

The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf

From the book, "Children's Classics in Dramatic Form" by Augusta Stevenson
Suggested by Hans Andersen's "The Girl Who Trod on the Loaf"

SCENE I

TIME: The day before Christmas

PLACE: Inge's Mother's home.

CHARACTERS:

Inge

Her mother

(The Mother stands at the kitchen window, watching for Inge.)

MOTHER: Ah, here she comes at last! *(Short pause. Enter Inge.)* I have waited long for you, my child. Where have you been?

(Inge is silent.)

MOTHER: Have you been to the Elf Hill? Tell me.

INGE: *(Hesitating.)* Just for a little while, Mother.

MOTHER: Inge! Inge! What have I ever told you?

INGE: I thought I'd go just this once.

MOTHER: *(Showing sorrow.)* Ah, Inge, that's what you always say.

INGE: There's no harm talking about the elves.

MOTHER: And I, your mother, say there is harm.

INGE: But, Mother,—they talk so prettily.

MOTHER: *(Nodding.)* Aye! And that's the harm. They've put such silly ideas into your head.

INGE: They say 't is friendship makes them talk as they do.

MOTHER: *(Indignantly.)* Friendship! 'T is friendship, is it, to tell you not to fetch the wood?

INGE: They say 't will spoil my hands.

MOTHER: Out upon them and their pretty talk! You shall go there no more. Do you hear me, Inge?

INGE: (*Pouting.*) I hear.

MOTHER: Now take this loaf of bread to your sick aunt. Say to her 't is her Christmas gift.

INGE: But, Mother, I must cross the muddy road to go there.

MOTHER: Well, you are neither sugar nor salt.

INGE: I'll spoil my shoes!

MOTHER: You think of your shoes, and your aunt lies ill?

INGE: Wait till spring and the mud will be gone.

MOTHER: Wait till spring and your aunt will be gone! Here is the loaf—now off with you!

(Inge takes the loaf and goes, but not willingly.)

SCENE II

TIME: A few minutes later

PLACE: The muddy road

CHARACTERS:

Inge

The Wicked Elf

(Inge is seen stopping at the muddy road.)

INGE: 'T is too wide to leap!

(The wicked Elf suddenly appears on the opposite side of the road.)

WICKED ELF: Good day to you, pretty maid!

INGE: Good day to you, dear Elf!

WICKED ELF: Wilt cross this muddy road?

INGE: I must.

WICKED ELF: Then I'll tell you how to do it and not so much as wet your shoe.

INGE: Oh, thank you, dear Elf!

WICKED ELF: Throw down your loaf and—

INGE: (*Showing surprise; interrupting.*) Throw down the loaf?

WICKED ELF: Why, yes, —to use it for a stepping-stone.

INGE: But 't will spoil the bread!

WICKED ELF: But 't will save your shoes!

INGE: Well, that's true—

WICKED ELF: A pretty maid ne'er wears a muddy shoe.

INGE: That's true, too—

WICKED ELF: Come, then, throw down the loaf!

INGE: Well, I'll do it! (*She throws the loaf and steps upon it.*) 'T is sinking! What shall I do?

WICKED ELF: Why, then, jump off!

INGE: (*Trying to jump.*) I can't! Don't you see I can't?

WICKED ELF: Ha, ha! You're fastened to it!

INGE: 'T is drawing me down! Help me! Help me!

WICKED ELF: There's no help for you.

INGE: No help? What do you mean?

WICKED ELF: You must go down with the loaf.

INGE: I pray you help me! See how I'm sinking! The mud will soon be over my shoes!

WICKED ELF: The mud will soon be over your head!

INGE: *(Weeping.)* Save me! Save me!

WICKED ELF: Will you be saved by magic?

INGE: Yes, yes!

WICKED ELF: Listen, then—I'll change you into a bird. Are you willing?

INGE: Yes, yes! Quick now, before I sink deeper!

WICKED ELF: *(Nodding head three times.)* A sparrow shall you be! Change, now change!

(Inge changes into a sparrow, with a tuft of white feathers, just the shape of a loaf of bread, upon her head. The Sparrow flies from the mud.)

SPARROW: Now change me back into Inge.

WICKED ELF: You shall remain as you are.

SPARROW: *(Showing surprise.)* Remain as I am?

WICKED ELF: *(Nodding.)* Until you change yourself back.

SPARROW: And when will that be?

WICKED ELF: When the loaf has gone from your head.

SPARROW: The loaf from my head? What do you mean?

