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# The Troll in the Belfry and The Old Beggar Woman

by R. J. Ryland

Two Fairy Tale Plays for Young Audiences  
Inspired by Van Gogh's "A Starry Night"

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The Troll in the Belfry  
and  
The Old Beggar Woman

by R. J. Ryland

Two Fairy Tale Plays for Young Audiences  
Inspired by Van Gogh's "A Starry Night"

“The Troll in the Belfry”

SETTING: *Grandopolis, a town without hope*

CHARACTERS:

*Jacob, a peasant boy*

*Sallie, a peasant girl*

*The Troll, a cruel overlord who has taken over as king*

*Martha, an old woman whose husband was killed by the troll*

“The Old Beggar Woman”

SETTING: *A Beautiful old village, strange and mystical*

CHARACTERS:

*The Boy*

*The Young Girl*

*The Vicar*

*The Old Beggar Woman*

*The Voice in the Wind*

ETC: *Simple stage setting with several stage props that can be easily adapted to fit both plays.*

## The Troll in the Belfry

by R. J. Ryland

*(AT RISE: Grandopolis, a town without hope. Its houses cry to be painted, their shutters mourn in disrepair. A selfish and cruel troll has taken over as king and beaten down the spirits of the townsfolk until they appear as worn and tattered as their houses. Sometimes, at night, the children creep from their beds and steal into the empty streets to plot ways to get rid of the troll. On this moonlit night, SALLIE, a young girl in braided pig-tails wearing a long, moth-eaten shawl over a faded red dress meets with her friend, JACOB, a rather boastful young peasant boy who would do anything to get rid of the troll.)*

SALLIE

What are we to do? Since that awful cruel troll took over the town, no one plays, no one sleeps, no one works, no one cares. All anyone does is stare blindly as if the sun has abandoned us forever.

JACOB

He just sits up there in the church belfry yelling at people and taking all their money in taxes. He's greedy and keeps it all to himself. But you'll see, I'll have the last laugh! Wait until he lies down to sleep in his ragged old bed. I put a frog under his pillow and rotten eggs in his sheets.

SALLIE

Stop lying, Jacob, you haven't the guts.

JACOB

Yes I have! And do you know what he threatened to do to anyone who dares cross him?

SALLIE

No.

JACOB

*(Twisting his body and hobbling like the troll, grabbing SALLIE's small neck from behind.)* He's going to drive a wooden stake through his neck and hang him from the side of the steeple for everyone to see!

SALLIE

Oh, no! You must run away and hide! He'll take to his bed soon, I hear his howling now!

JACOB

*(Laughing.)* Ah, he never stops howling! But you believed me all the same. Courage I have, but stupid I'm not.

SALLIE

*(Shaking her head sadly.)* He would do it. Since he moved from his gnarled old castle in the mountains to the church at the town square, he's thrown old Martha's husband into the sea and shoved the baker into his own oven for trying to charge him for bread.

*(Without warning, a misshapen figure darts threateningly towards them.)*

THE TROLL

*(Screaming.)* Get off my street! Go home to your wretched shacks! This is my town. This is my street! *(JACOB tries his best to stand tall, but his knees quiver and SALLIE's eyes well with tears.)* Stop your sniveling, you little fool! Go cry on your mother's shoulder, if she cares. I haven't the stomach for your tears. Get out of my way and go home!

*(THE CHILDREN stand aside as THE TROLL slinks past into the darkness towards the church. SALLIE cannot contain her tears.)*

SALLIE

*(Sobbing.)* My mother used to care. I know deep down she still does. She's so sad. She's lost all hope. But I won't give up! We can't give up! We have to find a way to rid ourselves of that terrible troll.

JACOB

*(Thoughtfully.)* It won't be easy, but perhaps there's a way. But we'll need help. I don't think we can do it alone.

SALLIE

But who? No one in the village has the heart to care.

*(A WOMAN in a flowing black veil rounds the corner headed in their direction. JACOB emits a sharp cry and dashes behind an old wooden crate, SALLIE ducks behind an overgrown bush.)*

MARTHA

*(Sneering and rattling a pail in her hand.)* Afraid of an old woman!

