

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

***A Spell of Cold
Weather***

by Charles Way

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CHARACTERS

Betty

Tomos Trickman

Holly

Bob

Cow/Cock/Dog (*played by Tomos*)

Setting: The play is set on a farm on the borders of England and Wales.

SCENE 1 (Tomas Trickman and the Farmers)

Music. This music is later identified with Tomos Trickman who now enters. Tomos is a faery, of a type which, in British folklore attached themselves to a particular household. He is friendly and mischievous. Tomos flits across the stage. His movements are neat and swift. He plays 'peepo' with the audiences. He does not speak. After he has made the initial contact, he shows them the instrument that made the music. He makes them laugh and feel secure.

Tomos then presents to the audience a large cut-out sun and demonstrates how in the context of this play he can control time. As he nears the west, the skies darken. He takes a few steps back and the lights rise again. He allows the sun to 'sink in the west' and then picks up a moon establishing that the action of the play begins at night. Finally he presents a bowl to the audience. He shows them it's empty – and illustrates how hungry he is. Tomos then hears Bob and Betty, who now enter. They are preparing for bed. Bob is humming in a grumpy kind of way. Tomos moves between them, making it clear that the two farmers cannot see him. He places his bowl on Bob's side of the bed and then waits, hoping that tonight the farmers will relent and feed him.

BETTY

Be quiet.

BOB

Just hummin.

BETTY

Sounds like a bee in a bottle.

Bob continues his preparations for bed. He holds up the toothpaste and looks for his toothbrush.

BETTY

What you looking for?

BOB

Toothbrush.

BETTY

Bah! (She gets into bed and he hums again as he continues his search) Stop hummin'.

BOB

Bah!

BETTY

Don't know what yer so cheerful fer, anyhow.

BOB

I'm not – I'm not cheerful at all.

BETTY

Stop hummin' then.

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BOB Not cheerful a bit – I'm not.

Betty raises her magazine, 'The Farmers' Monthly' and reads. Bob continues his search for his toothbrush and instead finds Tomos' bowl. He is holding it when Betty looks up.

BETTY What you doing with that old thing?

BOB It was just there, on the end of the bed.

BETTY Well, put it away.

BOB Betty?

BETTY What?

BOB Don't you think we should –?

BETTY – *Should?*

BOB Well, we could –

BETTY What –?

BOB Put some food in it.

BETTY Who for, Bob?

BOB For – um – Tomos Trickman.

BETTY Bah! I told you not to mention that name on this farm. There is no such person, no such creature as Tomos Trickman. Stuff an' nonsense.

BOB I'll leave it empty, then .

BETTY Aye – better still, throw it away.

Betty returns to her reading. Bob throws the bowl away but it is caught by Tomos, who looks at it sadly. He then decides to take revenge. At this moment, Bob sees his toothbrush lying on the floor at the end of the bed.

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Tomos sweeps forward and spins Bob round, steals the toothbrush and pulls the blanket off the bed.

BETTY What you doing?

BOB What?

BETTY Pulling the blanket off me.

BOB No, I never.

BETTY You did – look.

BOB I never.

BETTY Bah!

She picks the blanket up and returns to bed.

BOB Have you seen my tooth–

BETTY No.

BOB Brush?

BETTY Bah. *(She settles down to read. Bob turns away and Tomos pulls off the blanket again.)* You!

BOB What?

BETTY You done it again. Pulled the blanket off yer own wife in the middle of winter.

BOB I never touched the blanket.

BETTY Bah.

Betty then retrieves the blanket. Tomos then puts the toothbrush on her side of the bed. Bob puts the paste down on his side of the bed. He looks under the bed. Tomos steals the toothpaste. Bob is now under the bed, humming.

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BETTY Will you stop that hummin'.

Bob emerges on her side of the bed and sees his toothbrush.

BOB What's my toothbrush doing over here?

BETTY I'm trying to read.

BOB You took my toothbrush.

BETTY No, I did not take your stupid toothbrush.

BOB HAH!

BETTY HAH!

As Bob crosses back at the base of the bed, Tomos whips off the blanket again.

BETTY I'll clobber you, I will.

BOB I never touched the blanket. *(He gets back round his side of the bed and the toothpaste has gone.)* Where's the toothpaste?

BETTY Hey?

BOB You've taken the toothpaste.

BETTY Course, I haven't.

Bob sees the toothpaste on her side.

BOB What's it doing over your side then?

BETTY Bah. *(She throws it at him)* I'm trying to read.

BOB I'm trying to clean my teeth.

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BETTY Well, try a bit harder. *(Bob puts the brush and paste down. He gets a bowl and a jug of water. Tomos puts some paste on the brush and Bob starts to brush his teeth. He starts to hum.)* Stop.
(Meanwhile Tomos squeezes toothpaste into one of Bob's slippers. Bob is humming again.) Be quiet!

A dog barks loudly offstage. (i.e. Tomos)

BOB Now you set the dog off.

Betty gets up and shouts off:

BETTY Quiet down dog – Quiet. *(Dog barks back louder than before)* Go and shut that dog up, go on.

BOB You go.

BETTY I'm in me pyjamas.

BOB So am I.

BETTY I'm reading.

BOB I got nothing on me feet.

BETTY Put yer slippers on then.

Dog barks louder.

