

PLAYS FOR  
**New Audiences**

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

# ***The Tinderbox***

by Charles Way

Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

The license issued in connection with PNA perusal scripts is a limited license and is issued for the sole purpose of reviewing the script for a potential future performance. All other rights regarding perusal scripts are expressly reserved by Plays for New Audiences, including, but not limited to, the rights to distribute, perform, copy, or alter scripts. This limited license does not convey any performance rights of any kind with this material. By accepting any perusal script(s), Licensee agrees to and is bound by these terms.

**Cast**

Jonas

Jenny

Christian

The Sergeant

Hans

Bernhard

Mrs. Thorgesen

Dr Meisling

Mr Wulff

Monk 1 [Father Collins]

Monk 2 [Brother John]

Monk 3 [Brother Sam]

Three dogs

Ticket Tout.

City folk

Palace guards

The play was written for a cast of 7

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

Act one. Scene one.

Lights rise on the cast, who are barefoot and poor, in fact they are orphans.

Cast [Sing] Jonas, Jonas, Jonas, Jonas.

A baby descends from the heavens and one of them catches it.

Cast Where are his parents?

Cast Lost and gone before.

Cast Before what?

Cast Before time.

Cast Poor little mite.

Cast Looks unwell.

Cast Very unwell.

Cast No chance for this one.

Cast No chance at all.

Cast [Sing]  
Jonas the infant, a baby in arms  
No one to love him or keep him from harm  
Light as a feather, lost and alone  
Jonas the infant, all skin and bone.

Cast Look

The cast sees a small light that is seeking a home, which eventually plops into Jonas' mouth.

Cast [Sing]  
Jonas the infant, silent he lay  
Breathing his last one winter day  
When down came a light from somewhere on high

Fell into his mouth  
He stared to-

Jonas Cries.

Cast A miracle.

Cast A blessing.

Cast Welcome to the world little one.

Cast [Sing]  
Jonas the infant grows into a boy

The baby is replaced by a rough puppet boy.

Never had parents, or even a toy.  
When he was seven he went to Odense  
The orphanage there is small-but immense.

Cast Now Time is a river-it passes us by

The rough puppet boy is replaced by the live actor.

Cast Jonas feels awkward and doesn't know why,  
So down by the river he sits with a sigh .  
And sings to himself as the water runs by.

A summer evening. Jonas fishes.

Jonas Ipsy dipsy nonsense, nothing else to say  
Got a spot on my nose, that won't go away  
A hair on my chin ,beneath a silly grin  
Ipsy dipsy nonsense, put it in the bin

Cast Last day of school Jonas.

Jonas I know.

Cast What are you going to do?

Jonas I don't know.

Cast Where will you go?

Jonas I don't know.

Cast Don't know much do you?

Jonas No. YES.  
I love someone, but I won't speak  
Can't find the words, though I searched all week.  
If birds were words I wonder what they'd say  
Ipsy dipsy nonsense and then fly away.

As he sits and fishes a woman comes and sits next to him. Jonas is unaware of her presence. She puts on a mask thus becoming the witch of the story, when she does this she becomes visible to Jonas. [see notes.] She has large lower lip. She turns and stares at him at which point he turns, sees her and yells in fright.

Jonas You gave me a fright. Whoa- you've got an enormous normous lower lip.

Woman Good evening, Jonas.

Jonas Oh, you know me?

Woman I've often been here Jonas, though you may not have seen me. You sing to yourself and I have learned some things about you.

Jonas Oh? Like what?

Woman You have no mother or father.

Jonas So?

Woman You get into trouble at school.

Jonas I don't mean to, it just happens- a lot.

Woman                   And you're in love.

Jonas                    I'm not. I'm not. Well what if I am? And what do you want? You and your big lip.

Woman                   I need someone to help me. You Jonas.

Jonas                    Why me?

Woman                   You're special Jonas.

Jonas                    Nah-I'm just an orphan who can't spell his own name. That's why Master Swinecheek gave me this badge-cos I'm an idiot, 'a dreamer, a fool', but I don't have to worry about him no more. [*He throws his badge into the water.*] He's gone.

Woman                   School doesn't suit everyone.

Jonas                    No. How come you know so much?

Woman                   I'm a witch.

Jonas                    Oh. [*He moves gently away*] What kind of witch?

Woman                   The kind who needs your help.

Jonas                    Well, I will always help a body if I can.

Woman                   Even a witch?

Jonas                    Suppose. If she means no harm. Trouble is I'm busy. I'm waiting for Jenny. She's an orphan too.