JACOB

*(From his hiding place.)* I- I'm not afraid. You took us by surprise is all.

SALLIE

*(Recognizing the WOMAN's voice, she jumps from behind the bush and tugs on the veil, yanking it to the ground.)* I know who you are!

MARTHA

Let an old woman pass in peace. Isn't it enough I'm forced to walk the great distance from my shelter in the hills to this detestable town to pay homage to the murdered of my husband?

SALLIE

Aren't you Martha, the old woman who lives on the hill? The wife of the old man thrown into the sea?

MARTHA

And are you deaf, too? *(Picking up the veil and placing it over her head once again.)* You would do better to hold your tongue and listen when an old woman speaks than to jump out and frighten her from her wits.

JACOB

Come on, Sallie, let's go. Why waste your breath on this old woman. She's as crabby as the troll in the tower.

MARTHA

Troll? You mean, esteemed overlord, giver of our wretched lives? Masterful governor, graceless king of this godforsaken village? *(Falling to her knees in feigned piety.)* I thank him for saving me from my beloved husband, for snatching the bread from my mouth and throwing it into the sea.

SALLIE

*(Crossing to MARTHA and touching her gently on the shoulder.)* You have just reason to be bitter, but bitterness will not save us from the troll.

MARTHA

*(Standing.)* Stop dreaming and go back to your beds! Nothing will save us from the troll.

JACOB

*(Looking in MARTHA's pail.)* What have you there?

MARTHA

What business is that of yours?

JACOB

*(Reaching into the pail.)* Berries! Fresh berries!

MARTHA

*(Pulling away.)* You would do your best to keep your hands in your pockets. These are for the beast in his nest at the top of the tower. I have no money to pay taxes.

JACOB

*(To SALLIE.)* I have an idea!

SALLIE

What?

JACOB

To rid us of the troll. Bring me a branch from that bush.

SALLIE

*(Running to the bush and snapping off a branch.)* What are you going to do?

JACOB

Watch! *(He snatches the pail from MARTHA.)*

MARTHA

Give me my berries, you little fool! I'll have nothing at all to appease his royal behindness!

JACOB

*(SALLIE hands the branch to JACOB.)* This will do more than appease him! *(He tips the pail to one side and dips the branch into the berry juice.)*

MARTHA

What are you doing! You'll ruin my berries!

JACOB

Patience, old woman. *(JACOB takes the branch dripping with berry juice and uses it as a brush. He begins painting T-H-E K-I-N-G I-S A T-R-O-L-L on the side of one of the houses illuminated by the moonlight.)* This should draw him from his shell.

SALLIE

Do you have a plan?

MARTHA

A plan to get us killed.

SALLIE

Oh, my.

MARTHA

Are you mad? Cover your words or you'll lose your head!

JACOB

There, that should do it. Now all we have to do is wait.

MARTHA

You can wait if you want. Not me. *(She starts down the street.)*

THE TROLL

*(Bellowing from off.)* Who dares such insolence? I'll have you hanged from the steeple for all the village to see!

JACOB

Good. He did see it! I hoped he'd see it in the moonlight.

SALLIE

*(Shrinking nervously.)* You got your wish.

*(The troll advances menacingly towards them. MARTHA stops.)*

MARTHA

Thanks to the boy who lost his mind, we shall all lose our heads.

THE TROLL

Who is responsible for this outrage? Tell me, old woman, is it you?

MARTHA

*(Protecting the children.)* Of course it was I, your ungrateful highness. Haven't I reason to despise the king?

SALLIE

*(Gathering her courage.)* No, your majesty, it was I. You tore out our mothers' hearts and left us to wander aimlessly in the streets with no one to care for us. I have nothing to lose. All hope is lost.

JACOB

*(Boldly stepping forward.)* Don't be silly. You lack the courage to risk the ire of the king. It was I, and I alone. *(Showing THE TROLL his berry stained hands.)* See the stains on my hands?

MARTHA

If neither of you has wit enough to let an old woman die in your stead, so be it.

