



ALL RISE

BY SIMON COOKE

CHARACTERS: NARRATOR, LITTLE RED HEN, DOG, CAT, RAT, FOREPERSON

Scene 1. *The LITTLE RED HEN is centre stage, dressed like a judge.*

The NARRATOR is sitting to the side, eating a sandwich.

NARRATOR (to the audience). Everyone knows the story of the Little Red Hen. Undervalued. Overworked. A feathery legend from down on the farm.

LITTLE RED HEN. Thanks, Narrator. It's good to be appreciated.

NARRATOR. Little Red Hen worked selflessly, without help from the lazy dog, the lazy cat, and the lazy rat – her friends! So what happened *after* the story ended? Did Little Red Hen eat the bread by herself, or did she share it? Did her friends learn their lesson?

LITTLE RED HEN (to the narrator). Would you please not scatter crumbs? I'm the one who has to sweep up.

NARRATOR. Sorry. I have one final question. Why are you dressed like a judge?

LITTLE RED HEN. Because the court of the Little Red Hen is now in session. All rise. Judge Little Red Hen presiding.

NARRATOR (to the audience). How exciting. A courtroom drama! We can watch justice in action.

LITTLE RED HEN (to the narrator). Bring in the guilty criminals.

NARRATOR. Um, I'm not sure that's my job ... and isn't it a bit early to say they're guilty? We haven't heard the charges or seen the evidence.

LITTLE RED HEN. That's what I'm about to do. Now can you please just help, or do I have to get them myself?

NARRATOR (muttering). Fine, fine.

The NARRATOR goes off-stage and returns with DOG, CAT, and RAT.

LITTLE RED HEN. Dog, Cat, and Rat: you are charged with two crimes.

The first – laziness. You three never help out. I have to do *everything* around here. Cleaning, cooking, sitting on the eggs ... the list is endless!

The second, more serious charge is theft. Someone stole my bread.

DOG. What bread?

LITTLE RED HEN. *The bread.* The loaf I'm famous for. Remember?

DOG. She bakes one lousy loaf and acts like a celebrity baker. I rolled in something smelly the other day, but you don't hear me bragging.

CAT (to Little Red Hen). Oh, *that* bread. I thought you ate it?

LITTLE RED HEN. I was going to, but I had to make butter first. All by myself. Then jam ... *by myself.* And while I was busy doing *all* that, one of you lazy good-for-nothings stole my bread!

DOG. We wouldn't do that!

CAT. We're friends!

LITTLE RED HEN. Friends? Friends would help plant the wheat. Friends would help harvest the wheat. Friends would help bake. Friends would ... help! I'm overworked. My feathers are falling out. I'm a wreck.

RAT. Get a grip – it was only a loaf of bread.

LITTLE RED HEN. That's it! I find you guilty –

NARRATOR (*interrupting*). Ah, excuse me, Little Red Hen. No one's guilty yet, remember? The trial's not over.

LITTLE RED HEN. Fine. First defendant, Dog. Regarding the charge of laziness: do you deny you ignored my plea to help plant the wheat? Do you deny you said "Not I!" because you wanted to chase a ball?

DOG. I don't –

LITTLE RED HEN (*interrupting*). Lies! There speaks a guilty conscience! Second defendant, Cat. Do you deny that when I asked for help to harvest the wheat, you said "Not I!" because you wanted to catnap?

CAT. I –

LITTLE RED HEN (*interrupting*). See! Cat can't deny it!

CAT. But I didn't –

LITTLE RED HEN (*interrupting*). And third defendant, Rat. Do you deny that when I asked for help to grind the wheat, you laughed and said, "I'd rather stick my head in a bucket of rotten fish"?

RAT (*shrugging*). If I remember rightly, it was a bucket of –

LITTLE RED HEN (*interrupting*). A-ha! Four confessions.

NARRATOR. Actually, I think there were only three. And they weren't confessions. They weren't even complete sentences. They haven't had a chance to defend themselves.

LITTLE RED HEN. Rubbish. What we've heard today is enough for any jury to deliver a guilty verdict.

NARRATOR. This isn't justice. Judges are meant to be impartial.