Woman                   Then we must hurry. I've lost something of great importance. You can fetch it for me.

Jonas                    What is it?

Woman                   A tinderbox.

Jonas                    If it's a fire you need I can light one without a tinderbox. I'm good at starting fires. [*He grimaces*] Ask the school.

Woman                 No Jonas, it's the tinderbox I need.

Jonas                    But I'm waiting for Jenny you see. [Pause] The Orphans of Odense, that's what they call us, me and Jen. Where is it then?

Woman                 At the bottom of this tree, but I must warn you Jonas, there is some danger involved.

Jonas                    Oh danger, I'm not scared of a bit of danger.

Woman                 Yes you are.

Jonas                    I know I am. But if there's danger there must be some reward too?

Woman                 Oh yes- a reward beyond your deepest dreams.

Jonas                    Down this tree you say?

Woman                 The trunk of the tree is hollow and leads to a large chamber beneath the roots. There you'll find the tinderbox.

*Jonas tries to look down the hole in the tree.*

Jonas                    What kind of danger, and what kind of reward?

*Jenny enters and the woman vanishes.*

Jenny                    What on earth are you doing?

Jonas                    [*Jonas jumps back startled.*] What have you done with her?

Jenny                    Who?

Jonas                    The woman. There was a woman, just here- just now.

Jenny                    No Jonas, there's no one here.

Jonas Hello? Hello? She was here. Standing where you are now. There-  
no- there.

Jenny I saw no one. What did she look like?

Jonas She had an enormous normous lower lip. Like a drawer.

Jenny A drawer?

Jonas Sticking out from a cupboard.

Jenny You're dreaming again Jonas. You know what you're like,  
dreaming, fishing, dreaming, fishing.

Jonas Didn't seem like a dream-but perhaps--it was--if you say so.

Jenny I've brought some grub.

Jonas Where'd you get all this from? *[She lays out a cloth]* A cloth an' all.

Jenny So, here we are, the last day of school. I wonder what will become  
of us? Tomorrow night we shall not even have a bed to lie in.

Jonas Never liked school beds anyhow. I'd rather sleep in a hedge.

Jenny I'd rather sleep in a palace..Oh Jonas-last night I dreamt that I sang  
on a great stage in Copenhagen-and when I fished singing the  
people roared my name and gave me flowers- so many flowers I  
thought I would drown in them.

Jonas Dreaming-singing- dreaming. No one on earth has ever sung more  
sweet than you.

Jenny *[She laughs coarsely, disbelieving]* Don't be stupid.

Jonas I'm not. Because I'm not stupid- am I?

Jenny No- you're just.

Jonas What?



Jenny Different. [*Silence*]

Jonas Jenny you have food here fit for a king. And three of everything. Three knives, three spoons...

Jenny Christian is coming. I said we were going to celebrate the last day of school, so--you don't mind do you?

Jonas No, no.

Jenny Good. I like Christian. He's fun.

Jonas But there was something- I had been wanting--hoping ,like-- to say- to tell you.

Jenny Oh? What is it?

Jonas But if Christian were to arrive, sudden like, in the middle of my saying--

Jenny Then say it now, before he comes- just say it--

Jonas Yes--- [*Silence*]

Jenny Jonas?

Jonas I had the words, I had them-

Jenny Don't panic so.

Jonas But now my head's an empty box. What good are words anyhow, surely you must know what I'm trying to express?

Jenny I assure you, I do not.

Christian [*Off.*] Hello.

Jonas It's too late now--

Jenny Tell me later-can't be that difficult.

Enter Christian.

Christian There you are. This place is the devil to find-- but charming-no wonder you kept it secret Jonas. Caught anything?

Jonas *[Pulls in his line]* My idiot badge.

Christian Seems like you can't get rid of it-Eh Jonas?

Jenny Here Jonas. I have one too.

Jonas You?

Jenny Master Swinecheek didn't like my singing. Gave him a headache.

Jonas Then he's the idiot.

Christian *[Christian reads the nametags]* Ah, Jonas and Jenny--how sweet.

Jenny Master Swinecheek never gave you one did he-his favorite pupil.

Christian Wrong- *[He pulls out an idiot badge with his name on it.]*

Jenny What for? Were you wicked? I bet you were an' all.

Christian Remember the day Jonas set fire to the school.

Jonas I was cold that's all.

Christian Exactly- an accident. I told Swinecheek the same- and he struck me once across the face and gave me this badge to wear. Whatever made him hate you so Jonas?

Jonas I don't know.

Jenny Let's get rid of them now-forever. After three. One

Christian Two.

