

MOTHER GOOSED

By

Jason Pizzarello

For Perusal Purposes Only

Cast of Characters

In order of appearance

JIM	COP
FRANK	STEVE
BETH	PETER PIPER
CAT	NURSE # 1
PHIL	NURSE # 2
NANCY	DOCTOR STERGEN -
JACK	SPERGEN
BILL	JUDY
HUMPTY DUMPTY	OLD WOMAN /
SOLDIER #1	MOTHER GOOSE
SOLDIER #2	CHILD/ JEFFERY
SOLDIER #3	JACK
BOSS	JILL
ANNE	GIANT CAT
SPIDER MAMA	WARDROBE PERSON
SPIDER PAPA	
MISS MUFFET	

Production Notes

Roles can be doubled up as many times as desired, with as little as 8 actors and as many as 30. However, the actors who play FRANK and BETH should not play other parts.

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(Lights up on a reporter, JIM LUKEWARM, who appears holding a microphone. He's "on the scene.")

JIM. Jim Lukewarm here, reporting live on the scene to bring you a story of triumph. A feat, against all odds. A story of one cow who wanted to jump over the moon so bad, she defied the laws of gravity. I stand in the very spot where, just a moment ago, in a final attempt to jump over the moon, the cow disappeared into the sky, and is now, I can only guess, heading through the stratosphere.

(We see two news anchors, BETH NUCKERPANTS and FRANK DONNELLY, at the news desk.)

BETH. How long would you say before the cow reaches the moon, Jim?

JIM. Great question, Judy.

BETH. It's Beth, Jim. Judy is an intern.

JIM. Right. It's hard to say exactly, Judy. I have an eye witness here.

(The CAT appears.)

JIM. A cat who seems only interested in playing the violin.

CAT. It's a fiddle, man.

JIM. Right, I'm now learning that it's a fiddle. Can you tell me what you saw?

CAT. Man, that cow loves to jump. Tryin' to jump over the moon and things up high.

JIM. Right. That is not helpful at all. *(To off-stage:)* Excuse me, plate. Plate! Or spoon. What can you tell me about the jumping cow? *(Back to the camera:)* Right, well, they just ran off. Camera shy, it seems, of being seen together. Back to you in the studio.

(Back to the news desk.)

BETH. Fascinating stuff. Thanks for that special report, Jim. We'll have to check back in with you later to see where this story develops.

FRANK. Let me guess: the cow jumps over the moon.

BETH. Ha, ha, well we just don't know, Frank. We'll have to stay tuned to find out.

FRANK. Or now would be a great time to change the channel. Viewers, I don't know why you're watching. Why don't you get that Pop Tart you've been thinking about.

BETH. Um, Frank?...

FRANK. Trust me, you won't miss anything.

(BETH is in utter disbelief. She looks off-stage for help, then back at FRANK. She decides this must be a joke.)

BETH. Uh. Hu. Ha, ha. Very funny, very funny. You're such the merry prankster, Frank. On a serious note, we have plenty of exciting, ground breaking stories. Plus, later on, an exclusive interview with the little pig who stayed home. Why didn't he go the market like the first little pig? What does he do all day to keep busy? All that and more, coming up after this quick commercial break from our sponsors.

(Off air. PHIL, the producer, runs up to the news desk.)

PHIL. What the heck was that, Frank!?!

FRANK. What the heck was what?

BETH. Change the channel? Go get a Pop Tart?

FRANK. The people should do what they want. And Pop Tarts are part of this complete breakfast.

PHIL. Have you lost your mind? Do you know what—

FRANK. I can only explain myself like this. I feel dead inside. There's nothing left. I'm a shell of a man.

PHIL. No, you're not. Well, I don't know, maybe you are. But that camera's coming on in five seconds and you better pretend like

you're a real man. A real newsman, got it? And we're back in four, three, two and — *(he points the last count)*.

(They're back on air.)

BETH. Welcome back, folks. You're living in Fairytaleland and this is your 7 o'clock news.

FRANK. This is *not* news! News is supposed to be *neeww*. That cow jumps over the moon everyday. And the cat plays the fiddle. And the little dog laughs. And the dish runs away with the spoon. Let me guess what else happens today. The mouse runs up the clock? Little Bo Peep loses her sheep again? Jack and Jill — oh, wait — is that today's *breaking* story? *(To the camera:)* They fall down the hill folks, okay? Because Jack and Jill are clumsy. They're clumsy kids that never grow up and always need more water from the well. Why are they so thirsty? I don't know. And I don't care. This is not reporting.

BETH. Frank isn't feeling very well this morning.

FRANK. Actually, you're right, I'm feeling kind of nauseous from all the monotony. Let me give you a piece of advice, Betty: no one knows where the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked are and no one ever will. Because nothing ever changes in Fairytaleland. *(Going closer to the camera:)* Ya hear that folks? This is your 7 o'clock news, I'm Frank Donnelly and nothing ever changes. *(Pause.)* Unless you want it to.

(PHIL approaches FRANK, and opens his mouth to say something.)

FRANK. You don't have to fire me, Phil — I quit.

(FRANK leaves. An awkward pause.)

