

THE CRONE OF CROPLEY

By Matt Buchanan

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CHARACTERS
(In Order of Appearance)

The Crone of Cropley—a mysterious, poor old woman

The Mayor of Cropley

Bert Chandler—a dairyman

Mrs. Figg—a widow who keeps hens

John Hadley—a ten-year-old boy

Mary Butler—a twelve-year-old girl

Arthur Hadley—John's fifteen-year-old brother

Bob Shropshire—a farmer

Alice Marley—a baker

Fred Hanson—a miller

Amelia Hadley—mother of John and Arthur, owner of a small duck pond

Constance Butler, Mary's mother, an innkeeper

Townspeople (if desired)

THE CRONE OF CROPLEY

A One-Act Comedy For Young Audiences

by

Matt Buchanan

SCENE ONE

At Rise: The Cropley town square. Shops, thatch-roofed houses, a pillory, etc. A communal well sits down center. Everything has a slightly dilapidated appearance. The MAYOR's house is center stage. All is quiet. It is early morning, and no one is about. After a moment of complete peace, the CRONE OF CROPLEY enters. SHE is a very old and feeble woman, dressed almost in rags. SHE carries a very shabby, nearly empty burlap bag. SHE hobbles across the stage, poking into corners with her walking stick but finding nothing, and exits. After another moment's silence, the door to the MAYOR's house opens slowly and the MAYOR himself peers out, as if to check if the "coast is clear." Seeing no one, HE ventures forth into the square. HE is dressed prosperously, as befits one of exalted rank, but even HE looks slightly shopworn. HE stands in the square and inhales a breath of morning with an air of self-satisfaction. It doesn't last long. From either side of the stage come two agitated TOWNERS. THEY are BERT CHANDLER and MRS. ELEANOR FIGG. BERT is a young, strapping dairyman in his working clothes. MRS. FIGG is a prosperous widow who keeps hens. SHE is dressed for Market Day, and carries a cat in a basket. About both of them hangs the same shabbiness that seems to pervade everything in this town. THEY are both agitated.

BERT: Me Lord Mayor! Me Lord Mayor! A word with you, me lord!

MRS. FIGG: (*Practically simultaneously*) Mister Mayor! I need to speak with you right away! Mayor!

(*The MAYOR considers retreating to his house but it is too late—THEY are upon him.*)

BERT: Me Lord Mayor, I wanna talk to you about my milk cows. They've almost stopped givin' milk!

MRS. FIGG: Ladies first! Mister Mayor, about my hens. Why, last week they laid only seven eggs among them! Seven! What am I to take to market? If this keeps up, I'll have to eat one of the hens, and then what? Soon I'll have none!

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MAYOR: Well, I'm truly sorry, Widow Figg, but I'm not sure what you want me to do about it. Just what is wrong with your hens, that they won't lay?

MRS. FIGG: (*Offended*) *Wrong?! Nothing's wrong* with them. The finest laying hens in all of Cropley—in all of England, maybe. Nothing's *wrong* with them. They don't lay because they don't eat. I have no more corn to give them. You can't expect a laying hen to lay eggs without corn to eat! It's not reasonable!

BERT: That's just what I complain of! My cows are the finest milking cows in three counties, but they won't give milk, and for why? Because I have no corn to feed them. How can they give milk with no corn to eat? *And* no water to drink! I ask you!

MRS. FIGG: I'll tell you what it is—this town is unlucky. That's what it is. Cropley is an unlucky town!

MAYOR: Er—I hardly think—

MRS. FIGG: And that's your responsibility! Are you the Mayor or aren't you?

MAYOR: Er—

MRS. FIGG: Is it or is it not your responsibility to make things work around here?

BERT: That's right! You're the Mayor around here, not us! If this town's cursed, it's up to you to do somethink.

MAYOR: Well, now, I'm not sure the town is cursed—

MRS. FIGG: What else would you call it? I'm sure I haven't done anything wrong. I've never cheated anyone, or lied, or stolen. Why should my hens starve?