LITTLE RED HEN. Fine, let a jury decide. Their decision will be impartial. Narrator – get the foreperson.

NARRATOR. What foreperson?

LITTLE RED HEN. There's a foreperson off-stage. Just get them!

The NARRATOR goes off-stage and returns with the FOREPERSON.



FOREPERSON. Yes, Mum?

LITTLE RED HEN. I know you and your jury heard the pathetic excuses of Dog, Cat, and Rat. What is your verdict?

NARRATOR. This is –

LITTLE RED HEN (*interrupting*). Be quiet, Narrator, or I'll have you thrown out of court. Foreperson of the jury (who is certainly not my chick), has the jury (definitely not my eleven other chicks) come to a decision?

FOREPERSON. Yes, Mum ... I mean not-Mum. The jury has found the defendants three clucks.

NARRATOR. Three clucks? That's nonsense. Three clucks isn't a verdict!

FOREPERSON. Yes, it is. We decided one cluck means not guilty, two clucks mean guilty, and three clucks means really guilty.

NARRATOR. This is ridiculous. This is a kangaroo court!

LITTLE RED HEN (*insulted*). I'm a *chicken*, as you know. Now, shall we move on to the more serious charge of theft. Dog, how do you plead?

DOG. Definitely not guilty. I might be lazy, but I'd never steal from you. You're my friend.

LITTLE RED HEN. We'll see about that. Cat, how do you plead?

CAT. Not guilty. Dog's right – we'd never steal from you.

LITTLE RED HEN (*sarcastically*). Huh. And, Rat, how do you plead?

RAT. I'm gluten intolerant. I couldn't eat your bread even if I wanted to.

NARRATOR (*to the audience*). It looks like Little Red Hen and her jury are in trouble. There's no evidence, and the defendants sound genuine.

LITTLE RED HEN. But if it wasn't one of you lot, then who?

NARRATOR. Sometimes in life, mysteries are never solved. Which seems to be the case of Little Red Hen and the Stolen Bread.

DOG. Little Red Hen, we know you're upset, and you have every right to be ...

CAT. From now on, we promise to help more.

RAT. Yes, you won't need to lift a feather.

LITTLE RED HEN. That sounds wonderful!

RAT. Doesn't it?

FOREPERSON. Can I go, Mum?



Scene 2. *Later that day. The LITTLE RED HEN is resting, and the NARRATOR is eating another sandwich.*

NARRATOR (*to the audience*). And so the Little Red Hen finally gets some well-deserved rest. She can put her feet up while her friends do the work. Mind you, I haven't seen them for a while.

LITTLE RED HEN (*to the narrator*). This is wonderful. I should rest more often. Although ...

NARRATOR. What is it, Little Red Hen?

LITTLE RED HEN. The grass is getting long. Maybe I'd better get a –

NARRATOR (*interrupting*). No, your friends promised to help.

LITTLE RED HEN. You're right. (*Calling*) Rat! Can you mow the grass? (*Silence*) Where's Rat gone? And Dog? (*Calling*) Dog, can you put out the recycling? (*Silence*) This isn't fair. (*Calling*) Cat? You went for my lunch three hours ago ...

NARRATOR. Oh, dear. Old habits die hard.

LITTLE RED HEN. That's it! I'm going to reconvene the court, Judge Little Red Hen presiding!

NARRATOR *(to the audience)*. And there you have it. The end! If there's a moral, maybe it's that you can't teach an old dog (and their friends) new tricks. But the mystery remains. What happened to Little Red Hen's bread?

LITTLE RED HEN *(pointing at the narrator's sandwich)*. Hold it, Narrator. Where did you get that bread?

NARRATOR *(looking around, guiltily)*. What bread?

LITTLE RED HEN. The bread in your hand. It looks exactly like *my* bread! You've been caught bread-handed!

NARRATOR. It was just lying around, unwanted.

LITTLE RED HEN. Unwanted! Haven't you been listening?

NARRATOR *(rolls eyes)*. It's just a loaf of bread. Get a grip, Little Red Hen.

LITTLE RED HEN. That's it! You're first up in the guilty witness stand.

The NARRATOR runs off-stage.

illustrations by Zak Komene



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