

The Crowded House
By Eva Jacob
Illustrated by Holly Cooper

Characters

Father	Mother	Bartholomew
Tom	Granny	Joseph
Molly	Joan	6 Chickens
Meg	Willy	Donkey
Mary Ann	Martin	Goat

Scene 1

SETTING: *The only room of John the Carpenter's cottage.*

AT RISE: *everyone is busy and the room crowded. Upstage center, GRANNY is rolling out a piecrust. To left of center stage, MARY ANN is churning butter. Downstage left, MOTHER and MOLLY are winding wool; MOLLY holds the skein while MOTHER winds. Downstage center sits MEG, surrounded by her dolls; she is pouring tea for them out of an imaginary teapot. Downstage right, TOM and JOSEPH are sorting apples from one basket into two others. At right of stage, FATHER is hammering nails into a table he is making; at rise, he gives a few actual hammer blows, then pantomimes, once others start talking. At center of stage, MARTIN and WILLY are playing "wheelbarrow"; MARTIN walks on his hands while WILLY holds his ankles. JOAN is trying to sweep the floor. Throughout the entire scene, the characters pantomime to each other, as if to say: "You're in my way. Please move aside."*

MEG *(rescuing her dolls, as MARTIN and WILLY'S "wheelbarrow" approaches):* Oh me, oh my! I wish we weren't so crowded!

WILLY: So do I! There's not even room for the mice in this house. *(MARTIN pads toward butter church, WILLY following.)*

MARY ANN: Shoo, Willy! Martin – scat! How can I church my butter? *(MARTIN pads toward FATHER, WILLY following.)*

GRANNY: *(Turning around)* Mary Ann! Your churn is in my way. *(GRANNY and MARY ANN gesture protestingly at each other.)*

FATHER: *(To MARTIN and WILLY)* Children, don't play here. There isn't any room.

JOAN: *(Pausing with broom in front of apple baskets)* Joseph! Tom! Please move aside. How can I sweep? *(BOYS carrying baskets move angrily toward MEG.)*

MEG: *(Again rescuing dolls)* No, Tom, you mustn't sit here. You're right in the middle of my tea party! *(MEG, TOM, and JOSEPH pantomime a quarrel. Others all begin talking at once.)*

ALL: You're in my way. Please move over. How can I work? There's no room in this house! Why must we be so crowded?

FATHER: *(At the top of his lungs)* Quiet! Be still, I saw. *(Others are silent. FATHER clutches his head.)* Oh my ears and shoe buttons! All this noise! You'll drive me out of my wits! *(A knock is heard at door left.)*

MOTHER: Husband, I hear a knock at the door. *(Knock is repeated.)*

FATHER: Aye, good wife. I hear it. *(Loudly)* Come in.

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Entering. Leans on his staff and bows)* Good day to you, my friends.

GRANNY: Why, 'tis Wise Bartholomew himself!

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Bowing again)* None other.

MOLLY: Have you come to visit us, good Bartholomew?

BARTHOLOMEW: Nay, my child. I was on my way to the forest, but I heard such a shouting and wailing in this house that I thought there must be some trouble.

MOTHER: *(Wiping her eyes with her apron)* Alas, good Bartholomew, we have trouble enough and more.

FATHER: We lead a miserable life.

BARTHOLOMEW: Dear me! But what is the matter?

MEG: We're so crowded.

JOSEPH: We don't have any room at all.

ALL: He's in my way. She won't give me any room. How can I work? *(Etc.)*

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Raising his hand for silence)* Say no more. By all the gray hairs in my long gray beard, you really do have a problem.

FATHER: Dear Bartholomew, you are the wisest man in all the village. Can't you think of some way to help us?

OTHERS: Yes, please help us. There must be some way. Help us.

BARTHOLOMEW: (*Again raising his hand for silence*) Perhaps I can help you. Tell me this, friend John – do you own any animals?

FATHER: Animals? Yes, we have some animals. We have a goat, six chickens, and a donkey out in the barnyard.

BARTHOLOMEW: A goat, six chickens, and a donkey, you say. Ah, excellent. Fine. Very good. Now I'll tell you what to do.

ALL: Yes, tell us, good Bartholomew. What must we do?

BARTHOLOMEW: (*Raising hand for silence*) John, you must go out to the barnyard and fetch your goat. Bring him into this room to live with you.

FATHER: What? A goat in this room?

GRANNY: I never heard of such a thing! (*Others pantomime surprise*).