BERT: Or my cows, neither!

MRS. FIGG: And what about the rats? You can't say *they're* not a curse! Why, even if I had any corn, my hens would never get it—the rats would eat it first! There are so many, soon they'll be eating my hens!

MAYOR: Well, perhaps a cat—

MRS. FIGG: Don't talk to me about cats! Cats I had—a dozen or more. But they all ran away. And why? Because I had no milk to give them. This is the only one I have left (*indicating the cat in her basket*) and she's got no teeth. She couldn't catch a cold, let alone a rat. How do you expect me to keep cats if I've got no milk to give 'em?

MAYOR: (To Bert.) Well—er—perhaps you—

BERT: What, give 'er some o' my milk! I can just see myself! Why, I'm as honest a businessman as anyone, but you don't catch me giving nobody somethink for nothink. Besides, I've barely enough for myself.

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MRS. FIGG: I would give you some eggs, if cats came back and killed the rats and my hens started laying again.

BERT: Oh, now please! Come now! Lemme get this straight: you want me to give you some o' my precious milk—to *give* it to you—and you say that *mebbe, if*, you might *someday* pay me back with some eggs. Do I look like I was born yesterday?

MAYOR: (*Trying to avoid a scene.*) Yes, well it certainly is a problem. I can assure you I'll be looking carefully into the matter of this town curse. Yes sir, carefully into the matter.

MRS. FIGG: I should hope so. I will be leaving you now. Fancy—market day, and nothing to market! Humph!

BERT: I'll bid you good day, as well, me Lord Mayor—(*darkly*)—for *now*.

(*THEY exit in opposite directions. JOHN HADLEY and MARY BUTLER enter. JOHN is about ten and MARY about twelve. MARY carries a wounded bird in her apron. The bird may be a puppet of some kind, or indeed it may be simply pantomimed.*)

JOHN: Be careful, Mary!

MARY: I am!

JOHN: I think it's got a broken wing.

MARY: The poor thing! Poor little bird!

JOHN: Hurry—put it down! (*THEY sit on the ground with the bird between them. It flops helplessly.*)

MARY: (*Almost in tears.*) Oh, the poor, poor thing!

JOHN: Its wing is broken, I think. And its neck, too. It can't survive.

MARY: But it has to.

JOHN: Mary! It can't. What good is a bird with a broken wing? It's kinder just to help it die.

MARY: Help it die! What do you mean?

JOHN: I don't know! Do you think I know? But it's suffering—you can see that.

MARY: It's in pain—oh, the poor thing!

JOHN: My brother will know what to do. My brother knows most everything.

MARY: He's kind of cute, too.

JOHN: (*Somewhat miffed.*) Well, I wouldn't know about that. But he's sure to know what to do.

MARY: Let's go find him. (*To the bird*) You wait right here, and don't worry. We'll bring help.

JOHN: I bet he says we should help it die. Put it out of its misery.

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(THEY lay the bird carefully on the ground under a tree and run off. After a moment the CRONE OF CROPLEY enters, walking painfully with her stick and still carrying her bag. SHE sees the bird.)

CRONE: Dear me, what have we here? And why aren't you flying about in the trees where you belong? *(Painfully SHE gets down on the ground and takes the bird into her lap, examining it carefully but gently.)* Nothing seems to be broken. Just stunned, I think. And frightened and hungry. Here— *(SHE takes a small parcel from her bag, unwraps it, and feeds the contents to the bird.)* This was supposed to be my supper, but you need it more than me. There, now. Just get your strength back. That's right. You'll be good as new in a minute. Maybe next time you'll pay better attention to the glass in people's windows, eh?

(JOHN and MARY return, accompanied by JOHN's older brother, ARTHUR HADLEY. ARTHUR is fifteen and strong for his age. HE carries a shovel, intending to use it to put the bird out of its misery. THEY stop when THEY see the CRONE, and hold back. SHE doesn't appear to notice them.)

