

THE POPPING OF THE GRAND BALLOON

A Play

by

MARY RENSTEN

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

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**A Play for Children of all Ages
With Music and Dancing**

Length approximately 50 minutes

Adapted from a Hungarian folk story
“The Little Rooster and The Diamond Button”

Synopsis:

The Little Rooster, poor and hungry, scratching in the earth for something for himself and his poor Old Woman to eat, finds a Diamond Button.

The Grand Balloon, the very fat ruler of the land, claims it and takes it from the Rooster. Poor Little Rooster, he's chased by the Balloon's three fat servants, he's put in the well to drown, then in the fire to burn. He even has to battle with a hive full of the Balloon's best stinging bees.

However...it's the bees, released into the wide bag of the Grand Balloon's trousers - just at a time when he's feeling so happy and so sure of himself - that make him realise only too painfully that it's time to give in.

“Go and take your wretched Diamond Button” the Rooster is told. Let loose in the Grand Balloon's treasure chamber, one Diamond Button is not the only thing that the Little Rooster takes home, as the trembling servants discover after he has gone.

Scenery, props, music:

No specific ideas for setting the play are given in the script, but it is better done in the round - the various chases can then take place in and out of the audience.

All props and scenery, eg the well and the bee-hive, can be made by the children involved.

Similarly the music. Using recorders and percussion, the children can play simple tunes for the dancing, and also for incidental music. This can be recorded or live. In the same way, live or recorded, they can make the sound effects for the water and the bees.

Costumes:

Have fun with them. The play can be set in any time and any country (or a mixture of several).

The Little Rooster:

A padded "tummy" for when the Little Rooster is full of water or bees is easily put on and taken off behind the appropriate piece of scenery ie the well or the bee-hive. (The Rooster fills his tummy with treasure off-stage).

The Grand Balloon's Costume:

As "over the top" as possible. The only specific requirement is that the trousers (vaguely Eastern) should be very wide and baggy, big enough (in theory) for the Little Rooster to hide inside them.

The Ballooma:

For most of the play the Ballooma says nothing and is covered from head to foot in a black cloak. Towards the end when she takes off the cloak she is revealed in a glittering, shimmering outfit, as much a contrast from the black cloak as possible.

The Chief Minister:

He or she could wear morning dress and top hat, or some kind of uniform.

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

Narrator

Little Rooster

Old Woman

Grand Balloon (*very fat and self-important*)

Servant 1

Servant 2

Servant 3

Chief Minister (*very pompous*)

Ballooma (*wife to the Grand Balloon*)

1st Dancer

2nd Dancer

3rd Dancer

4th Dancer

Secretary

Plus as many servants, dancers, courtiers as required.

THE POPPING OF THE GRAND BALLOON

On stage are the NARRATOR, and frozen in a tableau are the OLD WOMAN and the LITTLE ROOSTER.

Music, either off stage or on, live or recorded.

Narrator: *(Holding a very large book on which we can see the title “The Little Rooster and the Diamond Button” in clear lettering)* Once upon a time ... which is how all the best stories begin ... there was an old woman and she was very, very poor. And because she was poor she was hungry. She had nothing to eat ... except ... her Little Rooster. *(Pause, looking at the audience)* But she couldn't eat HIM; he was her friend. The trouble was ... the Little Rooster was hungry, too.

The OLD WOMAN and the LITTLE ROOSTER “come to life”.

Rooster: *(To the OLD WOMAN)* Don't you have anything that I could eat?

Old Woman: If I had anything I'd eat it myself. You're lazy, that's what's wrong with you. There's plenty that you could eat, out here, in the earth. You just won't be bothered to look. Go on, scratch around a bit. There's lots of worms and insects. Eat them. I wish I could.

Rooster: I can't eat them! They're my friends.

Old Woman: All of them?

Rooster: No ... not all of them.

Old Woman: Well then, scratch around until you find some that aren't your friends. And while you're looking you can see what you can find for me. Otherwise ... you know what I WILL be eating, don't you?

Rooster: *(Giving her a scared look)* I'll find you something, don't worry.

The OLD WOMAN leaves the stage and the LITTLE ROOSTER begins to scratch and peck in the earth. As he scratches he talks to the insects he sees.

Rooster: Morning, George ... hello, Betty, how are you this morning? *(He listens to Betty's reply)* Good, glad to hear it. *(Scratching some more)* Ah, Seamus! *(With an Irish accent)* Top o' the morning to you! *(Looking more carefully at another insect)* Aha! Now, I don't know you. *(About to pick it up)* You're who? ... you're Seamus's cousin, you've just come here? I see *(pause, listening)* ... oh, you're Mick, are you? Oh, I'm terribly sorry, Mick, I do beg your pardon. Please apologise to Seamus for me. *(He moves away and scratches again)* Ah, now here's one. Er ... excuse me ... you're not related to Seamus by any chance, are you? *(Pause)* No. Oh, good. *(Picking up the insect)* To Betty? You're Betty's sister? Oh. Yes, well ... nice to meet you. Are you staying long? *(Pause, listening)* Probably not, I see. Yes, you're right, it is too dangerous round here. *(He puts the insect down)* Well, I'll be on my way, nice to have seen you. *(He moves away)* It's no good, I'm not

going to find anything to eat here. *(Suddenly he stops, seeing something shining in the earth)* Hello ... what's this? *(He stoops to pick up the diamond button he has found)* A diamond button! You're not related to anyone, are you? *(Pause)* Just as well, because I'm taking you home.

Meanwhile, unseen by the LITTLE ROOSTER, the GRAND BALLOON has appeared, followed by his three fat servants, two of them carry the wide bag of the BALLOON'S trousers, the third one holds a large fan which he waves over the GRAND BALLOON.