THE TROLL

I'll hang you all!

JACOB

*(Skillfully weaving his web.)* Then who will be left to pay homage to the king? The rest of the town may as well be dead. No one stirs from his house. No one lumbers along the street. No one labors with sweat. Soon there will be nothing to steal. Nothing but a few berries spilt from the pail of a broken old woman.

THE TROLL

Then berries will be worth the price of gold!

JACOB

But who will pick them?

THE TROLL

Who? You, this pitiful girl and this wretched old woman. You will live to serve me, that is if I choose to spare your lives.

JACOB

*(Moaning, sinking to the ground.)* We haven't the strength, you've beaten us. We shall lie here in the dark and wither like berries too long in the sun.

THE TROLL

Ah, but it is the sun that gives us strength. When the sun shines, you shall rise and become my slave.

JACOB

The sun will never reach us here in the narrow streets, in the shadows of the empty stores and fallen houses. No, we have no strength to go on. *(He lies prostrate on the ground, secretly motioning for SALLIE and MARTHA to follow suit.)*

SALLIE

*(Shrugging her shoulders but obeying.)* Woe is me!

MARTHA

*(Whispering.)* I hope you know what you're doing. *(Wailing and falling to the ground.)*  
Ahhhh, I am done!

THE TROLL

So you think you can get out of serving me by dying? I shall command the sun to alter its course and shine its rays in the narrows of the streets. You shall be saved whether you will it or not.

JACOB

You have no power over the sun.

THE TROLL

I have power over everything!

JACOB

Nonsense! The sun glows with laughter at your ignorance. When he rises in the sky, he rises high above your tower. You think you see all. You think you control all. He rises higher than you. He has power over you! The sun looks down on *you*!

THE TROLL

*(Railing.)* We'll see about that!

JACOB

You might have a chance to beat the sun. Go quickly to the church steeple. When the sun rises, leap on his back and let him carry you high into the sky!

SALLIE

*(Catching on.)* Oh, yes. It is so. He has power over you. From your tower you can jump on top of the sun as he mounts to the sky. Stand tall and beat your chest wildly! It is the only way to be higher than the sun. For *you* to look down on *him*!

MARTHA

Of course! It is the only way. Then you will be higher than the sun! You will control the sun and all its power!

JACOB

*(Jumping to his feet.)* And you will truly lord over everything!

THE TROLL

Yes, yes! I'll stand on the back of the sun. I shall be higher and shine greater than the sun and live among the stars in the sky!

JACOB

Hurry! Look! The sun is beginning to rise!

## THE TROLL

I'll tend to the three of you later. I must ride the sun to the stars! (*He exits.*)

This is Not the End of the Play  
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## The Old Beggar Woman

by R. J. Ryland

*(AT RISE: A beautiful old village, peaceful yet strange and mystical. It is just before dawn. A young boy asleep in his bed, outside the sky in turmoil, the wind blows eerily. A clap of fierce thunder awakens the boy followed by another crash just beneath his window.)*

### THE BOY

What was that? *(Sitting up in bed.)* Who-who's there? *(Crosses to the window.)* Oh, my! Look at the sky! *(Calling)* Mother! Father! Come quickly and see! The moon, the clouds and the stars; they're swirled up in the wind! *(A YOUNG GIRL pops up from beneath the window, startling THE BOY.)* Ahhh! What are you doing? You scared me half to death!

### THE YOUNG GIRL

Help me, please? I'm so cold. I can't find my mama and papa. They're gone!

### THE BOY

Here, come out of the storm. *(Helping her through the window.)* What do you mean they're gone?

### THE YOUNG GIRL

*(Shivering.)* Have you seen it! The sky! It's wild like on fire. The thunder woke me. I was afraid. I ran to their room. Someone had stoked the coals but their bed was empty. I saw your open window.

### THE BOY

It's okay, I'm sure. *(Wrapping a blanket over her shoulders.)* I'll get Father to help you.

### THE YOUNG GIRL

But you called to your father. And to your mother, too. I heard you. No one came.