MARY: Shhh! Look!

CRONE: There, now, that's better. Off you go now, my pretty thing.

(And to the wonderment of the three young people, the bird flies off. The CRONE gets painfully to her feet and shuffles off stage, perhaps nodding to the youngsters as SHE passes. THEY watch her go in silence. Finally, MARY speaks.)

MARY: Did you see that?

JOHN: It just flew away!

MARY: It can't have! Its neck was broken!

JOHN: You saw it! So did Arthur!

ARTHUR: Now, look here—are you sure its neck was broken?

MARY: It couldn't fly! I'm sure it couldn't!

JOHN: She made it better! She did! And we saw it.

MARY: Oh, my lord! Do you suppose she's a witch?

JOHN: She must be!

MARY: A good witch, obviously.

JOHN: Wait'll we tell people!

MARY: A good witch, right in Cropley! Why, she'll be able to help with all kinds of problems!

ARTHUR: *(Seriously concerned)* Now, you both want to be careful with that kind of talk.

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JOHN: But Arthur, it must be true. We saw it with our own eyes!

ARTHUR: Well, now, maybe we did and maybe we didn't. I need to think more about this. But you young 'uns best keep it to yourself until I decide what's best to do.

JOHN: Us "young 'uns!" You're only fifteen yourself!

ARTHUR: And that's half again what you are—so that makes me the wiser. You'd best mind what I say.

MARY: Oh, get off it anyway, Johnny! You said yourself not half an hour since that Arthur knows most everything!

ARTHUR: Well, now, Miss Mary, not everything—but I knows more than what this little toad does, and that's a fact. *(To JOHN)* You just hold your tongue 'til I've had a chance to think more on this. With folks feeling the way they do in this town, nobody needs to be hearing the word "witch" unless you're very sure of your ground. Very sure indeed.

JOHN: I suppose you're right.

MARY: Of course he's right. Come on, Johnny—let's go. We're already late for school anyway.

JOHN: *(Resigned.)* Right-oh.

(JOHN and MARY exit. ARTHUR watches them go, still with a concerned look on his face. Then HE shakes his head, takes his shovel, and exits. After a moment the MAYOR enters, worried and talking to himself.)

MAYOR: A curse! What nonsense! I don't know what they expect me to do anyway. I mean, I can't make chickens lay eggs, can I?

(Enter variously BOB SHROPSHIRE, ALICE MARLEY and FRED HANSON. BOB is a farmer in his working clothes, ALICE a baker in her apron, and FRED a miller, also in an apron, but this one of leather. Like everyone in Cropley THEY look a little shopworn, and ALL three are agitated. As before, the MAYOR contemplates retreat but finds his way blocked on every side.)

BOB: Your honor--

ALICE: Mr. Mayor, sir---

FRED: Mayor, my good man--

MAYOR: For the love of mike, one at a time!

BOB: Look 'ere, your honor—what are you goun' ter do about this 'ere curse?

ALICE: It's terrible, Mr. Mayor! Just terrible!

FRED: It's your duty to stop this sorcery!

MAYOR: Curses! Sorcery! That's all so much nonsense!

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FRED: No, it jolly well isn't nonsense! Look at my mill!

ALICE: And look at my bakery!

BOB: Me crops is dyin' on the ground!

ALICE: I've got nothing to bake!

FRED: And I've got nothing to grind up in my mill!

BOB: Yer can't say Cropley ain't cursed!

MAYOR: Now, I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation—

(Enter AMELIA HADLEY and CONSTANCE BUTLER. Both are hard working mothers dressed in poor but neat attire. AMELIA keeps ducks and CONSTANCE runs a small inn. THEY may be accompanied by a few additional TOWNSPEOPLE.)

AMELIA: Mayor! I need a word with you!

CONSTANCE: I need a word with you!

MAYOR: *(Growing increasingly flustered.)* Ladies—

CONSTANCE: How am I supposed to feed my customers with this curse on? My inn is losing money every day!