Rooster: My old woman is going to be very glad to see you. She'll be able to sell you, and then we'll BOTH be able to eat. Oh, you lovely diamond button! *(He throws it up in the air and catches it)*

Balloon: What have we here?

The LITTLE ROOSTER jumps with surprise.

Balloon: A little Rooster. And a diamond button! *(He turns to his servants and laughs)* A little Rooster and a diamond button!

Because the GRAND BALLOON laughs, the SERVANTS laugh.

Balloon: What possible use can a Rooster make of a diamond button? *(They all laugh again)* Well, what could he do with it?

Servant 1: He could put it on his ... tail. *(Laughs)*

Servant 2: He could have it made into a ring ... for his beak! *(More laughter)*

Servant 3: He could give it to his girlfriend. A hen with a ring! *(They fall about with amusement)*

Balloon: Well, what are you going to do with it, Little Rooster?

Rooster: I'm taking it home for my old woman. *(Getting nervous, starting to edge away)* She's ... er ... she's very fond of ... diamond buttons.

Balloon: Oh, is she? Well, so am I. In fact, I have quite a large collection of diamond buttons. *(He moves towards the ROOSTER)*

Rooster: Well, you're not having this one. I'm taking this one home to ...

Balloon: How dare you tell me I can't have that button. Don't you know who I am?

Rooster: Yes. You're the Grand Balloon.

Balloon: That's right. I am the Grand Balloon. And no one says no to me.

Rooster: No.

Balloon: No? Did you say no?

Rooster: *(Backing away)* Yes. I did say no.

Servants: *(To one another)* He said no.

Balloon: *(Looking pointedly at his servants)* No one says no to me! *(To the LITTLE ROOSTER)* How dare you! *(To his SERVANTS)* Catch him! Catch that Little Rooster! And when you've caught him, take away that diamond button.

The very idea ... saying no ... to ME!

The SERVANTS chase the LITTLE ROOSTER, the one with the fan swatting

everywhere with it, but never actually touching the ROOSTER.

Balloon: (*Encouraging them*) Go on, get him! Oh, you've missed him. You'll have to do better than that. After him!

Finally they catch him. By now they are out of breath. They take the diamond button from the LITTLE ROOSTER, and give it to the GRAND BALLOON.

Balloon: (*Taking the diamond button*) Magnificent! Superb! It really is a splendid button. I wonder who dropped it. (*He looks down at his own buttons which are popping open*) Could be one of mine, I s'pose.

Rooster: That is my button! You had no right to take it from me.

Balloon: (*Having no further use for the ROOSTER*) Go away. Off with you. Shoo! (*As the ROOSTER doesn't move, he turns to his servants*) Get rid of him. Silly Little Rooster, what's he want with a diamond button.

Servants: (*Shooing away the ROOSTER*) Go on, off with you! Shoo! Out of the way!

Rooster: All right, I'm going. But I'll be back ... you'll see. (*Pointing to the BALLOON*) If you think you're going to get away with this ... then you're sadly mistaken!

The SERVANTS shoo him and he moves aside.

Balloon: Come! We'll put this (*holding up the button*) in my treasure chamber. *They leave as they came, with two servants holding up the BALLOON's trousers and one fanning him.*

Rooster: (*Watching them angrily, to audience*) Who does he think he is? Just because he's rich! Just because he's fat! Just because he's got three servants who are fat! (*Pause*) That's my button isn't it? I found it. Finders keepers, that's what they say. Well, don't you think it is my button?

Pause. He waits for the audience to reply. If they don't, he repeats the question.

Rooster: Right then, I'm going to get it back. I shall go to the palace and I shall tell that Grand Balloon ... Balloon ... fancy being called a balloon. Well, he is full of hot air, isn't he? ... I shall tell that ... that Balloon, that that button is mine! And he's got to give it back to me! Oh, I can be very fierce indeed. So watch out, Grand Balloon, here I come! (*To audience*) Super-rooster, that's me. (*He flies around like Superman, unfurling a tiny cloak with a big letter "S" on it*)

Narrator: (*As the LITTLE ROOSTER "flies" round the stage*) And that's what he did. He flew to the palace and went to look for the Grand Balloon. But he wasn't easy to find. The palace was enormous, with many, many rooms. The Little Rooster flew from one room to another ...

The LITTLE ROOSTER "flies" round the stage.

Narrator: ... no Grand Balloon, no fat servants, and no diamond button. The poor Little Rooster was very tired and very hungry. He was just about to give up and go home ... when he heard music ...

Off stage, gradually coming nearer we hear Eastern dancing music.

Narrator: ... and into the room came the Grand Balloon ... *(as he speaks they all enter)* ... the three fat servants, the Balloon's Chief Minister, the Ballooma ... that's the Balloon's wife ... and the Balloon's beautiful dancing girls.

The GIRLS begin to dance and the BALLOON sits down, with his SERVANTS and CHIEF MINISTER in attendance. When the dancing ends the LITTLE ROOSTER pops up from his hiding place.

Rooster: Cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do!

The DANCING GIRLS shriek, then after their first alarm they gather round the LITTLE ROOSTER.

Balloon: What's HE doing here?

1st Dancer: Oh, isn't he lovely.

2nd Dancer: What a beautiful little rooster.

Balloon: Beautiful! Huh!

3rd Dancer: Look at his shining feathers.

4th Dancer: What wonderful colours.

Rooster: *(Enjoying the attention)* Cock-a-doodle-do! Grand Balloon, give me back my diamond button!

Balloon: How dare you come to my palace and make a noise like that. Go away!

Rooster: I'll go away if you give me back my diamond button.

They face one another angrily.