BETH. Right. Well, that...is...unfortunate. *(Another awkward pause. Looking to PHIL:)* Commercial?...No? Can't we just go to static? *(PHIL motions to keep rolling.)* Right. *(Back to camera:)* Time to get a Pop Tart?

(PHIL frantically motions to go to commercial.)

BETH. We'll be right back.

(Off air.)

PHIL. Beth, get it together. (*To someone on the headset:*) Let's run the Jack and Candle story. (*Back to BETH:*) Beth, I'm serious, collect yourself. You look terrible. Don't we have a makeup person? (*Over the headset again:*) Yeah, yeah, roll it. Roll it!

(NANCY appears, as in the "footage.")

NANCY. Hi, I'm Nancy Silvershoes with a special report. Have you ever wondered how Jack is so nimble and quick? Eating out, working less? Just the opposite in fact.

(JACK appears running and jumps over a candle stick.)

NANCY. Incredible.

(NANCY approaches him as he's "cooling down.")

NANCY. I'm here with nimble Jack, who just jumped over the candle stick for the fourth time today. And without catching fire, mind you. Now I'd imagine you'd have to be in great shape to do this. You have to be rather quick, is that right?

JACK. That's right, I have to be pretty quick.

NANCY. Fascinating.

JACK. And nimble.

NANCY. I'd say. The good Lord knows I couldn't do it without catching fire. Why, I'd be a ball of flames!

JACK. And then, like, after you stopped burning, you'd be like this black crisp of charcoal.

NANCY. Indeed I would, Jack. Indeed I would. Now, let me ask you, because the people out there want to know, how do you stay so fit?

JACK. Well, I'm always running and jumping over the candlestick, you know, because I don't want to catch fire. Because this one time I did and it was pretty funny, because I was like "whoa, I'm on fire," but it was also really hot and that made me thirsty. Like *really* thirsty.

NANCY. That sounds terrible. Never want to be *too* thirsty. Best of luck to you, Jack.

(End of "footage.")

PHIL. (To BETH:) Back in five, four, three... (motions the last counts).

BETH. I apologize for the inappropriate behavior of my *former* co-anchor, Frank Donney, just before. I guess it's just me now. The one and only anchor of your 7 o'clock news. I'm Beth Nuckerpants. Perhaps we should move on to today's top stories. (She begins to get a message in her ear piece.) Excuse me, someone is speaking very loudly in my ear piece. (Listening:) Uh-huh...uh-huh. (Back to the camera:) Sorry about that. We have a special report to...report. An *actual* report. This is a first. I'm going now to Bill Hacker in the field with a late breaking story. Bill —

BILL. Thanks, Frank.

BETH. It's Beth, Bill. Frank —

BILL. What?

BETH. Do I sound like Frank?

BILL. Frank, you sound like Frank. What?

BETH. Nothing. Forget it. What do you have for us?

BILL. Thank you. I'm on the scene here at Humpty Dumpty's wall, and it's not the only wall here. An additional wall was built today. A wall of defiance was built, built by an egg.

BETH. As I understand it, Bill, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

BILL. Yes, under normal circumstances, one would think just that. But today, something snapped in Humpty's big oval head.

BETH. Can you try and find out what snapped, Bill?

BILL. Darn it, Frank, let me do my job!

BETH. Sorry, I —

BILL. I'm a real reporter, not like your co-anchor.

BETH. Are you talking about me?

BILL. Not you, Frank, Beth.

BETH. But I *am* Beth!

(HUMPTY DUMPTY *appears on the wall.*)

BILL. Humpty Dumpty is making an appearance. Humpty! Humpty!

HUMPTY. No questions, please.

BILL. But Humpty, tell me, why haven't you fallen from the wall?

HUMPTY. I said no questions.

BILL. But it's the people's right!

HUMPTY. Okay, okay. I haven't fallen from the wall because... because...I don't want to. And that's *my* right, isn't it?

BILL. But Humpty, why all of a sudden, have you decided not to fall from the wall? Why today?

HUMPTY. I met a man. An angel, I think. And the angel told me not to jump. He showed me what my life would have been like if I didn't exist. And I didn't like it. I didn't like it at all. Why, there wasn't even a wall here. And no one knew who Humpty Dumpty was and all the King's Horses and all King's Men were doing other stuff and —

BILL. And what was this angel's name, Humpty?

HUMPTY. His name? His name was Frank.

BILL. An angel named Frank?

HUMPTY. He said he used to be a newsman before he saw the light and realized that we can be anything we want to be. And he decided he didn't want to be a newsman anymore, just like I decided I don't want to fall off this wall.

BILL. There you have it folks. An angel named Frank. Strange days indeed. Back to you in the newsroom, Frank.

BETH. It's not Frank, Bill. It's Beth! Frank quit!

BILL. Frank quit?! When? Just now?

BETH. No, before. Call me crazy, but the angel named Frank, that Humpty Dumpty was talking about, might just be *our* Frank.

BILL. Don't be crazy. Frank the angel, Humpty was talking about, used to be a newsman, and the Frank we know used to—wait a minute, Ginny, I might be on to something. Call me crazy, but the angel named Frank, might just be *our* Frank.

BETH. Do you think?

BILL. I don't know. Hold on. We have a scene mounting over here. All the King's Men have shown up and they are NOT happy.