### THE BOY

The wind is roaring. How could they hear? You wait here, I'll get them. They're sleeping comfortably in their bed.

*(THE BOY exits. THE YOUNG GIRL pulls the blanket tight around her. From off, THE BOY is heard calling for his mother and father.)*

### THE BOY *(Off)*

Mother? Father? Where are you? Are you here?

### THE YOUNG GIRL

They're gone as well.

### THE BOY

*(Entering.)* Their covers are tousled but no one sleeps soundly in their bed. Where would they have gone on such a stormy night?

## THE YOUNG GIRL

The wind has snatched them from their sleep.

## THE BOY

Nonsense!

## THE YOUNG GIRL

*(Falling to her knees in prayer.)* Please! Please bring back my mama and papa. Help us, please!

## THE BOY

The Vicar! We'll find the Vicar. He'll know what to do. *(Pulling THE YOUNG GIRL to her feet.)* Come on, let's go!

*(THE BOY and THE YOUNG GIRL crawl out the window into the chilling night. The wind whines loudly. As they cross the street to the Church, a strange shadow scurries past.)*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

What was that?

## THE BOY

Nothing.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

I saw something in the shadows.

## THE BOY

A cat, perhaps.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

It was much too big for a cat.

## THE BOY

It's the night. You're seeing things.

*(THE BOY pounds on the door to the church. THE YOUNG GIRL joins him as a figure in black approaches unseen from behind. THE VICAR opens the door.)*

## THE VICAR

What is it? What are you doing out in the dead of night? You should have your bottoms tanned for waking a poor Vicar from his sleep. Do your parents know where you are? They'll be worried sick!

*(THE CHILDREN cannot contain themselves and speak on top of one another.)*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

They're gone!

## THE BOY

Our parents have disappeared in the night!

## THE YOUNG GIRL

I'm so afraid!

## THE BOY

See the wind swirling!

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Has it blown my mama and papa away?

## THE VICAR

*(Looking at the sky.)* I've never seen such a sight. The night sky is stirred into a stew! Quite odd. Quite odd indeed. Come inside, quickly! Close the door!

## THE YOUNG GIRL

We must pray, Father.

## THE VICAR

Yes, we must pray. We must pray together. *(A knock on the door.)* Now, who?

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Hide! Hurry!

## THE VICAR

Stay calm.

## THE BOY

It could be Mother and Father! *(Throws open the door only to see a tattered old woman standing in the doorway.)* Oh!

*(THE YOUNG GIRL screams and hides behind THE VICAR.)*

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Do you have some coins for an old beggar woman? Or some food for my poor aching belly? Something to soothe a poor lost soul? *(TO THE YOUNG GIRL.)* Come to me, sweet child, I won't hurt you.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

No! Don't touch me!

## THE BOY

Go away, old woman! I know who you are. You're the old beggar woman who hides in the shadows. You're wicked and crazy enough, alright. You creep into our houses in the dead of the night and steal food from our hearths like a stray cat rummaging through trash.

## THE VICAR

*(To THE BOY.)* Peace, child, she's an old woman lost in the storm. *(To THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN.)* Come in, old woman, out of the wind. *(Looking about.)* Is there anyone else?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Only me. No one's been about all night but me.

## THE VICAR

*(Closing the door.)* No one? No one at all? Not the Baker? He rises hours before dawn to fire the ovens for his bread.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Not the Baker.

## THE VICAR

Not the Dairyman tending his old milk cow? I've woken many mornings to his cries of fresh milk long before sunrise.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Not the Dairyman.

## THE VICAR

No one?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

No one.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

*(Tears welling in her eyes.)* I want my mama.

## THE BOY

Don't cry.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Gone, all gone. While the children sleep their parents have gone to the deep. Gone, all gone.

## THE VICAR

You're frightening the children.

## THE BOY

What have you done with my mother? I knew you were wicked! A horrible, wicked old woman!

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

The wicked have eyes that see.

## THE VICAR

Then you know where they are? You know what has become of the people in the village?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Not I.

## THE BOY

She lies!