Balloon: Give it to you? I won't give it to you. It's mine.

Rooster: It's not yours, it's mine.

Balloon: I've got it, it's mine.

Rooster: Oh yes, you've got it, but it's not yours. It's mine, and I want it back.

Balloon: *(Clapping his hands for his SERVANTS)* I've had enough of this. A little rooster telling me what to do. Get rid of him! Take him away!

The SERVANTS chase the LITTLE ROOSTER in and out of the DANCING GIRLS.

Balloon: *(To his CHIEF MINISTER)* And you. You're supposed to be my Chief Minister, make yourself useful.

Minister: Me, sire?

Balloon: Yes, you.

Minister: *(On his dignity)* Chase a rooster?

Balloon: *(Nodding)* Yes, chase a rooster.

Minister: *(Sighing)* Oh, very well, sire. If you say so. *(With great dignity he tires to chase the LITTLE ROOSTER. He waves his long staff at him)* I say ... you ... Little Rooster ... come here, there's a good chap.

Rooster: *(Pausing in his running)* What, me? Not on your life, old chap! *(And he runs on)*

Meanwhile, one of the DANCING GIRLS is whispering to the BALLOON, who

laughs and nods. The GIRL whispers to the other girls and together they approach the LITTLE ROOSTER. The exhausted SERVANTS flop on the floor.

1st Dancer: Oh, I wish I had feathers like yours.

2nd Dancer: Oh yes, so do I. They are SO beautiful.

3rd Dancer: It's those green ones I like best ... the ones in your tail.

4th Dancer: Yes, the ones in your tail.

The LITTLE ROOSTER, flattered by this attention, turns to look at his tail. The SERVANTS, who have recovered their breath, and drawn closer while the GIRLS have been talking, spring towards the rooster and pounce on him, bringing him to the floor.

Servant 1: Got him!

Minister: I say. Well done, girls. *(To BALLOON)* Beautiful AND clever.

Balloon: Of course. *(To SERVANTS)* Bring him here. *(Which they do. To the LITTLE ROOSTER)* Now, you listen to me. I don't want to hear about your diamond button ever again.

Rooster: Ah, so you admit it is MY diamond button?

Balloon: *(As if the ROOSTER had not spoken)* ... And I'm going to make sure I never hear you either. *(To the SERVANTS)* Take him to the well ... and drown him!

Servants: Yes, sire.

They drag the ROOSTER away.

Rooster: *(As he's dragged away)* But I can't swim! *(Looking to the audience for help)* Help me, somebody ... I shall drown!

Balloon: *(Laughing)* He can't swim, he'll drown! Of course he'll drown, that's the whole idea! *(As the ROOSTER and SERVANTS go offstage)* ... Well, that's the last we've seen of him, thank goodness. Come on, girls, help me up. *(Which they do)* Let's go and have some more music.

With music playing, the BALLOON and all his followers leave the stage.

Narrator: So the Little Rooster was taken to the well.

As the NARRATOR speaks, the well is brought on and the SERVANTS enter with the LITTLE ROOSTER.

Narrator: ... Poor Little Rooster. All that water ... the well is very deep, you know. He's sure to drown.

Servant 1: There, that's it. Put him in.

Servant 2: Come on, you. We've had enough of your nonsense.

Rooster: *(Trying to get away)* Let me go, let me go! Cock-a-doodle-do! I'll get all my friends on to you. They'll bite you and scratch you ...

But the SERVANTS are too strong for him and finally they get him into the well.

Servant 3: *(Looking over the top of the well)* There, that's the last we'll see of him.

Servant 1: The Grand Balloon should be very pleased with that.

They shake hands and pat one another on the back in congratulation as they go off.

Narrator: Poor Little Rooster. What a sad end. *(For a moment there is silence, then we hear the gurgling of water)* ... Wait! What's that noise? It's coming from the well. Listen ...

(There are choking, spluttering sounds)

... I think it's the Little Rooster.

Rooster: *(From within the well)* Come my empty stomach, drink up all the water ... all of it.

There are more gurgling sounds, then groaning and moaning the LITTLE ROOSTER, now with an enormous stomach, climbs out of the well, shakes his wet feathers and staggers about the stage.

Narrator: Good for you, Little Rooster. Now what?

Rooster: Back to the Balloon's palace, that's what. *(He flaps around, heavily, crowing)* Cock-a-doodle-do! *(Looking for the BALLOON)* Not here. Not there. He must be somewhere. Oh, if only my tummy weren't so full. *(Looking down at it)* Oh dear, what a sight. Ugh. Still, it mustn't stop me looking.

We hear voices off-stage. The LITTLE ROOSTER looks towards the sound.

Rooster: ... It's him ... the Balloon! Oh, goodness, I hope I have the strength.

He manages to hide as the BALLOON enters with his SERVANTS and his CHIEF MINISTER.

Balloon: *(As he enters)* ... and I think that over there I shall have a great big pile of red and blue and yellow cushions.

Minister: *(Writing in his notebook)* Red ... blue ... yellow ... cushions. *(Looking at the BALLOON)* How many cushions would you like, sire?

Balloon: How many? I don't know how many. As many as will fill up the space.

Minister: *(Writing)* Fill ... up ... the ... space.

Balloon: *(When the CHIEF MINISTER has finished)* And here ... I shall have ... purple curtains with silver stars. *(Seeing the LITTLE ROOSTER looking at him cheekily)* You're supposed to be drowned! *(He turns angrily to his servants who are pale and trembling)* I thought I told you to put him in the well!

Servant 1: *(Throwing himself on the ground in front of the BALLOON)* We did, sire, we did.

Servant 2: *(Also throwing himself down)* We really did, sire.