(Back to the wall.)

HUMPTY. Whoa, whoa, whoa. I don't think so.

SOLDIER #1. C'mon, jump already!

SOLDIER #2. Yeah, jump, ya dumb egg!

SOLDIER #3. We have a job to do.

BILL. Tensions are increasing between the King's Men and Humpty Dumpty, as Dumpty defiantly sits upon the wall and the Men continue taunting him.

HUMPTY. No, I'm not doing it. I refuse. Consider this a sit-in.

SOLDIER #3. Well, that's great.

SOLDIER #2. What are we going to do, boss?

SOLDIER #1. Do we still get paid?

BOSS. We don't have a job to do, no one gets paid.

SOLDIER #1. Hey Egg, I've got mouths to feed!

SOLDIER #2. We'll figure out a way to put you back together again, we swear.

HUMPTY. Yeah right!

ALL SOLDIERS. *(Chanting:)* Jump! Jump! Jump!

HUMPTY. Jump? Jump? You mean plummet to my untimely death, is that what you mean? Crack my head open and let my insides spill out?

SOLDIER #1. Well, yeah.

BOSS. Know your role.

SOLDIER #2. Yeah, know your role, egg!

SOLDIER #3. “Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.” That’s who you are. If you don’t fall, who are you? What’s your place in the world?

HUMPTY. I don’t know, okay? I don’t who I am or where I belong. That’s the whole problem; I’m having an identity crisis up here. Who are you to judge anyway? You’re one of the King’s men. You probably don’t even have a name.

SOLDIER #3. *(Suddenly very sad:)* Oh...he’s right, I don’t.

BOSS. It’s okay, from now on instead of Soldier Number Three, we’ll call you Fredrick.

SOLDIER #3. Thank you, I’d like that.

SOLDIER #1. *(To the BOSS:)* Hey, I want a name, too.

SOLDIER #2. Me, too!

SOLDIER #1. I want to be called Gilbert!

BOSS. Alright, calm down, everyone will get names.

BETH. Sorry, Bill, I’m getting another story here on my end. I’ll have to check back in with you. I’m receiving a flood of reports. The phones are ringing off the hooks. Viewers, know that we *are* receiving your calls and we will respond as soon as possible. And please, if it’s an emergency, call the local police. We’re going to go to Anne Soggybottom with a special report. Anne —

ANNE. Thanks, Anne.

(BETH looks to PHIL for help. PHIL shrugs.)

ANNE. Disturbing news from the world. Where do you turn when disaster strikes? *(She takes a dramatic pause, as if waiting for an answer.)* Everyone knows Little Miss Muffet, how she sat on her tuffet, eating her curds and whey. A spider decides to join her, doesn’t mean any harm, doesn’t realize how easily Miss Muffet is frightened. Miss Muffet suffers from arachnophobia, but is that the spider’s fault? Did he deserve to die?

SPIDER MAMA. How dare you! How dare you say such a thing? My baby didn’t deserve to die!

ANNE. Are you a relative of the spider, ma'am?

SPIDER MAMA. I am that spider's Mama. *Was that spider's Mama. (She sobs and blows her nose. Very melodramatic.)* He was just a baby. He could barely spin a web. Oh, why?! Wilber, why?!

SPIDER PAPA. *(Holding MAMA:)* It's all right, all right.

ANNE. As I understand it, he was attempting to scare Little Miss Muffet. Did you know about this beforehand?

SPIDER PAPA. Now, hold on. He never laid a leg on anybody.

ANNE. Yes, but he did provoke her. Some might say Miss Muffet acted in self-defense.

SPIDER PAPA. The point is, spiders are going around getting killed because they're spiders. It's just not right. How did we get such a bad reputation?

SPIDER MAMA. Nobody cares about spiders. Nobody!

SPIDER PAPA. Now, if that was a butterfly that got squashed, everybody would be up in arms. A full investigation would be in effect. But nothing's going to even happen to that Muffet girl. A spider has to die, all so she can eat her nasty curds. What are curds anyway? I've never even heard of curds.

SPIDER MAMA. Curds is the devil's food.

SPIDER PAPA. I hope Little Miss Muffet gets the chair!

ANNE. Okay, thank you both for your time.

(SPIDER MAMA is comforted and taken away by SPIDER PAPA.)

ANNE. *(To the camera:)* As you can see, emotions are running high. Some are calling out for justice. I'd like to try and hear Miss Muffet's side of things. Little Miss Muffet —

(MISS MUFFET sits on her tuffet, in hand cuffs. A COP stands by her side.)

ANNE. Miss Muffet, why? Why the violence? Why didn't you just run away? Or call the exterminator?

MISS MUFFET. I've been running for a very long time. Maybe my whole life. And I would have today, if I didn't meet Frank. Frank, my knight in shinning armor.

ANNE. This Frank was a soldier of some kind? He was wearing protective armor?