## THE VICAR

Then who, old woman? Who has eyes that see?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

You know as well as me.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Do you, Father? Tell us, please? I so want to see my mama and papa.

THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN (*Chanting.*)

It watches the village day and night,  
It sees the darkness, it sees the light.  
It watches you sleep, it watches you play  
It watches the village by night and by day.

## THE BOY

She casts a spell on us, Father!

## THE VICAR

Don't worry, child, she has no power. Pity her. She's light in the head.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

*It has power.*

## THE VICAR

*It is a myth.*

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Believe what you will. *It is real.*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

What is she talking about, Father? What is real?

## THE VICAR

An old story, handed down from father to son, mother to daughter. Only a story.

## THE BOY

My father told me of the mysterious one. I thought it was like St. Nicholas. A story to flatter the imagination.

## THE VICAR

And so it is. Come, leave this old woman to her tales.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Turn tails and run. The village will be lost.

*(THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN opens the door. The Wind rushes in. They stare at the wonders of the night. It is suddenly still and quiet.)*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Where does it live?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

In the rushes above the sea, over the horizon where falling stars weep. On the wings of the Milky Way, in the frost on the window panes.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Will you take me to it?

## THE VICAR

Leave her to the flattery of her own wits. Come back inside.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

*(Crossing to THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN and taking her by the hand.)* I will go with you.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

*(With tears in her eyes.)* If I choose to take you.

## THE BOY

I will go, too!

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Now the boy sings a different tune.

## THE BOY

Father?

## THE VICAR

I don't know.

## THE BOY

Our parents are in trouble. Maybe *It* can help, maybe *we* can help.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Will you go with us, Father?

## THE VICAR

I will pray for you.

*(THE CHILDREN exit with THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN. THE VICAR closes the door behind them.)*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

How far? How far must we travel? The wind is so strong, I can barely walk.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Hold tight, I will help you along. *(She caresses THE YOUNG GIRL with her arm around her shoulder.)*

## THE BOY

The sun will rise soon. The air is cold, the sky strange, and yet it is almost—

## THE YOUNG GIRL

*(Looking up at THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN.)* Soothing.

## THE BOY

I was going to say *Spooky!* How far?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Here.

## THE BOY

Here? You are a crazy old woman!

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Hold your tongue and wait.

*(The lights change as the dawn begins to break. A shadow appears behind THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN.)*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

It is the dawn.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

*It has come. Like the daybreak, always here, always somewhere, always watching.*

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Tell us, what do you see?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

I see what you see. The stars in the sky, the Earth beneath. They dance with the wind. It is a wondrous night and a grateful morning.

## THE BOY

Why grateful? Our mothers and fathers are gone.

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

The wind draws the sea up into the stars, the moon calls to the sea. It rises above the church steeple, above the hills that blanket the shore.

## THE BOY

The village will drown in the sea!

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Like a stray cat rummaging through trash, I creep into your houses in the dead of the night and whisper in their ears. I call their names in my soul.

## THE BOY

Whose names? Whose names do you call?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Your mothers and your fathers. Your aunts and your uncles. Your neighbors and their eldest sons.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

My mama and papa?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

The people of the village have crept from their beds in the dark of the night and gone to secure the shore. They carry sand bags and buckets to the top of the hills to hold back the raging sea.

## THE BOY

Everyone?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Everyone. The Baker and the Dairyman, leaving the cow to bawl in the night and the bread to burn in the oven.

## THE YOUNG GIRL

Can they save the village?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

Listen for their voices in the wind as you do mine.

*(The three listen quietly to the voice in the wind.)*

## THE VOICE IN THE WIND

Fill the bags! Faster! There to the west! Higher! Oh, such a sight! Hold hands, stand tall! We will save the village! We must save the village! We must save our children, all snuggled warm in their beds without knowing. Our strength and our love will save them! (*THE VISION cheers triumphantly.*) Yes! Yeah! Hurrah!

## THE BOY

I hear cheering. Can it be?

## THE OLD BEGGAR WOMAN

The voices of the village.

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