How does that work? It's already been told.

BARDMAN Magic.

SOUND CUE: MAGIC SOUND

WORDSMITH is mesmerised by the 'magic'.

BARDMAN Wordsmith! The story.

W'SMITH Oh yes, right... the story. Well, once upon a time in a land far ... in a land surrounded by green rolling hills as high as mountains and lakes as big as oceans...

BARDMAN Mountains and Oceans.

W'SMITH What?

BARDMAN Hills as high as mountains are mountains and lakes as big as oceans are oceans. Now carry on and stop making me interrupt.

W'SMITH *(Getting rattled)* Very well. In a land surrounded by mountains and oceans, there lived a King. He lived with his wife, who was a Queen, and their precious daughter who just happened to be a Princess.

LIGHTS CHANGE TO CASTLE INTERIOR

The curtains are pulled back by the GUARDS to reveal the KING on his throne. The GUARDS go back to their places and go back to sleep.

*The KING looks very old, very tired and very bored and is slowly falling asleep.
The QUEEN'S throne is empty.*

W'SMITH The King was old and wise and loved his gentle little daughter very much. So much in fact that he gave her everything she asked for.

PRINCESS *(Entering and shouting rudely)* Father! I want a new pony!

KING *(Waking up)* What? Are we being attacked? Sound the alarm! *(To GUARD)* You guard - go and fight them off. Find the Queen!

The GUARD takes no notice.

PRINCESS *(With a big sigh)* I want a new father, this one's rubbish.

The PRINCESS sits near the KING and sulks.

The KING falls asleep again.

BARDMAN You need to get on with the story, they're all falling asleep.

W'SMITH I'm just getting warmed up – they're completely under my storyteller's spell.

QUEEN *(Entering and shouting to no one in particular)* Where's my mirror? Where have you put it? I used to have lots of mirrors, now I can't find a single one. And where's my special one – the one that talks?

PRINCESS I want a new pony!

QUEEN Father! She wants a new pony!

KING *(Waking with a cry)* Sound the alarm!

QUEEN A new pony!

PRINCESS I want a new pony!

KING *(Shouts)* Get the Princess a new pony!

PRINCESS *(Running out)* It had better be the best one ever!

QUEEN Where's my mirror?

The QUEEN starts looking for her mirror

KING I can't do all this ruling anymore – it's bad for my nerves. Being attacked every few minutes, never getting any sleep. I just want to look at the stars. Is that too much to ask?

QUEEN (*Sits on the throne*) I used to have a mirror. It liked me. It understood what a Queen needs. Where is it?

BARDMAN This doesn't seem quite right.

W'SMITH Just a few little touches of my own. Essentially the story is still there. It's just a matter of ...

PRINCESS (*Entering and shouting*) I'm bored and so is Four Legs, my pony. We want something better.

QUEEN Nurse!

NURSE (*Entering and shouting*) What is it! I'm trying to get some peace and quiet with a good book and everyone's shouting!

PRINCESS I want a library!

QUEEN Have you got my mirror?

KING What does she want?

QUEEN A library.

NURSE You can't have the whole library.

QUEEN Oh, give her the library.

NURSE I haven't seen a mirror.

KING Give her the library.

PRINCESS Hooray! Now, burn all the books! I want a big playroom for me and my pony!

NURSE You can't burn books – other people might want to read them.

PRINCESS Well, they should have thought of that before. It's not my fault if people are too lazy to read when they have the chance.

NURSE Your Majesties, tell her she can't burn the books!

PRINCESS (*Runs out shouting*) Burn the books!

NURSE runs out after her.

NURSE (*Shouting*) Save the 'practical carpentry' section!

QUEEN And look out for my mirror – I must have put it somewhere (starts looking again and finds a head-sized paper bag).

KING I wonder if the stars are out (*falls asleep*).

BARDMAN Everybody in this story is completely mad.

W'SMITH Thank you, I do try to work on developing interesting characters.

BARDMAN It wasn't a compliment. Well, get on with the story.

W'SMITH One day, shortly after a terrible fire had burned the castle library, the Princess was distraught and...

PRINCESS (*Running in shouting and blackened by fire*) I'm fed up! My pony ran away, all the books have gone and I want a NEW TOY! Get me a new toy!

The KING is asleep and the QUEEN is now on her throne with a paper bag over her head. The PRINCESS advances on them.

PRINCESS Mother! Father!

KING (*Waking up*) Sound the alarm! Hoist the mainsail! Get underground! Call the guards! (*Sees the QUEEN*) Where's the Queen? She's been kidnapped and replaced by a paper bag!

PRINCESS I want a new toy! (*Pause*) MOTHER!

The QUEEN looks out from under the paper bag

QUEEN I can't find my mirror, so I don't know what I look like anymore. I'm in disguise until I can be sure it's me. NURSE!

NURSE (*Entering and shouting*) What is it now, I'm busy making the new bookshelves.

QUEEN Get the Princess a new toy.

NURSE I have just the thing for a grumpy princess. Look at this.

PRINCESS What is it?

NURSE A lovely golden ball. You could run down to the pond and play with it there.

PRINCESS Oooooo! I want it now! Give it to me. (*Takes the golden ball*) I'm going to play with it by the pond. And if anyone comes near me or tries to take it, I'll trip them up and push them in the pond. So there.

The PRINCESS runs out, followed by the NURSE.