Servant 3: *(Doing the same)* Honestly, sire, we did.

Servants: *(Together)* We put him in the well.

Balloon: Then what is he doing here?

Servant 1: *(They are all still on the ground)* We don't know, sire.

Servant 2: He must have learned to swim.

Servant 3: Very quickly.

Balloon: Swim! I'll give him swim! *(To ROOSTER)* Come here, you.

The ROOSTER begins waddling towards him.

Balloon: I don't know about learning to swim, but you've put on a lot of weight since I saw you last. Mmm. Nice plump bird. You'd go down well with roast potatoes and peas. That's it! We'll put him in the oven, and cook him! With gravy! Let's see you swim your way out of that, Little Rooster. *(To the SERVANTS)* Come on, you lot, get on your feet and catch him.

The SERVANTS get up and chase after the ROOSTER, catching him easily this time.

Balloon: Now don't overcook him. I'd like him just nicely browned.

Rooster: *(Held by the SERVANTS)* I didn't come here to be turned into your supper. I came here for my diamond button.

Balloon: You're not still on about that, are you?

Rooster: Yes, I am. I want it back.

Balloon: You want it back?

Rooster: Yes I do!

Balloon: Well then, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll decorate you with it ... when you're cooked, and sitting on my table. *(To the SERVANTS)* Take him away.

Rooster: *(As he's taken away)* Help me, somebody! Help! Cock-a-doodle-do! Help!

Balloon: *(To his CHIEF MINISTER as the ROOSTER is taken away)* Would you care to join me for supper this evening, Chief Minister?

Minister: It would be a pleasure, sire.

Balloon: Good. Shall we say half past seven?

Minister: *(Writing in his notebook)* Half ... past ... seven.

Balloon: *(Leaving with the CHIEF MINISTER)* Well, now we've settled the cushions and the curtains, what about the carpets?

By which time they have left the stage.

Narrator: So that would appear to be the end of it. Poor Little Rooster ... going to become the supper of the Grand Balloon. With all that water inside him there's no way he could escape. I'm so sorry ... if I'd realised this was going to be such a sad story I would never have begun reading it to you. I did so hope it was going to have a happy ending.

Rooster: *(Off-stage, loud and jubilant)* Cock-a-doodle-do!

Narrator: It can't be!

Rooster: *(Entering, no longer fat and heavy)* Cock-a-doodle-do!

Narrator: It is! It's the Little Rooster. Oh, Little Rooster, it's so good to see you. *(Looking at him doubtfully)* Is it really you?

Rooster: Oh, yes, it's me all right. Alive and fighting fit ...

Narrator: But ... the last time we saw you, you were being taken away to be ... to

be cooked ...

Rooster: (*Laughing*) A fire can't burn if it has water poured all over it.

Narrator: Water? Where did you get water from?

Rooster: From my full stomach, of course. Haven't you noticed my new, (*patting his stomach*) slim figure?

Narrator: You mean you ... you emptied the water ... that came from the well ... ?

Rooster: Exactly!

Narrator: Well, well.

Rooster: (*Offended*) If that's meant to be a joke ...

Narrator: (*Quickly*) Oh no. No. Of course not. (*Pause*) I suppose you're hungry again now.

Rooster: Hungry for revenge, that's what I am. Where is he, that great fat bubble of hot air? Just let me get at him!

He rushes off, full of energy.

Narrator: (*As the ROOSTER goes*) Best of luck, Little Rooster. (*Looking at the story book*) Now, where had we got to? (*Finding the place*) Ah yes, here we are. (*Reading*) Meanwhile ... back at the palace, the Grand Balloon was preparing to write an important letter ...

The BALLOON enters, carrying a sheet of paper. He is attended by his fat SERVANTS, the BALLOOMA, his CHIEF MINISTER, and his SECRETARY with her portable typewriter, box of pens, and a large shoulder bag.

Balloon: (*Holding out his hand*) Pen.

Secretary: (*Handing him one*) Sire.

Balloon: (*Starting to write*) How do you spell "thumb"?

Secretary: T-H-U-M-B, sire.

Balloon: (*Writing*) T-H-U-M-B. (*Stops writing*) "B"?

Secretary: Yes, sire. "B".

Balloon: What does it want a "B" for? It doesn't need a "B". It can say thumb perfectly well without a "B".

Secretary: That's how it's spelt, sire. With a "B".

Balloon: Well, it shouldn't be. (*Writing*) "B". (*Speaking*) I suppose you'll be telling me next that lamb has a "B" at the end of it.

Secretary: (*Timidly*) It has, sire.

Balloon: Well, it has no right to have. No good for making honey, your sort of "B's" are they?

Secretary: No, sire.

Balloon: (*Having trouble with his pen*) Blessed thing won't write. (*He throws it down angrily*) Give me another one.

Secretary: (*Nervously picking up the pen and handing the BALLOON another one*) Might I suggest, sire, that it would be easier if I typed it for you?

Balloon: No, you might not. Good heavens, can't I even write a letter for myself? Can't I have any privacy? I have these three (*pointing to the SERVANTS*) following me wherever I go, without having you as well. (*Pause*) I suppose you've got "B's" on that typewriter?

Secretary: Bees? (*Understanding*) Oh, "B's". Oh yes, yes of course, sire.

Balloon: Hmm. Well I'm not having any "B's" in my letter thank you. This is my private letter, and I shall spell it how I like.

The BALLOON goes on writing, with everyone watching him so intently that they don't see the LITTLE ROOSTER approaching on tiptoe, with a finger to his beak, telling the audience not to give him away.

Rooster: (*When he's ready, very loudly*) Cock-a-doodle-do!!