MISS MUFFET. No, I just mean he saved me. He told me...he told me that I don't have to be afraid anymore. That I can stop running. At first I didn't believe it was possible. But Frank showed me the way. When that spider sat down, I saw the light and I used the light to find the strength that was always stored inside me. Frank calls it "the power within." And I brought my hand down upon that spider. Well, it was my shoe actually. But I squashed it. I squashed it good. I know because I heard a crunching sound. And as I was wiping my shoe on the grass, I felt that a great burden had been lifted. Now I can eat my curds and whey and know that the terror that had taken over my life is finally over. *(Beat.)* I am Miss Muffet and I am strong. Hear me roar.

(ANNE waits for it.)

MISS MUFFET. Rar.

(A COP enters and takes MISS MUFFET away.)

COP. Alright, let's go lady.

MISS MUFFET. But my tuffet.

COP. You're not gonna need that where you're going.

MISS MUFFET. At least let me finish my whey. Rar.

(They're gone.)

ANNE. One word: tragic. Back to you, Beth.

BETH. I'm sorry, what did you call me?

ANNE. Sorry, Anne. I don't know what I was thinking.

BETH. No, that's my name.

ANNE. I know, Anne.

BETH. No, that's your name.

ANNE. Don't you think I know that?

BETH. Okay, then, *Beth*, let me ask you a question. When you arrived on the scene was there any sign of Frank?

ANNE. Frank, the man that Miss —

BETH. We in the studio have come to believe that Frank, my former co-anchor —

ANNE. I know Frank.

BETH. Right, that Frank, after quitting, decided to take matters in to his own hands... Word has it that he's trying to start a rebel against Mother Goose and her beautiful rhymes. It's sick if you ask me. And Frank is a deranged and dangerous, man. When he's caught he should be put down like a rabies-infested dog. Or quartered.

ANNE. Quartered?

BETH. You know, with horses.

ANNE. That seems a little cruel don't you think?

BETH. Not in the least.

(PHIL *signals to go to commercial.*)

BETH. We'll be right back after this short commercial break. Stay tuned for the latest developments. (*Dramatic voice:*) When Nursery Rhymes Revolt!

(PHIL *storms on stage.*)

PHIL. What do you think you're doing, Beth? Have you lost it? I know they don't do it anymore, but you suggested Frank be quartered.

BETH. I'm not trained for this type of news. These are events, happening in real time, and I'm supposed to report on them as they happen!

PHIL. You *are* a news reporter, Beth.

BETH. I never signed up to think on my feet. This is a violation of my contract.

PHIL. Now listen, Frank's little mutiny is his feeble attempt to take the spotlight away from you. Well, I'm not going to let that happen. I'm not going to let Frank do this to you...or the news station...or Mother Goose!

BETH. (*Into the camera:*) If you're listening, Frank, you need to come back.

PHIL. We're on commercial break, Beth.

BETH. I know we are.

PHIL. Now, pull yourself together. You can get through this. You just have to focus. You're the only news anchor I have left. Which makes you lead anchor. Right now, you are the face of this news station. You are Beth Nuckerpants. Now say it.

BETH. (*Weakly:*) I am Beth Nuckerpants.

PHIL. Now say it again. I am Beth Nuckerpants.

BETH. (*A little stronger:*) I am Beth Nuckerpants.

PHIL. Better. Again.

BETH. (*Stronger:*) I am Beth Nuckerpants. And this is your 7 o'clock news.

PHIL. Now try singing it. (*Singing.*) I am Beth Nuckerpants...and this is your 7 o'clock news...

BETH. Phil, I—

PHIL. Sing with me!

PHIL and BETH. (*Singing:*) I am Beth Nuckerpants...and this is your 7 o'clock neeewwwss!

PHIL. Nice finish. Now we're going back on the air and you will report the news...as it happens. And back in five, four, three, and... (*He motions the last counts.*)

BETH. (*Still recovering:*) Well, I...welcome back...from commercial. Welcome back...to the news. Ah, yes, the news. I'm Beth Nuckerpants? (*Finally strong.*) I am Beth Nuckerpants. And this is your 7 o'clock news. Currently in a state of emergency the community of Fairytaleland has gone completely hay-wire. What we've come to

know as “world order” can be thrown out with the trash. Chaos. Mayhem. Confusion. Fear. But there’s no reason to panic. We’re live on the scene. *(Holding her ear piece:)* Steven, I understand you’re with Peter Piper. What do you have for us?

STEVEN. That’s right, lady, I’m here with the Peter Piper, or what’s left of him I should say. This is not a pretty scene.

BETH. What can you tell us?

STEVEN. I regret to report that Peter Piper has officially lost his mind.

(PETER PIPER is rocking back and forth while clutching a jar of pickles.)

PETER. *(Mumbling, almost incoherently, to himself:)* Picked a peck of pickled peppers. Pickled peppers, a peck did I pick. I picked, I picked. I know I picked a peck of pickled peppers. Peter Piper. Peter Piper picked. Good, Peter. Good picker Peter.

STEVEN. The proper authorities are on their way.

BETH. A sad day. Can you tell us what happened?

STEVEN. You may not believe this, but I was here when it happened —

BETH. Let me guess, it was Frank.

STEVEN. Yes! It was Frank. What is he doing? This is his fault. Peter was picking a peck of pickled peppers, going about business as usual, when Frank starts telling him that peppers don’t matter. Then, he said “Where’s the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?” which should have been a rhetorical question, but it hit a nerve deep down and Peter, well, he just lost it.