BARTHOLOMEW: Do as I saw, or go your own way. Fiddle-dee-dum, Fiddle-dee-dee, that's all the advice you'll hear from me. (*Turns, as if to go*)

MOTHER: Please don't go away, wise Bartholomew. We'll do as you say.

OTHERS: Yes, we'll obey. We'll get the goat.

BARTHOLOMEW: Very well. In seven days and seven nights, I shall come again, to see how you are faring. Good day, my friends. (*Exits*)

FATHER: I suppose I'd better fetch the goat. (*Exits*)

MOTHER: A goat in this room!

JOAN: What a strange idea!

MEG: (*Pulling her dolls close*) I'm scared of goats.

MARY ANN: Fiddlesticks! Old Bartholomew is the wisest man in the village. His advice *must* be good.

FATHER: (*From offstage*) Watch out, everybody! Clear the way. Here comes the goat! (*ALL gather up their possessions, prepare to dodge, crying: Óoooh! Watch out! The goat!" etc. GOAT rushes onstage, heading straight for TOM and JOSEPH, who run out of the GOAT'S path. FATHER tries to hold GOAT back by rope, but is pulled along instead.*)

ALL: (*As GOAT charges around the stage*) Help! Watch out! He's coming this way!
Help!

MOTHER: (*Clutching head*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I very much fear that inviting this
goat was a bad idea!

Scene 2

TIME: A week later.

SETTING: Same as Scene 1.

AT RISE: All are busy with the same activities as in SCENE 1, except for MARTIN and WILLY, who hold a large red cape between them, flapping it at the GOAT.

MARTIN: Here, Billy Goat, Billy Goat, Billy Goat!

WILLY: Here, you old goat – come and play bullfight!

MOTHER: Martin! Willy! Stop that at once! I told you not to tease that goat. (*GOAT seems uninterested in cape.*)

TOM: He'll butt you!

MEG: Or he'll butt me! (*Gathers up dolls and pulls fearfully out of the way*)

MARTIN: Oh, Mother, there's really no harm.

WILLY: It's only *bulls* that charge at red things. Goats don't mind. See? (*Waves cape at GOAT again. GOAT suddenly lowers horns and charges for cape.*) Help!

MARTIN: Watch out! Help! Help! (*MARTIN and WILLY, still holding on to the cape, dash out of GOAT'S path, run around churn, etc., pursued by GOAT.*)

ALL: Watch out! Help! You see? We told you! You bad boys! (*FATHER runs after GOAT, finally manages to catch him. FATHER holds GOAT down, speaks to GOAT very nervously.*)

FATHER: There, there, old goat. (*GOAT tries to rise. All watch nervously.*) No! No! Mustn't chase after nice people. Shhh! (*While others watch uneasily, a knock at the door is heard. FATHER places a hand to forehead.*) Come in. (*BARTHOLOMEW enters, bows.*)

BARTHOLOMEW: Good day to you, my friends.

OTHERS: Good day, Bartholomew.

BARTHOLOMEW: (*Still cheerful*) How are you this fine winter's morning? Has the goat been helpful?

FATHER: It's dreadful! Dreadful!

GRANNY: We're worse off than ever before.

ALL: This goat is terrible. We've had a dreadful week. Awful!

BARTHOLOMEW: Dear me. Dear me! You really do have troubles.

FATHER: Please, good Bartholomew, tell us what to do. We need help very badly.

BARTHOLOMEW: (*Stroking his beard*) Very well, friend John. This is what you must do. Go out to the barnyard and fetch your six chickens. Bring them into this room to live with you.

ALL: What? The chickens, too? Into this room?

BARTHOLOMEW: Do as I say, or go your own way. Fiddle-dee-dum, fiddle-dee-dee, that's all the advice you'll hear from me. (*Turns, as if to go*)

MOTHER: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Don't be angry, Bartholomew. We'll do as you say.

BARTHOLOMEW: Very well. In seven days and seven nights, I shall return to see how you are faring. Good day. (*Exits*)

GRANNY: Chickens!

MOLLY: The goat was bad enough!

FATHER: Old Bartholomew is the wisest man in the village. I think we should obey him. I'll go fetch the chickens. (*Exits*)

MOTHER: (*Shaking her head*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I very much fear that we won't like having those chickens in here.

Scene 3

TIME: A week later.

SETTING: The same.

AT RISE: All are doing the same activities as before, but now they are more crowded than every. The GOAT wanders around the stage, sniffing and butting everyone – and hopping, pecking, clucking everywhere are the CHICKENS.

JOSEPH: (*Shooing two CHICKENS away from his basket*) Shoo! Scat! (*CHICKENS squawk, flutter over to MEG, who shoos them away.*)

MARY ANN: Watch out for the goat!