Everyone is startled. The CHIEF MINISTER collapses and is revived by the SERVANT's fan, others shriek and gasp, etc. The BALLOON's pen and paper go into the air. The SERVANTS tremble.

Rooster: (*Leaping in front of the BALLOON*) Grand Balloon, give me back my diamond button!

Balloon: You! Again! You're supposed to be ... you're supposed to be my supper! With sage and onion.

Rooster: Sage and onion? Oh, yummy. Oh, I am sorry to disappoint you. All right, that's enough of the jokes. (*Getting tough*) Where is it?

Balloon: Where's what?

Rooster: My diamond button, what d'you think?

Balloon: (*Also getting tough*) Listen, Little Rooster ... that ... is not ... YOUR ... diamond button! UNDERSTAND! NOT YOURS!

The ROOSTER stands still in front of the BALLOON. They stare hard at each other.

Balloon: ... So GO ... AWAY!

Secretary: Ooh ... ooh, Little Rooster ...

Rooster: (*Not looking at her, still staring at the GRAND BALLOON*) Yes. What?

Secretary: (*Silky and enticing*) Your diamond button ... it's here ... (*she opens her typewriter case*)

Rooster: (*Turning round to her*) Where?

Balloon: What are you talking about? My diamond button's not in there, it's in my treasure chamber ...

The SECRETARY and GRAND BALLOON speak together:

Secretary: } Come on, Little Rooster, it's here if you want it.

Balloon: } (*Together*) What's going on? This is nonsense!

Rooster: (*Unsure, but tempted*) Where? I can't see it.

Secretary: (*Pointing to the typewriter keyboard*) Here.

The LITTLE ROOSTER, the BALLOON, and any others who have gathered round, peer at the keyboard.

Balloon: I can't see anything ...

Secretary: (*Quickly clipping a handcuff, already attached to her own wrist, to the ROOSTER*) Got you!

Balloon: (*Letting out a deep breath*) Ooh ... you had me worried there for a bit ... not seriously, of course. I knew the diamond button couldn't possibly be in there. (*Pause*) That was a very clever idea. However did you think of it?

Secretary: Well, I ... er ...

Balloon: Come on, tell me.

Secretary: Well, you see, I ...

Balloon: You didn't think of it, is that what you're trying to say? Pinched somebody else's idea, I suppose. I might have known it.

Secretary: I saw it in a film, sire.

Balloon: (*Interested*) A film? What sort of film?

Secretary: (*Becoming very embarrassed*) An old ... a gangster film, sire.

Balloon: You mean James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart ... that sort of thing?

Secretary: (*Nervous*) Yes, sire.

Balloon: You like them, do you?

Secretary: (*Still unsure*) Er ... yes, sire.

Balloon: Splendid! Splendid. (*Confidentially*) I get a lot of my ideas from films, too. We must have a chat sometime.

Secretary: (*Quite overcome with relief*) Oh, thank you, sire. Thank you.

Balloon: Yes, all right, that's enough. (*Turning to the ROOSTER*) Now ... what are we going to do with him? (*To the SECRETARY*) Well?

Secretary: Me, sire?

Balloon: Yes, you. Or is one good idea all you have?

Secretary: No, sire. I have plenty of good ideas.

Balloon: Well, come on then, let's hear them.

Secretary: Well, we could ... um ... we could put him in with the bees. Sire.

Balloon: Do you mean "B"s, or bees?

Secretary: Er ... bees, sire. The bees that buzz ... and sting.

Balloon: Ah, yes. The bees that sting. The bees in my bee-hive.

Secretary: Yes, sire.

Balloon: Excellent! What you might call a stinging good idea!

He turns round for approval to his court, and what started off as a groan at such a feeble joke, turns into nervous laughter. Only the ROOSTER isn't laughing.

Secretary: Yes, sire. Thank you, sire.

Balloon: (*To SECRETARY*) And you shall have the honour of putting him there ... in the bee-hive. Take him away.

Secretary: Yes sire. Certainly, sire.

The SECRETARY picks up all her things and with the ROOSTER handcuffed to her,

leaves the stage.

Rooster: *(As he's taken away)* You can't do this to me. If you put me in a bee-hive I shall get stung. *(To the audience)* Help! Help! Cock-a-doodle-do! Help!

Balloon: *(Following them)* Come on, we'll go and watch. I want to make sure nothing goes wrong this time.

The BALLOON and his COURTIERS leave the stage.

While the NARRATOR is speaking, the bee-hive, with sound effects of buzzing bees, is brought on.

Narrator: So the Little Rooster, handcuffed to the Balloon's secretary, was taken to the Royal Bee-hive, which was full of angry, buzzing bees.

The LITTLE ROOSTER is brought on and put into the bee-hive. The BALLOON and his COURTIERS enter and watch.

Balloon: You won't get away this time, Little Rooster.

Servant 1: Go on, bees, sting him.

Servant 2: Give it to him, bees.

Servant 3: Make it hot for him.

The bees buzz loudly and the ROOSTER "cock-a-doodles" faintly and painfully.

Balloon: *(To the SERVANTS)* You're very lucky you're not all going in there too. *(The SERVANTS draw back and tremble)* ... It's what you deserve. And it's what you'll get ... if things go wrong again.

They all take a last look in the bee-hive, from which come faint, painful sounds.

Balloon: *(Satisfied all is well)* Come.

They all leave the stage. The NARRATOR wipes away a tear and blows his/her nose loudly. The bees buzz quietly.

Rooster: *(From inside the bee-hive)* Come my empty stomach, come my empty stomach, eat up all the bees in the Grand Balloon's bee-hive.

Narrator: *(Hopeful)* I do believe ...

The buzzing becomes loud again, then quiet, then finally stops altogether.