MAYOR: There isn't any—

AMELIA: My Arthur and my John are growing boys! What are they supposed to eat? Never mind my ducks!

MAYOR: I don't—

CONSTANCE: I haven't had bread on my table in almost a week! My Mary is skin and bones! My little Huxley hasn't had milk in days! And as for eggs—

AMELIA: Please! Forget eggs! It's the curse, I tell you!

MAYOR: *(With the first vestige of authority we have yet seen)* Wait, wait, wait!

(EVERYONE stops and looks at him in mild surprise.)

We're getting terribly muddled. There has to be a logical explanation for all of this if we can just find it out.

BOB: Sure there's a logical argument! The town's cursed!

ALICE: It's so obvious!

MAYOR: Yes, yes, all right, if you insist, have it your way, but *why*?

FRED: How do we know?

BOB: *(Simltaneously)* I dunno, do I?

MAYOR: Let's think this thing out. You two—*(indicating AMELIA and CONSTANCE)* what exactly is your complaint?

CONSTANCE: We've got no bread to feed our children... my customers.

AMELIA: Because *she (indicating ALICE)* won't sell us any.

CONSTANCE: She says she hasn't got any.

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ALICE: I haven't! How can I make bread without flour? Not to mention eggs and milk. I've barely got enough bread to feed myself!

MAYOR: And *why* haven't you got any flour?

ALICE: (*Indicating FRED*) Ask him!

FRED: It's no good blaming me! Can I make flour with no grain?
(*Looking meaningfully at BOB*) No, I cannot!

BOB: 'Ere—don't go looking at me like that, Fred Hanson! 'Ow can I grow anythink with no water? It ain't rained in a donkey's age. I can barely grow enough corn and grain for myself.

MAYOR: Er--the well.

FRED: (*Disgusted.*) Pah. That dried up a week ago Tuesday.

ALICE: We've been carrying water from the well in Dibley, but that'll probably dry up soon too.

CONSTANCE: Amelia Hadley (*looking at her*) has a pond. *That* hasn't dried up.

AMELIA: Oh, no! I'm not having Bob Shropshire nor any other smelly farmer draining my duck pond! What would happen to my ducks?

BOB: Don't matter anyhow. 'Ow would I get the water to me crops? Magic?

FRED: Magic is what we need, if you ask me.

MAYOR: (*Horried*) What?

FRED: How else do you break a curse?

MAYOR: (*Exasperated.*) There isn't any—never mind. Look, I'll think about all this, I promise. But now I'm going in my house and having my lunch.

(*The MAYOR exits into his house. The OTHERS disperse, some muttering as THEY go.*)

BOB: It's all right for some. 'E can eat.

ALICE: Denial, that's what it is. He's in denial.

CONSTANCE: Fancy sitting there eating his lunch on his silver tablecloth...

AMELIA: Who ever heard of a silver tablecloth?

CONSTANCE: ... while the town is cursed!

(*And the stage is empty. After a moment the CRONE enters and crosses the stage as at the opening, still looking for scraps and failing to find any. When SHE is gone, JOHN and MARY enter, carrying heavy pails of water.*)

JOHN: I'm so tired of carrying water.

MARY: Everybody is, John, but what can we do? The well's dried up.

JOHN: Do you think Cropley really is cursed?

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MARY: I don't know if I believe in curses.

JOHN: Well, something's wrong, that's for sure.

(Enter CONSTANCE, irritated.)

CONSTANCE: Hurry up, Mary! I need that water! Oh, hello, John.

JOHN: 'Lo, Misses Butler.

MARY: John's helping me bring the water.

CONSTANCE: *(To JOHN)* Well, that's very nice of you, dear. Of course, if that mother of yours would just let us have some from her precious duck pond--

MARY: Mother! It's not John's fault!

CONSTANCE: I know. I'm sorry. It's just this curse. Everyone's all out of temper.

JOHN: Do you believe in the curse too, Misses Hadley?