WICKED ELF: *(Going.)* Fly away to the brook and see! Ha, ha, ha! *(She runs away, calling back.)*
Fly away to the brook and see! Ha, ha, ha!

SCENE III

TIME: The day following Christmas day

PLACE: An old stone wall by a brook

CHARACTERS:

The Sparrow

*The Peasant
Gretel
First Stone
Second Stone
Third Stone*

(The Sparrow sits in a hole in the wall.)

FIRST STONE: Come, come, be not so sad, little Sparrow!

SECOND STONE: Come, lift up your head and sing!

THIRD STONE: Come, sing us your Christmas song!

SPARROW: Sing! I have nothing to sing about.

FIRST STONE: Sing of your friends.

SECOND STONE: Sing of their love for you.

THIRD STONE: Sing of their kindness to you.

SPARROW: Talk not to me of friends, or love, or kindness! There's none in the world.

(Enter a Peasant with his little Gretel. The Peasant carries two ears of corn.)

PEASANT: Now, my Gretel, we'll place the corn here on the old wall.

GRETEL: Mother thought you brought too much.

PEASANT: Well, 't is true there are only three ears left at home, but the birds must have their Christmas dinner. *(He places the corn on the wall.)*

GRETEL: There's none about to see it!

PEASANT: Oh, some bird will soon find it!

GRETEL: But will it call the others?

PEASANT: We'll wait to see. Come, we'll sit there on the log. *(They go to a log nearby.)*

FIRST STONE: There, little Sparrow, say you now there is no kindness?

SECOND STONE: Or love?

THIRD STONE: Or friendship?

SPARROW: No, no! I can never say that again. The peasant's heart is full of kindness and love and friendship. I will sing of it! 'T will be my Christmas song! (*The Sparrow leaves the hole and flies to the corn.*)

GRETEL: Look, Father, there is a sparrow! And hear it sing! Just hear it!

PEASANT: It is calling the other birds.

GRETEL: Why, it doesn't even touch the corn!

PEASANT: It's waiting to share it with the others. Is it not a pretty sight? Come, we must go tell Mother.

SCENE IV

TIME: One month later

PLACE: Same as Scene III

CHARACTERS:

Our Sparrow

The very old sparrow

The old sparrow

The young sparrow

The very young sparrow

The wicked elf

(All the sparrows except Our Sparrow sit on the stone wall.)

YOUNG SPARROW: I say the stranger should be driven away!

VERY YOUNG SPARROW: So say I!

OLD SPARROW: The stranger is a sparrow, but still not a sparrow.

VERY OLD SPARROW: And yet she is only different by a tuft of white feathers.

YOUNG SPARROW: And such a tuft! For all the world like a loaf of bread!

VERY YOUNG SPARROW: I'd think it shame to carry such on my head!

OLD SPARROW: I fear 't will shame us all to have this stranger about.

VERY OLD SPARROW: And yet we are not ashamed to eat the crumbs this stranger brings.

OLD SPARROW: Well, 't is true she has been most kind.

VERY OLD SPARROW: 'T is a hard winter! Shall we drive away the one who finds food where we find none?

YOUNG SPARROW: And calls us every time!

VERY YOUNG SPARROW: And never eats till we have come!

VERY OLD SPARROW: I've kept in mind the crumbs she has found us. Now, how many do you think?

OLD SPARROW: I cannot say, for I did not think to notice.

VERY OLD SPARROW: There only lacks two or three now of being a loaf.

OTHER SPARROWS: *(Greatly surprised.)* A loaf?

VERY OLD SPARROW: *(Nodding.)* A loaf.

VERY YOUNG SPARROW: Here comes the stranger now!

OLD SPARROW: She brings a crust!

(Our Sparrow flies up with a crust in its bill.)

OUR SPARROW: Come, friends, 't is for all of you!

VERY OLD SPARROW: Do you know, stranger bird, that, with these crumbs, you have brought us in all one loaf?

(Our Sparrow drops the crust for the others. At once it changes into Inge. The bird fly away frightened.)

INGE: Ah! Now I understand. The loaf had to be made up, crumb by crumb.

(The Wicked Elf suddenly appears.)

WICKED ELF: Come, pretty maid, come to the Elf Hill!

INGE: No, no! I will not!

WICKED ELF: But we have such pretty things to tell you!

INGE: I care not for your pretty things! I go to fetch wood for my mother. I go to walk in the mud if need be. Away with you! I'll have none of you! Away, away, I say!