Narrator: *(Losing hope and turning away from the hive)* Oh no ... oh dear ... poor Little Rooster, he couldn't possibly survive ...

The LITTLE ROOSTER, his tummy fat again, emerges from the bee-hive.

Narrator: ... anything as awful as that. *(To audience)* Could he?

Seeing the ROOSTER, they should answer "yes".

Narrator: He could? *(Turns round and sees the ROOSTER)* He has! Oh, Little Rooster, you've done it again! *(Pause, looking at his tummy)* You've eaten all the bees!

Rooster: Yes, I've eaten all the bees. *(They give a buzz in his tummy. To the bees)* Settle down in there, d'you hear? *(Bees go quiet)* That's it. Now stay like that until I tell you to come out.

Narrator: What are you going to do with them, Little Rooster?

Rooster: I haven't quite decided. You should know, you've got the story there.

Narrator: Oh, I daren't look, in case something dreadful's going to happen again. Why don't you go home now?

Rooster: Home? Oh no, not yet. Not till I've got my diamond button. I'm going back to the palace.

Narrator: Oh dear. You will be careful, won't you?

Rooster: Don't worry. Between you and me, I have a feeling that I'm going to enjoy the next part of this adventure. And not before time either. *(He waves to the NARRATOR and the audience)* Bye. See you again soon. *(He leaves the stage)*

Narrator: *(Reading from the book)* So back to the palace he went. The Grand Balloon, who was feeling very happy, now he'd got rid of the Little Rooster at last *(looks up at the audience and puts a finger to his lips)* ... was having a party ...

As the NARRATOR speaks, the BALLOON, the SERVANTS, CHIEF MINISTER, the BALLOOMA, etc enter.

Narrator: ... *(Reading)* his dancing girls were there, his secretary was typing a letter ... his Chief Minister was organizing the refreshments ... and HE was watching an old film on a portable telly.

All these things are seen to happen. There is also music.

Balloon: *(To his SECRETARY)* Look, look! It's James Cagney. *(Imitating Cagney)* "You dirty rat". I like this bit. *(He watches intently for a moment, then to his SECRETARY)* Oh, thank you for typing that letter. Make sure you put in all the "B's" won't you? You were right; those words looked funny without them. *(The SECRETARY looks pleased. The BALLOON takes some sweetmeats from the CHIEF MINISTER)* Thank you, Chief Minister.

Minister: My pleasure, sire.

Balloon: It's good to see you working at last.

Minister: *(The smile fading)* I do my best, sire.

Balloon: I'm sure you do ... old chap! *(He reclines on his cushions)* Oh, what a splendid day! What a marvellous day! I'm so happy! *(and he beams a big smile at everyone)*

Rooster: *(From just behind the GRAND BALLOON, shatteringly loud)* Cock-a-doodle-do!!!

The GRAND BALLOON leaps high into the air, the SECRETARY freezes with fear, the DANCING GIRLS shriek and cling to one another, the SERVANTS quake, the CHIEF MINISTER raises his staff, plates of food spill everywhere. Only the BALLOOMA, mysterious and hidden in her black cloak, remains calm.

Balloon: *(Letting out a mighty roar)* NO!!! *(He pulls off his hat and stamps on it, then rushes around shouting at everyone)* You're fired! You're sacked! Go

away! All of you! You're useless!

They all withdraw, trembling.

In the meantime, the LITTLE ROOSTER has been watching with amusement. Now he struts up to the BALLOON.

Rooster: *(Very sweetly and calmly)* Dear Grand Balloon ... please ... please ... give me back my diamond button, then I'll go away and you'll never have to see me again. Never, I promise.

Balloon: *(Jumping up and down)* No! No!! No!!! It's not yours, it's mine ... and I will NOT give it to you. *(He sighs deeply)* What am I to do with you? I can't drown you, I can't cook you ... and somehow, you've got out of my bee-hive, a bee-hive full of the world's best stinging bees. *(Almost tearful, he turns to his courtiers)* What am I going to do with him? Come on, help me.

Pause. Things have gone so wrong they hesitate to suggest anything.

Balloon: Well?

Servant 1: *(Timidly)* You could chop his head off.

They all shudder and say "UGH".

Balloon: No. Too messy. Next.

Servant 2: You could hang him from the flagpole.

Balloon: No. You're too fat to get up there. Next.

Servant 3: *(In a small voice)* You could sit on him.

They all turn slowly to stare at the 3rd SERVANT who begins to fan himself rapidly he's so embarrassed.

Balloon: What did you say?

Servant 3: *(Fanning faster)* I said ... you could sit on him ... sire.

Balloon: *(Considering it)* Sit on him ... hmm. Sit on him.

Servant 3: It was just an idea. *(Pause)* Sorry.

Balloon: You have no need to be sorry. It's a brilliant idea. I like it. *(The 3rd SERVANT gulps)* I like it a lot. *(The 3rd SERVANT hides behind the fan)* Bring him here. *(Pause)* I'm talking to you.

Servant 3: *(Peering out from behind the fan)* Me, sire?

Balloon: Yes, you. It was your idea. Bring the Little Rooster here.

Servant 3: *(Beaming with joy, but unsure what to do with his fan - take it or give it to someone to hold)* Yes, sire. Coming, sire.

Balloon: Well, get on with it, or he'll have flown away before you get to him! Oh dear, oh dear ...

Ballooma: *(From behind her cloak)* Oh do come on, I'll hold it for you.

They all look at her with amazement.

Balloon: Well done, my dear. Well done.

While the 3rd SERVANT is giving his fan to the BALLOOMA, the CHIEF MINISTER leans toward the BALLOON.

Minister: Be careful, sire. Be on your guard. I rather suspect a plot. The fellow's being much too agreeable.