BOB Oh alright – alright. *(To dog)* BE QUIET!
(He puts on his slippers) That's funny.

BETTY What?

BOB There's something sticky in my slipper.

BETTY That'll be yer foot, Bob.

BOB No, it's – it's toothpaste.

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BETTY Toothpaste? In yer slipper?

BOB Toothpaste.

BETTY I thought you were going to clean yer teeth, not yer toenails. *(The dog barks again)* Go and shut that dog up.

Bob sighs and goes off stickily. Tomos then puts his bowl on the bed next to Betty. Offstage, we hear Bob talking to the dog. Betty then sees the bowl and is very surprised. She picks it up and at that moment, Bob returns. She looks guilty.

BETTY I thought I told you to throw this away.

BOB I did throw it away.

BETTY Well, throw it further.

Bob throws the bowl away and as before Tomos magically retrieves it. He looks sadly at the bowl. Bob is now shivering with cold.

BOB What date is it Betty?

BETTY Twenty-sixth of December – why?

BOB Twenty-sixth?

BETTY What?

BOB I've got a funny feeling we've missed something.

BETTY Don't put yer cold feet on me.

BOB Good night, Betty.

BETTY Good night Bob.

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The lights begin to fade.

BOB Feels like we're in fer a spell of cold weather.

SCENE 2

The Farmers wake up.

Music. Tomos removes the moon and replaces it with the sun. The lights rise on the two farmers who are still in bed. In their sleep, they struggle for control of the blankets.

Tomos enters as the cockerel. The cockerel/Tomos places himself between the two farmers and crows loudly. They wake up with a yell and jump out of bed. Bob chases the bird for a few moments, but fails to catch it.

BOB One of these days.

BETTY We'll have that bird for supper.

Bob starts to get dressed but Betty is getting back into bed.

BOB Come on Betty, it's morning.

BETTY I'm not getting up.

BOB You got to get up.

BETTY What fer?

BOB For work.

BETTY Work? *Ugh. (She hides beneath the covers.)*

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BOB (*gently*) Come on Betty, we used to enjoy the farm. We used to enjoy work. We used to be happy.

BETTY (*from under the covers*) It's your turn to make the tea.

BOB I'll get it now.

He trudges sadly off. Betty emerges.

BETTY I used to enjoy the farm. I used to enjoy work. I used to be happy – but I'm not now – no, I'm not now and I don't know why – I don't know at all.

Tomos enters on a bike wearing a postman's hat. In his teeth, he has a letter. Tomos rings the bike bell with annoying persistence.

BETTY (*calls out to Bob*) Postman.

BOB (*enters with tea*) Your turn.

BETTY Bah. (*She gets up and halts the postman. He keeps ringing the bell.*) Stop ringing that blasted bell. (*She takes the letter from Tomos*) Thank you.

Tomos rings the bell twice in reply. He then rides off ringing the bell.

BETTY Stop ringing that blasted – one of these days...

As she opens the letter, Tomos gets off the bike, removes the postman's hat and listens.

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BETTY It's a letter from my sister, Avril.

BOB Oh, aye. What do she want?

BETTY (*reads*) Dear Betty... Oh, dear me –

BOB What?

BETTY She has to go into hospital fer an hoperation on her hankle.

BOB Oh – there's sorry for her, then.

BETTY (*reads*) AH!

BOB (*shocked*) What?

BETTY And she wants us to look after her little girl while she's away.

BOB Her little girl? You mean – a child?

BETTY A child.

BOB Us can't have that.

BETTY I don't want a child up here.

BOB I don't like children.

BETTY Neither do I.

BOB I mean – I don't know any.

BETTY Neithér do I.

BOB Oh dear, dear.

BETTY (*reads*) She will arrive at the train station at tea time on December the twenty-seventh.

BOB That's today.

BETTY (*reads*) Please look after her, until I'm better.
Love from your sister, Avril.

BOB We can't – we can't – we can't.

BETTY (*reads*) P.S. I enclose some money to cover the cost of her stay.

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Silence. Betty shakes the letter and a £20 note flutters to the floor.

- BOB** Oh well –
BETTY We'll have to, then.
BOB Seeing as we're getting paid.
BETTY But what will us do with her?
BOB I don't know.
BETTY What do children *do*?
BOB I don't know.
BETTY What do children like doing?

Silence.

- BOB** I don't know that either.
BETTY Yewer useless you are.
BOB So are you, then.

The dog barks 'offstage.

- BOB/BETTY** Be quiet!
BETTY You go down to the station.
BOB Me?
BETTY You.
BOB No, I can't – not me.
BETTY Yer not frightened of a little child are you?
BOB No – no. But what shall I say to it?
BETTY *Say?* Say, 'Hello'.
BOB A child. Oh dear, oh dear.

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BETTY Get on with you.

BOB I'll take the car.

BETTY Walk – it'll save petrol.

BOB We don't need to save petrol.

BETTY Walk – it'll give 'ee time to think what to say to the child. She's called Holly.

BOB What you'll do then?

BETTY I'll *work*. I'll milk the cow, fetch the eggs an' count the sheep. (*She picks up her tea.*) Who's drunk my tea? (*The cockerel, i.e Tomos, crows with satisfaction*) You blasted bird. (*She chases the bird / Tomos off, then returns and stares at Bob*) Well, don't just stand there – start walking.

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