

# ACT I

## 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 in the bar of your venue (recommended if possible).*

*SOUND CUE: Music fades slowly during following.*

**WORDSMITH:** 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?

**WORDSMITH:** Frogs?

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

**WORDSMITH:** 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.

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

- BARDMAN:** Dragon?
- WORDSMITH:** *(Getting nervous)* No... no... The pirate teddy bear?
- BARDMAN:** Who fell in love with a mermaid?
- WORDSMITH:** No, no that's wrong. It was a ... a unicorn!
- BARDMAN:** Stop! *(Consulting a notebook)* Chester Ulysses Wordsmith you say?
- WORDSMITH:** *(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.
- WORDSMITH:** *(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.
- WORDSMITH:** *(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.
- WORDSMITH:** 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)*
- WORDSMITH:** Ah.
- BARDMAN:** Then someone – *(accusingly)* a rogue storyteller we think – came along and changed it to Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!
- WORDSMITH:** 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!
- WORDSMITH:** 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?
- WORDSMITH:** 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?
- WORDSMITH:** (*Evasively*) I thought they probably were.
- BARDMAN:** But you couldn't tell could you?
- WORDSMITH:** Not exactly or precisely, no.
- BARDMAN:** I wonder why that was.
- WORDSMITH:** 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?
- WORDSMITH:** 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.
- WORDSMITH:** 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!

**WORDSMITH:** 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.

**WORDSMITH:** I could tell another story...

**BARDMAN:** No!

**WORDSMITH:** But...

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

**WORDSMITH:** In?

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

**WORDSMITH:** 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.

**WORDSMITH:** 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.

**WORDSMITH:** *(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.*