Balloon: Plot? Rubbish. There's no plot. He's just given in. *(To the ROOSTER)* Haven't you?

Rooster: It looks like it.

Balloon: *(To CHIEF MINISTER)* There you are, you see. I told you. Nothing to worry about. *(To the LITTLE ROOSTER)* Sensible fellow. *(Smiling at him)* I shan't make you suffer too much, I'm a reasonable man. *(To the 3rd SERVANT)* Right. Pop him in. *(Two SERVANTS hold open the wide bag of the BALLOON's trousers and the 3rd SERVANT lifts the ROOSTER into it)* That's the way.

Rooster: *(As he's lifted in)* Oh well, this looks like being the end. *(And he disappears from view)*

Secretary: *(Quietly, anxious)* Being ...? The end ...? Oh dear, I do hope not. I know who'll get the blame.

Balloon: There we are, that's over. *(To the CHIEF MINISTER, who is hovering anxiously)* Well, come on, let's get on with the party. *(Clapping his hands for the SERVANTS)* Music! Food! Entertainment!

The SERVANTS get busy with the food.

There is music and the GIRLS begin to dance.

Balloon: *(To the BALLOOMA)* Are you all right, my dear? *(Behind her veil the BALLOOMA nods)* Good, good. *(To the CHIEF MINISTER)* Switch the telly on again, will you? *(To the SECRETARY)* And you get on with your letter. I'll give you another one to do when that's ... *(Suddenly he leaps into the air, roaring with agony. There is a sound of buzzing which continues throughout the scene)* Ow!!! I've been stung! *(He jumps about in pain)*

Minister: Been wondering where those bees had gone. Rather think they've been found.

Buzzing increases and everyone swats the air as though fighting off the bees.

Rooster: *(Appearing from where the BALLOON was seated)* Cock-a-doodle-do! Grand Balloon, give me back my diamond button.

Balloon: *(Still hopping about and moaning)* Oh, take your wretched diamond button, I don't want it. Someone take him to the treasure chamber. Just get him out of my way.

The SERVANTS, warily, as there are still buzzing sounds coming from him, take him off stage.

Balloon: *(To the SECRETARY)* This is your fault. Putting him in the bee-hive was your idea. You're fired.

Secretary: But, sire I ...

Balloon: Fired, d'you hear me? Sacked. Not wanted. Much good your typewriter's

done me. “B’s”, stupid “B’s”. From now on there’ll be no more “B’s” ... of any kind. *(To everyone)* Is that understood?

Everyone: Yes, sire.

Balloon: Yes, sire, what?

Everyone: No bees, sire. Of any kind.

Minister: *(Writing it down)* No ... bees ... of ... any ... kind.

Balloon: That’s right.

The LITTLE ROOSTER returns, his stomach full again.

Balloon: *(To the ROOSTER)* Well, have you got it?

Rooster: Yes, I’ve got it. Here it is. *(Holding it for everyone to see, then looking at it)* Not worth all this fuss, though. *(To the BALLOON)* I’m surprised you wanted it at all, with all the other stuff you had in there. Compared with some of the jewels you’ve got, this is a ...

Balloon: *(Weary)* Oh, go away, go away.

Rooster: Just one more thing, then I’ll go.

Balloon: *(Resigned)* What is it?

Rooster: Your hat. I’ve taken a fancy to it. I think it would suit me.

Balloon: If I give it to you, will you go?

Rooster: I’ll go.

Balloon: And never come back again?

Rooster: Never.

Balloon: Promise?

Rooster: Promise. I’ve nothing to come back for, not now.

Balloon: Very well. Here. Take it. *(He takes off his hat and throws it at the LITTLE ROOSTER, who puts it on, then takes it off again)*

Rooster: No. I’ll take it home to my old woman. She’ll look very smart in it, very smart indeed. Poor old woman, she hasn’t got much. *(To the DANCING GIRLS and the SECRETARY)* Do you know ... she’s so poor, and so hungry ... she was going to have to eat ME. She had no choice, she was starving. One diamond button, that’s all I wanted. One small button ... nothing to him, a fortune to her.

1st Dancer: Ah ... and he has so much.

2nd Dancer: How could he be so mean?

3rd Dancer: He could have spared just one button.

4th Dancer: It wasn’t even his. The Little Rooster found it.

1st Dancer: Come on, Little Rooster, we’ll take you home.

They begin to take him away, being motherly to him.

2nd Dancer: We’ll make sure you get there safely.

3rd Dancer: *(As they are leaving)* We’re sorry we tricked you before.

4th Dancer: We wouldn’t have done it if we’d known.

Balloon: Huh! Well, if that's the way you feel, you needn't come back. (*He glares at all the GIRLS*) Any of you.

Ballooma: Good. (*Everyone looks at her in amazement*) I've never liked any of them. They always made me feel so dull. And I'm not. (*She unfastens her cloak, revealing beautiful, shimmering clothes*) What's more, I can type, too. *She goes over to the SECRETARY and takes the typewriter from her. The GRAND BALLOON watches, openmouthed.*

Minister: I say ... intelligent, and beautiful.

Balloon: Of course.

Secretary: (*To the DANCING GIRLS*) I might as well come with you. There's nothing for me here any more.

Rooster: Well, come on, hurry up. I want to get home to my poor old woman. She'll be wondering where I've got to.

As the ROOSTER is about to leave with the DANCING GIRLS, the THREE SERVANTS enter and fling themselves down on the ground in front of the GRAND BALLOON.

Servant 1: Oh, sire, forgive us, forgive us.

Servant 2: It was an accident, sire, we didn't mean it to happen.

Balloon: Accident? What are you talking about? What have you done?