CONSTANCE: Right now I believe I need that water. *(To MARY)* Your baby brother hasn't had a bath in a month of Sundays. How you manage to take so long is beyond me.

MARY: I'm sick of carrying water, Mother! Who cares if stupid Huxley is dirty?

CONSTANCE: You just watch your mouth, young lady! Just for that, you can take little Huxley for his afternoon walk!

MARY: But Mother!

CONSTANCE: Not another word. Bring that water home this instant, and then you can take him out. Now!

(CONSTANCE sweeps out. MARY looks apologetically at JOHN.)

MARY: I guess I'd better go. Let me take that. *(Taking bucket.)* See you.

JOHN: See you.

(MARY exits, leaving JOHN alone on the stage. After a moment the CRONE enters slowly. Seeing her, JOHN starts.)

JOHN: The witch!

(JOHN hastily hides behind something, watching her. The CRONE moves to the well down center and lowers the bucket carefully into it. The bucket comes up empty a few moments later.)

CRONE: Hum. Empty. Dried up, is it? I wonder *(peers into the well for a moment.)* I see. Well now. *(SHE rummages in her burlap bag and comes up with a battered tin cup. SHE undoes the knot that holds*

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the bucket to the well rope and replaces the bucket with the tin cup. SHE lowers it carefully into the well, peering down to see it go. In a moment SHE pulls the cup back up and it contains a single drink of water.) That's better. (SHE carefully detaches the cup and drinks deeply. Then SHE re-attaches the bucket and shuffles off.)

(JOHN comes out of hiding and stares after her.)

JOHN: Crikey!

(HE runs after her. After a moment MARY enters from one side of the stage and ARTHUR from the other. MARY pushes a baby carriage from which can be heard fretful cries and complaints from an unseen baby.)

ARTHUR: Oh, hullo, Mary.

MARY: *(A little shy.)* Hello, Arthur. Just taking stupid Huxley for his walk.

ARTHUR: *(Looking into the carriage.)* Grumpy little cuss, ain't he?

MARY: It's his colic. He doesn't get enough milk, and it makes him cranky. Oh, be quiet, Huxley, do!

(The BABY cries louder.)

ARTHUR: That was effective.

MARY: There's never anything anyone can do when he gets like this. Hush, Huxley!

(The BABY cries even louder. The MAYOR sticks his head out of his door.)

MAYOR: Young woman, can't you control that baby? How can I think with that infernal noise?

MARY: I'm sorry, your honor!

MAYOR: As well you should be! This town is under a curse, in case you didn't know. I've got important thinking to do in here!

(HE slams his door. The BABY continues to wail. Unseen by the children, the CRONE slowly awakens and slowly crosses to them.)

MARY: Oh, what am I going to do? Huxley! Huxley, do shut up!

ARTHUR: That ain't the way of it, Mary. Try stroking him.

MARY: *(Irritated, forgetting her shyness)* You stroke him! I've stroked and coddled and tickled and rocked. Nothing works. It'd take witchcraft to get him to quiet down now.

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(The CRONE has arrived at the side of the baby carriage. Still unseen by the children, SHE begins to sing a lullabye. NOTE: This could be a very simple, even improvised lullabye, but if the actress happens to be a singer, this is a chance to showcase her voice. MARY and ARTHUR jump when THEY hear her sing, but the BABY almost instantly shows signs of quieting down, and by the time the CRONE finishes her song, HE is totally quiet. MARY and ARTHUR stand amazed.)

CRONE: There now. He's a good little boy, really. *(To MARY)* He'll sleep now, I reckon.

MARY: That was amazing! How can I thank you?

CRONE: Oh, I don't want anything. *(Pats her arm.)* You take good care of that little angel, now. Goodbye.

(The CRONE moves slowly and painfully off, with MARY and ARTHUR watching. JOHN runs on.)

JOHN: Mary! Mary, you won't believe what happened!

MARY: Neither will you!