MOTHER: Don't step on the chickens.

WILLY: Oh dear, I think I've stepped on an egg!

ALL: (*Loudly, at once*) Shoo! Scat! Watch out! Keep that chicken away! Watch out for the goat! (*A knock is heard.*)

FATHER: (*At the top of his lungs*) Quiet! (*Silence, except for CHICKENS' clucking*) I think I heard a knock. (*Knock is repeated.*) Come in.

BARTHOLOMEW: (*Enters, bowing. Cheerily*) Good morrow to you, my friends. My, what lovely chickens!

MEG: They're not lovely – they're nasty!

ALL: They're awful! We're so crowded! We've had a terrible week! (*CHICKENS flutter about, clucking.*)

FATHER: Please, good Bartholomew. Help us.

MOTHER: We don't know *what* to do!

GRANNY: But, please, kind sir – no more goats and chickens!

BARTHOLOMEW: Very well, my friends. I'll tell you what to do. John, you must go out to the barnyard and fetch your *donkey*. Bring him into this room to live with you.

MOLLY: Oh, no! We *can't* do that!

TOM: Not the donkey, too!

BARTHOLOMEW: Fiddle-dee-dum, fiddle-dee-dee, that's all the advice you'll get from me. In seven days and seven nights, I shall return to see how you are faring. Good day, my friends. (*Exits*)

GRANNY: Well, I never!

MARY ANN: Don't do it, Papa! We *can't* live with a donkey!

FATHER: Old Bartholomew is the wisest man in all the village. (*Sighs*) Let's try his advice just one more time. I'll fetch the beast. (*Exits*)

MOTHER: The goat is a terror, the hens are a brawl, but a donkey, I fear me, is worst of them all.

Scene 4

TIME: A week later.

SETTING: The same.

AT RISE: All are doing the same activities as before, but with more difficulty than ever: The GOAT is butting everyone. The CHICKENS flutter, and squawk and peck. The DONKEY (two boys under a blanket) blunders around the stage, braying loudly.

ALL: Shoo! Scat! Watch out for the goat! Don't step on the chickens! Here comes the donkey! Watch out! Help! Be careful!

FATHER: Oh, oh, oh! This is dreadful! I can't bear it another minute! *(A knock at the door is heard.)*

MEG: Papa, I think I heard someone knock.

GRANNY: If it's that Bartholomew again, I don't want to see him.

FATHER: Come in. *(BARTHOLOMEW enters, bowing as before. The family is silent, unfriendly. But the DONKEY brays, the CHICKENS cluck, and the GOAT baas.)*

BARTHOLOMEW: Good morrow to you, my friends. And how are the animals today?

MOTHER: The animals are fine, good sir, but we're *not*!

GRANNY: *(Crossly, to BARTHOLOMEW)* Do you have any *more* good advice, kind sir?

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Still cheerful. Stroking his beard)* Fiddle-dum, fiddle-dee; we'll see.

FATHER: Dear, good Bartholomew, you are still the wisest man in all the village. *Please* help us. We've never been so miserable.

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Patting DONKEY. Looks up, as if astonished)* Do you mean to say that you don't like these nice animals?

JOAN: *(Tartly)* Begging your pardon, sir, but you don't have to live with them.

BARTHOLOMEW: You don't like living with them?

ALL: NO!

BARTHOLOMEW: *(Stroking his beard)* Well now, there's only one thing to do. John

—

FATHER: *(Fearfully)* Yes?

BARTHOLOMEW: Take all these animals – and put them back in the barnyard where they belong!

ALL: Hurray! (*JOHN and others chase all the animals offstage through the door; animals bray, cluck, and baa as they go off.*)

MOTHER: How wonderful! They're gone!

JOAN: (*Puts broom aside. Stretches*) Mmmmm! Look at all this room we have now. I'm so glad they're gone!

MARTIN: I really think this room has grown bigger.

GRANNY: I never knew before how nice it was *not* to have a donkey in the room.

MARY ANN: Or a goat.

WILLY: Or chickens.

TOM: Come on, Meg. Spread your silly dollies out. There's plenty of room now. (*All turn happily to their tasks.*)

MOLLY: It's so quiet and peaceful.

FATHER: I'm so happy. I never knew how much room we had!

BARTHOLOMEW: Fiddle-dum, fiddle-dee, as I've said thrice before: I don't think you'll be needing my advice anymore. Farewell, my friends. (*Walks toward exit, waving.*)

ALL: (*Waving*) Farewell, good Bartholomew! Farewell! Thank you! (*Curtain*)

THE END