Servant 3: Oh, sire ... your treasure chamber, sire.

Rooster: Oh-oh. It's time I wasn't here. Come on, girls. Let's get out while we can. *He rushes them off, unseen by the BALLOON.*

Dancers: (*As they go*) What's the matter? What's happened?

Rooster: (*As he leaves*) I'll tell you on the way. Come on. Quick! It's a pity you can't fly.

Balloon: What about my treasure chamber?

Servant 1: It's ... er ...

Servant 2: Some of your jewels are missing, sire.

Balloon: (*Grabbing the 2nd SERVANT by his collar and hauling him up*) Some of them? How many of them?

Servant 2: (*Choking*) A lot of them, sire.

Balloon: (*Grabbing the 3rd SERVANT in the same way*) How many?

Servant 3: (*In little more than a whisper*) All of them, sire.

Balloon: All of them?

Servant 3: Yes, sire.

He bangs their heads together, lets go of them, and they fall on the floor.

Servant 1: (*As the other SERVANTS recover*) Oh, please don't blame us, sire, we didn't know what he was doing.

Pause.

Balloon: He? Who is he? (*But he knows the answer*)

The SERVANTS shake and tremble.

Balloon: (*Menacingly*) I asked you ... who is “he”?

Servant 1: (*Stuttering, his teeth chattering*) The ... the ... the ... li ... li ... little ... rr...
roo ... roo ... rooster. Sire.

Balloon: (*Letting out a great roar of anger*) Ohhh!!! (*He goes to take his hat off and finds it's not there*) Somebody give me a hat so I can jump on it.

All those with hats quickly take them off and fling them down in front of the GRAND BALLOON. He chooses the CHIEF MINISTER's top hat, much to his dismay, and jumps up and down on it, making angry noises.

Balloon: Ah. That's better. Now I can think about what to do.

Servant 1: D..d..d..do, sire?

Balloon: Oh, not about you, you fool. I've got to decide what to do about that Little Rooster. Chief Minister, come here.

The CHIEF MINISTER is busy trying to push his top hat back into shape.

Balloon: Oh. Leave that alone. I'll get you another one. We have far more important things than hats to worry about.

Minister: Sire?

Balloon: What's it to be?

Minister: What, sire?

Balloon: Oh, give me patience! (*Shouting*) What am I going to do with that confounded Little Rooster, you great nincompoop!

Minister: Ah. Yes. Quite so. Sticky one, that. Well, let's see ...fire, no. Water, no.

Balloon: We've done those, and they don't work. Or don't you remember?

Minister: So we have. (*Pause*) Need to think about this one, sire. (*Thinking*) Mmmm.

Balloon: (*To everyone else*) Well, go on, the rest of you can think too. (*To the audience*) And you. I expect you're on the Little Rooster's side, aren't you? Yes, bound to be.

Minister: I have it, sire. The very thing!

Balloon: Well ... come on, let's hear it.

Minister: A fishing net.

Balloon: A fishing net?

Minister: Yes, sire. Allow me to explain. We take this very large fishing net, and we spread it over the pond ...

Balloon: Yes?

Minister: And then ...

The GRAND BALLOON and the CHIEF MINISTER start to walk off the stage, followed by the COURTIERS. The BALLOOMA remains on stage.

Minister: ... we persuade the Rooster, having tricked him, of course, into supposing that there's an abundance of fish in the pond ... (*By which time they are off*

stage)

Ballooma: (*Laughing*) Ha, ha ... oh dear ... a fishing net! They'll never catch him with that. The Little Rooster's far too clever! Mind you, it's just the sort of thing the Rooster could use on them. I can just see the Balloon thinking he could walk on the water! I think I'll go and see what the Little Rooster's up to. I wouldn't be surprised if he's having a party!

She exits, going the way of the ROOSTER.

Narrator: (*To the audience*) Well ...? Was the Ballooma right? Did the Grand Balloon ever catch the Little Rooster? No, of course he didn't. The Rooster did have a party, though. (*Looks at the book*) It says so here. In fact I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll read you the rest of the story, and then I'll go and join the party. (*Reading*) "The Little Rooster took the diamond button home to his old woman. 'It's very beautiful' she said, 'but we can't eat it'. So the Little Rooster sold the diamond button, and bought food, and clothes, and warm covers for their beds. As for the Grand Balloon ... without his treasure he wasn't very grand." (*Stops reading, closes the book*) I do hope he learnt not to be so greedy. And mean.

Music is heard off stage.

Narrator: ... Hello, what's going on?

Sounds come nearer and the LITTLE ROOSTER enters, holding a large balloon with a cartoon of the GRAND BALLOON on it. He is followed by the OLD WOMAN wearing a beautiful shawl and the GRAND BALLOON's hat. The DANCING GIRLS and the SECRETARY, all in jeans and T-shirts with the words "FRIENDS OF THE LITTLE ROOSTER" enter, and the BALLOOMA in her shining dress.

Narrator: It's the party! Oh great, they're having it here!

The NARRATOR puts down the book and begins to dance.

One of the DANCING GIRLS gives the NARRATOR a "ROOSTER" T-shirt.

Narrator: Oh, thank you. I'm certainly a friend of the Little Rooster. (*To the audience*) I'm so glad the story had a happy ending.

Rooster: So am I. When I think of all I've been through just because of that big bag of hot air, that Balloon ... thank goodness he's been popped at last. (*And taking a hat pin from the OLD WOMAN, he pops the balloon he's been holding*)

Come on, everyone, let's enjoy ourselves!

The music gets louder and everyone on stage takes a member of the audience to dance with them.

Everyone: (*As they dance*) Goodbye, everyone. Goodbye.

They all wave and dance off.

THE END