JOHN: That old woman! I think she really is a witch!

MARY: I know! You should have seen what she did to Huxley! Look at him sleep!

JOHN: That's nothing! Wait'til I tell you what I saw her do! It proves she's a good witch! She had this magic cup, see, and she—

ARTHUR: Now hang on, the both of you. I said it before and I'll say it again. You want to be careful what you say about witchcraft in this town these days. Folks ain't stable.

MARY: But, Arthur, you saw what she did! Who else but a witch could do that?

ARTHUR: I ain't saying you're right and I ain't saying you're wrong. But you just be careful who you say "witch" around. That's all I'm saying. Maybe you'd best get that little tyke home before he starts in again.

MARY: Oh, all right. But I don't know why you have to be such an old stick-in-the mud. Come on, Huxley. *(pushes the carriage off)*

ARTHUR: *(To JOHN)* And you'd best come with me, Johnny. Ma wants the fence whitewashed, and I ain't doing it by myself. Come on.

(THEY exit. After a moment MRS. FIGG stalks across the stage, still carrying her cat, and begins pounding on the MAYOR's door. SHE is followed, in no particular order, by BERT CHANDLER, BOB SHROPSHIRE, ALICE MARLEY, FRED HANSON, AMELIA HADLEY, CONSTANCE BUTLER, and as many additional TOWNSPEOPLE as desired, all in a tizzy.)

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MRS. FIGG: Come on out! We know you're in there, Mister Mayor!

You've got to talk to us! We're your constituents!

BERT: Come on, me Lord! You gotta deal with this here curse!

ALICE: It's no good hiding in there, Your Honor!

(The door opens hesitantly and the MAYOR steps out, in some trepidation.)

MAYOR: All right! All right! I'm here. Now, everyone just calm down!

FRED: It's all well and good to say "calm down." What are we going to do?

MRS. FIGG: This town is cursed, and you know it!

BOB: It's your job t' take care a things! You're the Mayor!

MAYOR: *(Suddenly showing a little spirit)* You want the job? It's yours whenever you say! How am I supposed to know anything about curses? If there even is a curse.

BOB: Now hold on. I ain't said I wanted the job. I'm just saying, what are we gonna do?

(ARTHUR enters, unnoticed by the OTHERS.)

BERT: Me cows've stopped giving milk! I got no corn to feed 'em and no water—how're they gonna give any milk?

MRS. FIGG: My hens have stopped laying! They've got no grain to eat, so they can't lay eggs!

BOB: Me crops is dyin' in the fields! How can I grow crops without water?

ALICE: How can I bake bread with no flour? And no eggs?

FRED: My mill is just sitting idle. How can I make flour with no grain to grind? I ask you!

AMELIA: I've got nothing to feed my family! There's no bread! Let alone any to feed my ducks!

CONSTANCE: And what about my family? My little Huxley's got no milk!

MRS. FIGG: If I've got no eggs to sell, how can I make my living?

ALICE: If I can't bake bread, how can I make my living?

BERT: And how can I, if I got no milk to sell?

FRED: And no flour to sell?

BOB: And no crops to take to market neither!

AMELIA: And no ducks!

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(Suddenly EVERYONE is talking at once, each demanding that the MAYOR do something for him or her. When ARTHUR speaks up, EVERYONE stares at him.)

ARTHUR: Why doesn't everybody cooperate?

MAYOR: What?

CONSTANCE: Cooperate?

BOB: *(Suspiciously)* Cooperate how?

ARTHUR: Well, I just thought—look: *(to BERT)* I know you ain't got much milk, but if you gave some to Ms. Marley, maybe she could bake some bread.

BERT: *Give* her some milk? Just *give* it to her? Get a grip! I hardly got enough for meself!

ARTHUR: *(to MRS. FIGG)* and you could give her some eggs.

MRS. FIGG: Is it likely that I'd just *give away* my eggs?

ARTHUR: *(to FRED)* and you could give her a little flour.

FRED: You're crazy!

ARTHUR: *(urgently)* and maybe Mr. Shropshire could give you some grain to make the flour—and give some to Mrs. Figg for her hens and some corn to Mr. Chandler for his cows—

BOB: I don't just give away me crops! How does a farmer make a living if 'e does that?

ARTHUR: *(to AMELIA)* and, ma—do those ducks really need all that water? What if you gave some to Mr. Shropshire for his crops and some to Mr. Chandler?

AMELIA: You want me to drain my pond? How can I make my living without my duckpond?

ARTHUR: Not drain it all—just some of it!

MAYOR: I personally think the young man has an idea—

FRED: I makes no sense! No business sense at all! No businessman-

MRS. FIGG: Nor no businesswoman—

FRED: No one gives it away for nothing!

MRS. FIGG: The nerve of you, you young scalliwag!

AMELIA: Now, you lay off my Arthur!

MRS. FIGG: The very idea!

BERT: You just don't know what you're talkin' about, you young 'un!

ALICE: Cooperate indeed! Pah!

(JOHN and MARY enter, unnoticed by the OTHERS. JOHN carries a paintbrush.)

MAYOR: All right! All right! So that idea's no good. Anyone else got one?

FRED: I still say what we need is magic.

MAYOR: Not that again!

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FRED: I mean, it stands to reason! If this town is cursed—

MAYOR: Which I still doubt—

FRED: How do you fight magic? You fight magic with magic!

MRS. FIGG: That makes sense!

ALICE: Yes! Fight magic with magic! Of course!

BERT: Now we're starting to talk sense!

BOB: Fight magic with magic!

AMELIA: It's so obvious!

(Again, EVERYONE is talking at once, ALL clamoring about "fighting magic with magic." The MAYOR throws up his hands as if to ward off the assault. After a moment, HE pulls himself together enough to shout them down.)

MAYOR: All right! Fine! Fight magic with magic. All right! There's just one problem.

(EVERYONE looks at one another, perplexed. It seemed such a good idea—what could be wrong with it? The MAYOR continues.)

We don't know any magic.

(Several PEOPLE open their mouths to object, then shut them again when THEY realize that HE has a point. Long pause. Finally:)

BERT: Well, that's true.

MRS. FIGG: I certainly don't know any magic.

ALICE: Nor do I. Obviously.

AMELIA: I'm no witch.

BOB: And I ain't no warlock, neither.

MAYOR: *(Grimly triumphant)* And I don't know any witches. Do any of you?

FRED: Well, I certainly don't.

MRS. FIGG: Not the kind of folks I associate with, naturally.

CONSTANCE: The very idea!

ALICE: Well, obviously!

MAYOR: So I don't think this idea is going to get us anywhere, do you?

(EVERYONE sort of deflates in resignation, mumbling to themselves—things like, "too bad—it seemed like such a good idea" and "Obviously won't work." When JOHN speaks up, everyone is surprised to see him and MARY.)

JOHN: We might know one.

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(Long pause as EVERYONE stares at him.)

MARY: Well, not so much know her really.

JOHN: But we know *of* her.

MAYOR: What are you talking about? Know who?

MARY: A witch. At least, we think she might be a witch.

JOHN: A *good* witch.

MARY: Maybe she can help us.

ARTHUR: Now, don't be getting' all carried away, you two. You don't know she's a witch.

JOHN: But we've *seen* her do magic! And so have you, Arthur!

ARTHUR: Now, that may be and it may not be, but—

MARY: Oh, come *on*, Arthur! You saw her heal that wounded bird. Its neck was broken, and she healed it.

JOHN: And that's not all! She got water out of the well.

MAYOR: What, our well? That's dried up.

JOHN: Exactly! But she had this magic cup, and she lowered it into the well and it came up full of water! She's magic, I tell you!

MARY: And she made my little brother stop crying. Nobody can do that!
(To CONSTANCE) You know that, Ma!

CONSTANCE: That's true. Nobody can quiet my little Huxley when he's got the colic.

MARY: She's a good witch for sure!

MAYOR: Just the same—

MRS. FIGG: Wait a minute, Mayor. Maybe these two young 'uns have got something here. A good witch might be able to help us.

BERT: She might could break the curse!

FRED: It's worth a try.

ALICE: What have we got to lose?

BOB: It just might work!

MAYOR: Yes, well—who is this alleged good witch, then?

CONSTANCE: Not so much of that "alleged," *Mister* Mayor. My Mary wouldn't lie!

MARY: Haven't any of you seen that old woman?

MAYOR: What old woman?

MARY: She's been hanging around for weeks. I don't think she lives anywhere.

JOHN: She comes around looking for leftover food and stuff.

ALICE: I've seen her! She was rooting through my dustbins just the other day. Not that she found anything.

FRED: That old crone? How can she be a witch?

MARY: But we *saw* her!

JOHN: We both did!

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MARY: She's definitely got magical powers.

BOB: But will she help us?

(EVERYONE stops to ponder this question, and to stare at BOB, who blushes, but eventually continues.)

Mean to say—*why* should she help us?

ALICE: He's got a point. What have we ever done for her?

BERT: Nobody don't do nothink for nobody for nothink. *(HE pauses to consider what HE's just said.)* Leastwise, I think that's what I mean.

MAYOR: It's a vexing problem, to be sure.

AMELIA: So we'll just have to do something for her!

ALICE: Like what?

AMELIA: Well, isn't it obvious? If this old crone goes around rooting through dustbins for leftovers, she's probably hungry.

MRS. FIGG: We'll feed her! I'll bring her some eggs!

CONSTANCE: And if she needs a place to stay, I can put her up in my inn!

ALICE; I'll bake her some nice bread!

BOB: We'll treat 'er like the ruddy queen! She'll have to help us then!

(To JOHN and MARY) Do you young 'uns know where to find this old crone?

JOHN; I think so.

MARY: We can look, anyway. *(Blushing)* And Arthur can help.

JOHN: Come on!

(The THREE YOUNG PEOPLE run off. The MAYOR claps his hands together in satisfaction.)

MAYOR: Very well, then. That's settled. We'll put this old crone up like royalty, and then when she's all well fed and comfortable, we'll ask her to see what she can do about this curse thingy. Agreed?

EVERYONE: Agreed! *(etc.)*

MRS. FIGG: There's just one little thing.

(EVERYONE looks at her.)

I said I'd give her some eggs, but I don't really have any. My hens are so starved they've stopped laying.

BOB: Oh, that's all right. I can give you some grain for them. They'll be fattened up and ready to lay in no time.

MAYOR: *(Now eager to have the thing over and finished)* Good then, that's settled. Now—

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ALICE: Now that you mention it, I can't very well bake her any bread without eggs and milk and flour.

BERT: I can give you some milk—If Bob'll (*nodding at BOB*) let me have some corn fer my cows an' Mistress Amelia (*nodding at AMELIA*) will give 'em a little water.

BOB: No problem.

FRED: And can I have some grain as well? Then I can grind some flour for (*nodding*) Mistress Alice's baking.

BOB: I suppose so. Though, come t' think on it, I don't know as I'll be able to grow much corn nor much grain without some water fer my fields.

AMELIA: Oh, don't worry about that—you can come get as much as you need from my duck pond.

FRED: You can use my wagon to carry the barrels.

CONSTANCE: And I said I'd put her up in my inn, but what am I going to feed her? She can't live on eggs and bread—that's only for breakfast, after all.

AMELIA: I can let you have a nice fat duck.

BOB: And I'll bring you some lovely termatos and some runner beans.

MAYOR: Excellent. So we've got a plan, then. We'd better all get to work. All this stuff isn't going to happen overnight, you know. Now, then—

(MARY, JOHN and ARTHUR enter, leading between them the CRONE OF CROPLEY, looking a little dazed.)

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