(An ambulance siren can be heard approaching.)

BETH. Sounds like Frank’s handy work. What is that sound?

STEVEN. That must be an ambulance siren. Someone must be on their way to the hospital.

BETH. Yes, from my understanding, that’s where ambulances go. But could it be on its way to you, for Peter?

STEVEN. I suppose it would be silly to rule anything out at this point. And yes, the sound does seem to be getting closer. Who knows.

(The ambulance siren arrives and two large nurses appear. One carries a straight jacket.)

STEVEN. Looks like the ambulance was coming this way after all. This is all just a little difficult to digest. Peter Piper, prized pickled pepper picker, respected by his peers, beloved by pickled pepper eaters world wide, praised by the local people. And now...

NURSE #1. There he is.

NURSE #2. Alright, pal, let's make this nice and easy.

(PETER continues to rock back and forth.)

PETER. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, a peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked? *(The answer comes to him:)* 23. 23? 23! 23!!!

NURSE #1. Alright, get the jacket.

STEVE. *(Getting close on the action:)* What's '23,' Peter? Is '23' a location?

PETER. 23 'P's! 23 'P's!

(PETER starts laughing maniacally.)

PETER. Peter — 1, Piper — 2, picked — 3, peck — 4, pickled — 5, peppers — 6

NURSE# 2. Tazer?

NURSE# 1. Tazer.

(STEVEN steps back. NURSE #2 hands a tazer to NURSE #1, who then "tazers" PETER. He flails to the ground and shakes a bit before becoming still. The NURSES drag him off.)

STEVEN. Wow. That was great T.V. Back to you, nurse.

BETH. I refuse to acknowledge that name, but you're right, that was great T.V. Thank you, Steven. I'm now joined by a Doctor Stergen-Spergen. I don't know if I'm pronouncing that correctly.

DOCTOR. Yah, correct. I is Stergen-Spergen from Luxenhosen. I have medical license to perform da sergeries. I frame certificate. (*He produces a framed certificate.*) You like?

BETH. Yes, that's very nice.

DOCTOR. Go, take.

BETH. No, that's alright, thank you.

DOCTOR. Take. Is copy. Is copy. Take.

BETH. (*Taking it.*) Alright then. Thank you for joining us on such short notice, Doctor. I realize you must be a very busy man.

DOCTOR. Yes, da people like da sergeries.

BETH. Yes, I understand they do. Can you tell us a little more about some sergeries you recently performed on a particular client? Or set of clients I should say. Three. Three blind mice.

DOCTOR. De blind mice is no blind no more!

BETH. Is that so? So let me get this straight, you were able to restore sight to the three blind mice. How is this possible?

DOCTOR. I am corrective eye surgery.

BETH. Yes, but how is that possible? They're mice.

DOCTOR. I use very small tools.

BETH. Uh-huh.

DOCTOR. I give tails, too. Prosthetic, yes? They come to me, the three mice. No sight. No tails. No nothing. They look not even mice. Just like little fur thing. And they say, Doctor Stergen Spergen, help us. First, we are blind. Then de farmer's wife chop off tails. Very sad. Very said. I say, okay mice, sit down, fill out papers, I be back. I go eat san-de-wich, I come back, I say "you have papers?" They say we give to nurse. But I don't have nurse. We laugh. We make joke together. I like them. So, I say "okay, don't worry about papers, I do sergeries now." I do sergeries, I send bill.

BETH. Fascinating.

DOCTOR. I am professional. I do skin care for you, yes?

BETH. No.

DOCTOR. You decide later. Any time.

BETH. Thank you for stopping by, Doctor.

DOCTOR. I wait outside.

BETH. Please don't.

DOCTOR. I be in your car.

(DOCTOR is gone. PHIL hands BETH a stack of papers.)

BETH. No word yet from Mother Goose. Let's go back out into the field. Judy, I understand you're with the Old Woman who lives in the shoe.

JUDY. That's right, Ms. Nuckerpants.

BETH. Wait, Judy?

JUDY. That's right. It's an unusual —

BETH. Judy the intern Judy?

JUDY. Well, yes. I have been enrolled in the internship program this semester.

BETH. That's great. *(Looking off stage:)* Phil, what did we run out of reporters? *(Back to the camera:)* I guess so. Judy our intern, ladies and gentlemen, is apparently suddenly qualified to handle a professional assignment.

JUDY. Please, Ms. Nuckerpants, give me a chance. I mean, I did take a journalism course last semester.

BETH. In that case, take it away.

JUDY. Thank you. Now, like I was saying, this is an unusual case here. The Old Woman in the Shoe, with so many children she didn't know what to do, is being harassed by none other than former co-anchor of the 7 o'clock news, Frank Donnely.

BETH. Excuse me, did you say Frank is there right now?

JUDY. We were able to catch the elusive Frank in the very act of transforming our cultural landscape. Frank Donnely, man of the people. Let's zoom in and see if we can get some sound.

(FRANK appears following the OLD WOMAN as she sweeps around the outside of her shoe. They're in mid-conversation.)

FRANK. You don't have to live like this anymore, is what I'm telling you. Cooped up like chicken in this shoe. You and your children can live a better life. This is your chance to finally break free of the confines of your rhyme.

OLD WOMAN. And what about Mother Goose, won't she be upset with us?

FRANK. Forget Mother Goose!

(She gasps.)

OLD WOMAN. *(Shouting off stage:)* Children, close your ears. That's blasphemy, young man, and I won't stand for it. No one goes around cursing the great Mother Goose, not around my shoe they don't.

FRANK. Alright, I'm sorry. All I'm saying is, you don't have to live in a shoe.

OLD WOMAN. There's nothing wrong with this shoe. The laces are still together. The tongue is in place. It doesn't smell inside. Come in and smell it. I keep it clean. And this old shoe could tell you stories, oh boy. Young man, this shoe has a soul. No pun intended... Okay, maybe slightly intended.

FRANK. A shoe is a shoe, it's not a house.

OLD WOMAN. This old woman may live in an old shoe with her old children and her old values, but I'll tell you something about this shoe. It's a shoe to you, but it's a home to us.

(A raggedy child approaches from the shoe. This is one of the OLD WOMAN's children.)

CHILD. Mommy, did the bad man come to take away our shoe?

OLD WOMAN. No, honey, he's going to do no such thing.

FRANK. *(To the child:)* I'm not a bad man, you know. I'm a good man and I'm trying to help your mother and all your brothers and sisters find a nice big house to live in.

CHILD. Mommy, tell the bad man to go away.

OLD WOMAN. I'm trying, honey.

CHILD. The bad man reads my thoughts.

FRANK. What?

OLD WOMAN. Go along now, I'm making bread and water for dinner tonight, so make sure you and the other children wash up.

CHILD. Bread and water?! Hooray!

(The CHILD runs off.)

OLD WOMAN. You see that? We accept what Mother Goose has given us and we are thankful. Why are you wasting all of your time bothering everyone?

FRANK. Some people out there are under the impression they're not allowed to live the lives they want. And I say it's high time we put a stop to Mother Goose's tyranny over the residents of Fairy-taleland.

OLD WOMAN. Mother Goose never intended to rule over people's lives. She's a simple woman who created simple stories.

FRANK. And how do you know that? No one has ever met her, yet they live her stories day after day without question. People need change. They need new stories.

OLD WOMAN. Maybe you're right, Frank. If it's time for new stories, it's time for new stories.

FRANK. Thank you! If only Mother Goose was listening.

OLD WOMAN. Maybe she is. She works in mysterious ways, you know.

(The OLD WOMAN smiles and takes off her old woman garb to reveal...she's MOTHER GOOSE.)

FRANK. Mother Goose?!

MOTHER GOOSE. That's right, Frank.

FRANK. What are you — ...I thought...You live in a shoe?

MOTHER GOOSE. Not everything is as it seems, Frank.

FRANK. What is the shoe, then, a doorway to an underground lair?

MOTHER GOOSE. There's an elevator, actually. I can't climb stairs like I used to.

FRANK. And all these children?

(The CHILD from before comes out and takes off his children's clothing to reveal a shirt and tie.)

MOTHER GOOSE. I'd like to introduce my assistant, Jeffery.

JEFFERY. Nice to meet you, Frank. Sorry about all the "bad man" stuff.

MOTHER GOOSE. We had to make sure you had the right intentions.

FRANK. So, you're not upset?

MOTHER GOOSE. I didn't say that. But I can appreciate your desire for change. Ya got spirit, kid.

JEFFERY. If there's one thing Mother Goose loves, it's spirit.

FRANK. Thank you, I guess.

JEFFERY. And tea. Spirit and tea. And hats. How she adores hats. So that's spirit, tea, and hats. Oh, and —

MOTHER GOOSE. Alright, that's enough, Jeffery. Why don't you check on the children?

JEFFERY. As you wish, Mother Goose.

(JEFFERY exits into the shoe.)

FRANK. Aren't you worried about someone seeing you out here in broad daylight?

MOTHER GOOSE. Oh, don't worry. No one comes within a thousand feet of this shoe without triggering the security system. The rest of the children are inside right now monitoring the surveillance.

FRANK. Wow. They must be smart children.

MOTHER GOOSE. They're not really children. They're the size of children, but they're actually midgets. Dwarfs, or little people.

Whatever they call them now. All hard working, mind you. Like the Oompa Loompas. I don't know what I'd do without them.

FRANK. Impressive.

MOTHER GOOSE. They also bake cookies. Like the Keebler elves.

FRANK. They run security and bake cookies?

MOTHER GOOSE. And make toys at Christmas.

(JEFFERY runs on.)

JEFFERY. Mother Goose, we have company. A young lady with a video camera. The children caught her hiding behind some bushes.

MOTHER GOOSE. *(To FRANK:)* Know anything about this?

FRANK. No.

MOTHER GOOSE. Alright, bring her over. Let me take a look. Resume disguises.

(JEFFERY puts on his child clothing and MOTHER GOOSE dresses as the old woman.)

JEFFERY. Frank, just don't say anything you'll regret.

(JEFFERY waves in someone from off stage. JUDY-the-intern is pushed on the stage.)

JEFFERY. Mother, look who we found.

MOTHER GOOSE. Bring her closer.

(JEFFERY pushes JUDY closer to MOTHER GOOSE.)

JUDY. I was just passing through.

JEFFERY. She was playing with this toy and wouldn't let any of the other children have a turn.

(JEFFERY hands a video camera to MOTHER GOOSE.)

MOTHER GOOSE. Well, that's not very nice. Don't you know anything about sharing, young lady?

JUDY. Frank, it's me Judy. Judy-the-intern, from the station.

MOTHER GOOSE. Do you know her, Frank?

FRANK. No.

JUDY. I bring you your coffee everyday.

FRANK. Oh, right. What are you doing out here?

JUDY. Everyone's looking for you, Frank. We ran out of reporters, so they sent me.

MOTHER GOOSE. Frank was trying to convince me to move into a condo or something, isn't that right?

FRANK. Something like that.

JEFFERY. (*As the child:*) But I like our shoe, mom! I don't want to leave!

MOTHER GOOSE. There, there. Now, why don't you take this video camera and see if some of the children inside want to play.

JUDY. That's actually a very expensive piece of equipment and it's not even mine.

MOTHER GOOSE. Oh, they'll be careful, won't you, honey?

JEFFERY. (*Almost sinister:*) Perfectly careful. I'd be very interested to know what's on this tape. Very interested indeed.

JUDY. How old are you?

JEFFERY. ...six?...and a half.

JUDY. You're pretty intimidating for a six year old.

JEFFERY. Thank you. Everything I needed to know I learned in kindergarten.

FRANK. Judy, just go back and tell them everything is fine.

JEFFERY. Better yet, first tell us, if you're just passing through, why we caught you hiding behind those bushes, with a very expensive recording device.

JUDY. Look, I know you're Mother Goose. I saw you.

JEFFERY. So, the truth comes out.

FRANK. You shouldn't have come here, Judy.

JUDY. Why not? I'm like a real reporter now.

MOTHER GOOSE. Judy, Judy, Judy. You know my true identity.

JEFFERY. You realize I'm going to have to kill you.

JUDY. What?

(BETH enters on a razor scooter, out of breath.)

BETH. Frank! Judy!

FRANK. Beth?!

JUDY. Ms. Nuckerpants?

JEFFERY. Stop right there! Put down that scooter.

MOTHER GOOSE. Who is this and how'd she get in here?

JEFFERY. Those darn midgets, I mean children, must be baking cookies again.

BETH. It *does* smell delicious.

MOTHER GOOSE. If I told them once, I told them a thousand times to bake in shifts.

BETH. Judy, are you alright? Your camera went dead and I just knew something was wrong because I have reporter instincts now and I came down here as fast as I could.

FRANK. Don't you have a car?

BETH. There was someone in my car... It's a long story.

FRANK. Who's reading the news?

BETH. We're on a commercial break. *(To JUDY:)* Frank didn't kidnap you, did he?

JUDY. What? No. I followed him here to Mother Goose.

FRANK. Kidnap her?

BETH. Where's Mother Goose?

JUDY. That's Mother Goose.

BETH. You're just the Old Woman in the shoe.

(MOTHER GOOSE pulls off her old woman garb.)

FRANK. Mother Goose, what are you doing?

MOTHER GOOSE. It's okay, Frank.

JEFFERY. Now I'm going to have to kill both of you.

BETH. I knew it! I knew there was something big going down.

JUDY. And I followed Frank here and I caught Mother Goose on tape and I was going to report back to you, but then I was captured by these midgets posing as children and —

BETH. You did great, Judy.

JEFFERY. You might even have had the chance of being a reporter one day, if we didn't have imprison you in our lair.

MOTHER GOOSE. Alright, that's enough, Jeffery. No one is going to get hurt. I've decided it's time I've formed a relationship with the press. Ms. Nuckerpants, as you understand, I'm a very private person and must remain that way in order to uphold a number of responsibilities. So, in exchange for your vow of silence, I will grant you one interview in the duration of ten minutes every year.

BETH. Make it twenty minutes twice a year.

FRANK. Beth! This is instead of her killing you.

MOTHER GOOSE. Okay, Ms. Nuckerpants, you got yourself a deal. On the condition that upon her graduation, you make Judy-the-intern a full-time reporter.

JUDY. I'd be honored, Ms. Nuckerpants. You're like my role model you know.

BETH. I suppose it wouldn't hurt to have a little flattery around the station. Frank, are you coming back or are you a homeless person now?

FRANK. I'm not coming back, Beth.

BETH. But you're my co-anchor.

FRANK. I quit, remember?

BETH. Okay, if you think I can't handle the news program without you, you're wrong. I'm lead anchor now and I report on news as it happens. Live.

FRANK. That's fine, Beth. You're a great news anchor.

BETH. But what are you going to do, Frank? Collect cans?

MOTHER GOOSE. Frank is going to stay with me.

BETH. You are?

FRANK. I am?

MOTHER GOOSE. You'll become my successor.

BETH. You will?

FRANK. I will?

MOTHER GOOSE. If Frank accepts my offer he will begin a rigorous training program and learn the way of the rhyme.

BETH. But why Frank? He's the last person you should choose. He's done nothing but destroy your rhymes and everything you stand for.

FRANK. Apparently, that's called spirit.

MOTHER GOOSE. Frank will fall in to a great line of rebellious story tellers. Just as I took over for the Brothers Grimm, who took over for Aesop and his fables, Frank will take over for me. When he's ready.

FRANK. I have to say, I'm very flattered. However, and no offense to you, Jeffery, but I have no desire to become your man servant.

MOTHER GOOSE. Frank, you will be my successor. A creator of stories, of life.

FRANK. I'm sure that's what you told Jeffery in the beginning, too.

JEFFERY. No, she told me I'd be her man servant. I prefer "assistant" by the way.

MOTHER GOOSE. Frank, I'll be honest with you, I'm getting old. And so are my rhymes. You've shown me that. The time has come for me to pass the torch. Sure you could continue on your rampage, but after you've broken the walls down, you'll have to rebuild. And that's what I'm offering you, a chance to create permanent change.

FRANK. And you'd be willing to let me destroy the walls you've built?

MOTHER GOOSE. Look at it this way, I'll let you tear down the house, but we'll keep the foundation.

FRANK. I think I can work with that.

MOTHER GOOSE. Good.

JUDY. Beth, we should get back to the station, don't you think?

BETH. You're right, Judy, we should. Phil's probably having a heart attack. Frank...we'll miss you. Don't screw up the new job. And don't quit.

FRANK. Thanks, I'll try not to.

JUDY. Good luck, Frank.

FRANK. Go get 'em, Judy.

BETH. *(To JUDY:)* I'll steer.

(BETH and JUDY ride off on the scooter. Everyone waves.)

FRANK. So what now?

MOTHER GOOSE. Let's go in the shoe, Frank.

JEFFERY. There's plenty of paper work.

MOTHER GOOSE. And plenty of cookies.

FRANK. Does this mean I get a disguise? I'd like to be the young handsome man in the shoe, if possible. Or most eligible bachelor in the shoe.

MOTHER GOOSE. We're not trying to attract attention, Frank. I think we'll go with the old man in the shoe.

FRANK. Oh, alright.

(FRANK exits with MOTHER GOOSE and JEFFERY.)

(BETH and JUDY appear at the news desk, as co-anchors. It's some-time in the near future.)

BETH. Judy, I understand you have an exclusive for us tonight.

JUDY. A special edition behind-the-scenes exclusive, actually, Beth.

BETH. We haven't had one of those in years—I'm certainly not changing the channel.

JUDY. Tonight we take a look at the *new Mother Goose*. Who is this heir to the mighty throne of rhyme and who shall he become? Get a sneak peak of a story in creation.

BETH. Later, I'll check in with Mother Goose at The Nursery Rhyme Nursing Home, for her reaction to latest developments.

JUDY. Let's go to the scene...

(JEFFERY quickly reenters with a script on a clipboard.)

JEFFERY. Places, places people!

(JACK and JILL enter and sit near a window.)

JEFFERY. Jack and Jill. Alright, good. We went over this, right? You're stuck inside because it's raining. There's nothing to do.

JILL. Why don't we go up the hill? That will keep us busy.

JACK. Yeah, let's fetch a pail of water.

JEFFERY. No, you're not doing that anymore. You're getting a new story. One where Jack doesn't end up in bandages.

JACK. *(Idiotically proud:)* I bumped my crown.

JILL. *(Raising her hand:)* I'm thirsty!

JACK. Yeah, let's fetch a pail of water!

JEFFERY. You both get juice boxes when we're done. Okay, here we go. *(Reading off the script.)*

Jack and Jill sat home.

It's very bored inside

All day, all alone

Without a sound

Except the rain drops

On the ground

And the tock

Of the ticking too-diddle clock.

Then--

JILL. *(Interrupting, raising her hand:)* Is this a rough draft? It's not very "polished."

JACK. We don't even have lines. Or character arcs.

JEFFERY. Now, listen! This is a work-in-progress. Let's just get through this scene, okay? Thank you. Continuing—

Of the ticking too-diddle clock

Then there was a...

Knock. Knock. Knock.

(Looking up, annoyed:)

Cue. Knock knock knock.

(There's a knock knock knock at the door.)

Good. Door opens...

(The door opens and a GIANT CAT walks in. This vaguely resembles the Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat" except without the hat.)

GIANT CAT. Stop right there, with those sad faces. I have arrived to bring you many fun places.

(FRANK enters.)

FRANK. Cut!

JEFFERY. Cut!

GIANT CAT. What's wrong?

JEFFERY. What's wrong, Frank?

FRANK. The cat's missing something. Can I get wardrobe in here!

(A WARDROBE PERSON quickly enters.)

WARDROBE PERSON. Yes, Frank? Is it the fur?

FRANK. No, the fur's great. Love the fur. The costume though is missing some pizzazz, some distinction. Bring me a bowtie. Yes, and a hat. A bizarre, striped top hat if you have one.

(The WARDROBE PERSON immediately produces a bow tie and a giant striped top hat.)

WARDROBE PERSON. How's this?

(FRANK *puts the new apparel on the cat and steps back. Everyone looks.*)

FRANK. Much better... Let's run it again.

JEFFERY. From the top!

(Lights fade out.)

End of Play