Jonas                    Three.

*Music. In slow motion they throw the badges into the stream.*

Jenny                    How strange.

Christian                We're free.

Jenny                    To go where we want, do as we please.

Christian                Well my good friends, [He pulls out a bottle from his jacket.] Let's drink shall we?

Jenny                    Yes, let's drink.

Christian                To a new beginning.

Jenny                    Far from this boring-

Christian                Grubby-

Jenny                    Mean little town, with its mean little orphanage.

Christian                And Jonas, if in all those years I ever said anything to you that was less than kind, I'm sorry.

Jonas                    Tis all forgot Christian, all forgot.

Jenny                    Well said, well said---- both.

Christian                Friends then- forever.

Jenny                    Forever. Let's eat- lots.

Christian                There are only two chicken legs. [*He takes a bite*]

Jenny                    Well of course. What kind of chicken has three legs? You have it Jonas.

Jonas                    No you have it.

Jenny                    You're a gentleman. *[She picks up a chicken leg and challenges Christian with the a chicken leg as a weapon.]* But you sir, are not. En Guard croque monsieur.

Christian                Touche Madame Poulet.

Jenny                    And, and, and, Sur le pont D'avignon.

*They fight a mock duel and Jenny dies operatically singing as she falls.*

Christian                What a glamorous death. Jonas won't you avenge her?

*Jonas picks up a stick and Christian does the same and they fence. It quickly becomes competitive.*

Christian                My word Jonas- you're a natural swordsman. *[Christian attacks Jonas who easily defends himself then gets a touch carried away, striking Christian.]* Ah-that hurt.

Jenny                    Your arm, it's bleeding. Oh Jonas—

Jonas                    I didn't mean to.

Christian                No matter- I shall run him through till he is holier than a monk.

Jenny                    No stop. *[They continue]* Stop. It's time to eat. Some more.

Christian                Eat? Jenny, all you ever do is eat. *[He attacks Jonas who again strikes him, Christian cries out in pain]*

Jenny                    Jonas! I'm not going to watch this- it's stupid. I'm going for a walk.

Jonas                    Jenny?

Jenny                    Alone.

*Exit Jenny- Jonas turns to watch her go and Christian leaps on his back.*

Christian            Idiot. [*Jonas tries to get him off- but he hangs on for dear life. Eventually they collapse in a heap, laughing.*] Ah Jonas-all that fighting's made me hungry.

Jonas                Me too.

Christian            Poor Jenny, takes everything so seriously. Especially eating. One day she'll be as round as the moon.

Jonas                Her early years were hungry ones I suppose- and now she will make amends. [*They eat as friends*]

Christian            Why didn't you fight like that at school?

Jonas                [*Shrugs*] I could have hurt someone.

Christian            But the bullies would have let you alone- idiot. What are you going to do, Jonas, now the world is yours?

Jonas                I haven't thought much, beyond today. Of course, I'll make my fortune-and stuff--And you?

Christian            My father has entered 'politics'. He wants me to follow in his footsteps.

Jonas                Still-it is good to have a path to follow, and someone to be sure of. There's only one person in the world I am sure of.

Christian            Oh?

Jonas                Sometimes I feel her name must be scratched on my forehead- for I think of her constantly.

Christian            I don't know who you mean.

Jonas                Yes you do. I've known Jenny since I was six-and that makes it difficult to say what I--. Besides you know what a clod I am with words.

Christian            What is it you want to say?

Jonas                    Everything- and one thing, and I need to tell her because it's just, like, burning me up inside. And every time I try to tell her I start mumbling and stumbling and I become --

Christian                An idiot.

Jonas                    Yes.

Christian                But what is it- you want to say?

Jonas                    That I love her. That I always have and whatever happens in our lives, I always will- love her. But when it comes to saying it- to her- I start mumbling and stumbling. But you Christian have always been so good with words- even French ones, and I thought- perhaps...

Christian                What?

Jonas                    You could tell her. Tell her my words as clearly, as plainly as I told you. Tell her that I love her.

Christian                I'm to play the role of the 'messenger' in your great romance?

Jonas                    No, no. 'Tis no romance-as such. I- I just want her to know- to understand because who knows where life will take us from this moment-and if I had not said what I-ah. Help me Christian. Please.

Christian                Alright, alright. So you go -hide- and if she calls your name don't, and I mean don't come rushing back. Stay hidden and I'll call you when it's done.

Jonas                    Thank you Christian. But be mindful of my words- exact words-

Christian                Yes, yes. Go go.

**PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT**