

PERUSAL SCRIPT

THE BLACK KNIGHT

by

Matthew Ivan Bennett

based on French/German folklore

Part 3 of YULETIDE - Episode 9 in the **RADIO HOUR** Series



Newport, Maine

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THE BLACK KNIGHT

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CAST OF CHARACTERS - 1F 3M 1BOY

Adeline Meyer (F) - A dedicated mother

Jacob Grimm (M) - Of the Brothers Grimm. Collecting the story of *The Black Knight*

Edsel Meyer (M) - A spiteful and petty man

Con Meyer (boy) - A sensitive child

Hans Trapp (M) - A supernatural evil being; a demon

Period Costumes or contemporary clothes

Radio Station setting

Sound Effects required (can be Foley, recorded, or a mix of both. Music required.)

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THE BLACK KNIGHT by Matthew Ivan Bennett Part 3 of YULETIDE - Episode 9 in the RADIO HOUR Series. 4M 1F Period Costumes or contemporary clothes. Radio Station setting. SFX essential. Staged Radio Drama, Radio Broadcast, Fully-Staged Production, or Virtual Theatre. 53 minutes. A deliciously dark thriller for the holidays, *The Black Knight* recounts the French/German legend of the demon Hans Trapp, charged with punishing the wicked at Christmas. The very dark “Knight” has some mild language and intense and verbally-gory situations not recommended for children. YULETIDE was a co-production between Salt Lake City’s Plan-B Theatre Company and the University of Utah’s Public Radio station KUER's Radio West. **ORDER #3243.3**

MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT is a resident of Plan-B Theatre, listed by American Theater magazine as one of 14 companies nationwide exemplifying social action and civic engagement. At Plan-B, he’s premiered several stage and radio plays, including an adaptation of “*Frankenstein*” that won a Utah Broadcasters Association award, and “*Eric(a)*”—which won Best Drama at the United Solo festival in New York. He received the Holland New Voices award from the Great Plains Theatre Commons, has twice been a finalist in screenwriting at Austin Film Festival, and in 2016 was an O'Neill finalist. His short plays have appeared at Chicago's Circle Theatre, Rising Sun in New York, Monkeyman in Toronto, and the Source Festival in DC. Matt is a member of the Dramatists’ Guild.

THE BLACK KNIGHT

F/X: *Teapot (whistling, then screaming—for a long beat before it's pulled away);
Footsteps—with cane;
Pouring;
Hearth (in the background.)*

ADELINE: *(mid 50s)* You look like a sugar man. Sugar?

JACOB: *(late 20s)* Plain will be sufficient. Thank you.

ADELINE: It's no trouble. Despite the miserable character of my kitchen, I do very well for myself. I can afford sugar, Mr. Grimm.

JACOB: Well then, please, begin dispensing it.

F/X: *A heaping three spoonfuls; stirring.*

ADELINE: You seem young to be writing a book. Too many young people write books.

JACOB: You think so? Are you a very wide reader, Mrs. Meyer?

ADELINE: *(sitting; effort)* I read. But I doubt that I will turn your pages, Mr. Grimm.

JACOB: *(laughs)* Can you be so sure from two minutes with me?

ADELINE: I can be sure a man with boots as shiny as yours never set his mind on the common folk or what interests them.

JACOB: Your directness charms me, Mrs. Meyer, but I must contradict you: I came here in pursuit of the folk and I daresay my book will interest you in a way you may not expect. For *you* could be one of its authors.

ADELINE: Me.

JACOB: Yes indeed. Strictly speaking, *I* am not writing a book, Madame. Only editing one.
(she grunts)

You see, I'm collecting household tales, fairy stories—for the nursery, and for grown-ups. We—my brother and I—are reconnecting the folk to their lore. So much has been lost, you know. But with the assistance of fabulists like you, we can restore for all of Germany—

ADELINE: “Fabulists”?

JACOB: Storytellers. Anecdotists. Raconteurs.

ADELINE: Who told you I was anything of the kind? Was it Mr. Schmidt? Were you down at the pub before your evening meal, sir?

JACOB: Yes, I often stop in alehouses—

ADELINE: Do you?

JACOB: To track down the local talents. He said you had a wonderfully complete version of “The Black Knight.”

ADELINE: Did he now.

JACOB: He did—he suggested, in fact, I would root out no finer teller of the tale.

ADELINE: —Get out.

JACOB: I beg pardon?

ADELINE: Leave here.

JACOB: Ah, he did indicate you might be unwilling. Now am I prepared to pay—

F/X: *Fist on the table.*

ADELINE: I am not unwilling, Mr. Grimm; I am furious. My story is not for sale and it does not belong in a fancy pack of fairy stories. Tell that to Mr. Schmidt.

JACOB: —But you do know a variant of “The Black Knight”?

ADELINE: Are you in on it?! Did they sic you on me?

JACOB: Madam, I am genuine. I came only for the story.

ADELINE: Hans Trapp is no story! He’s blood and bone!

(Beat: JACOB laughs...)

F/X: *She breaks a cup.*

JACOB: *(stops laughing...)* Ah. You were not jesting. So you...actually believe in him?

ADELINE: The Black Knight is a man like you.

JACOB: Yes, the story has an historical basis. He was a German knight circa 1450—

ADELINE: He still lives, Mr. Grimm. He gave me this scar, on my cheek here. My limp.

JACOB: Right. Now I think it is you and the barkeep making merry with *me*. I should go.

F/X: *Chair.*

ADELINE: I am a Christian lady, Mr. Grimm: if I lie the Devil take my tongue. I met Hans Trapp on the road to Sturzelbronn twenty-seven years ago at Christmas.

F/X: *Blizzard (briefly, in memory.)*

JACOB: Sturzelbronn.

ADELINE: On the road to, in the forest.

MUSIC

(HANS TRAPP darkly chuckling, in memory)

JACOB: Did he have pointy teeth and old straw jutting from his clothes? Little bells on?

ADELINE: Young man, you may have been to university and memorized a good deal of Greek, but I guarantee if you publish “The Black Knight” as a nurse’s tale you *will* harm someone—likely a child. So. Put another log in the stove for me.

JACOB: Mrs. Meyer, the day fades, and as my lodging situation—

ADELINE: You’ll stay with me. You’ve gotten my hackles up and till they’re down you’ll sup at my table, sleep at my hearth, and listen well.

JACOB: My dear lady, as appealing as your fire—

ADELINE: I lost two husbands that year, and a little boy. The records can prove it.

F/X: *Blizzard (in memory)*

The snow came; the sickness came; Death came.

MUSIC: ORGAN

JACOB: Madam, I am sorry. But—

ADELINE: If you’re sorry you can show it by sharing some soup—and listening.

F/X: *Coughing (male.)*

It took my Berit in three days. We kissed for the first time at the bonfires of Sommertagszug; when we kissed for the last time, *he* was the fire. His fever.

F/X: *Groaning (male); Shoveling.*

I would have had to bury him myself—had it not been for Edsel. You remind me of him, you know. You sound a little like him, Mr. Grimm.

(back in time...)

F/X: *Wind... Shoveling... Boots in snow...*

EDSEL: Adeline! Adeline! What the devil are you doing out here?

ADELINE: *(late 20s)* Have you lost your eyes, Edsel? What does it look like?

EDSEL: *(sighs)* He’s passed on then?

ADELINE: If you want to call it that. Just before dawn.

EDSEL: Where’s your coat?

ADELINE: Con.

EDSEL: Where is he? Why's he not helping? Con!

ADELINE: It was hardly two hours ago, Edsel, leave off.

EDSEL: He ought to be helping his mother, dammit. Con!

ADELINE: —He ain't four years old, leave 'im be.

EDSEL: Where's he hidin'? You in the barn, Con?!

ADELINE: He's in the trees.

EDSEL: By himself?

ADELINE: He's a smart boy.

EDSEL: He's a dreamer. *Con!* Get over here and move this earth for your mother!

ADELINE: —How about *you* give me a hand? He was your brother after all.

F/X: *Shoveling...*

EDSEL: God help me. Forgive me, Adeline. I shouldn't be... I'm just... Here, take my coat, give me the shovel. Go find your boy before the wolves do.

MUSIC

ADELINE: (*narrating; to JACOB*) Digging that hole may have been the only kindness Edsel Meyer ever showed me. Certainly, it was no kindness when he offered his hand in marriage.

F/X: *Church bells.*

(*narrating; to JACOB*)

Had I been in my right mind, I would have socked him for even suggesting it. He wanted the farm, that was plain to see, but grief can make you un-see many a thing, Mr. Grimm. Did I know Edsel Meyer had run off his wife with that temper? Course I knew. He and my Berit were cut from two cloths. Berit got the silk, but Edsel? He was leather, outside and in.

F/X: *Chopping (potatoes); Pages turning.*

(*CON humming throughout*)

EDSEL: Adeline. I told you to harness up the mule.

ADELINE: Edsel, it's going to storm, have you seen the sky? We may as well go tomorrow and try to enjoy Christmas morning in our own house.

EDSEL: They're expecting us.

ADELINE: I doubt they are now.

EDSEL: The clouds are too high for any storming.

ADELINE: They'll drop soon.

EDSEL: *(re: Con)* What's he doing?

(snapping)

Hey. Boy. The family Bible's not a plaything.

ADELINE: He's looking at the pictures; he's not doing any harm.

EDSEL: Con. You hear me?

(CON hums)

EDSEL: Shut up and look up.

(CON hums)

EDSEL: Hey!

(he claps)

Are you goin' daft?!

(CON stops humming)

ADELINE: No he is not! He's still finding his feet in all this.

EDSEL: Why's he not talking to me?

ADELINE: He's not saying much to me either. Give it time.

EDSEL: —I don't want his grubby hands in all the books.

ADELINE: Why not? Someone here ought to handle them.

(CON starts up humming)

F/X: *Boots.*

EDSEL: *(getting closer; under his breath)* ... Was that meant to be a slight?

ADELINE: *(under her breath)* Go back to clearing the tree line, Edsel.

EDSEL: *(still low)* Did you give this guff to my brother?

ADELINE: *(still low)* I had no need to.

EDSEL: *(lower than before)* "No need," eh? You had him broken pretty well?

ADELINE: We had a good understanding.

EDSEL: Yeah? Well...I think we will too.

(kisses her on the cheek)

Now you harness the mule. When I finish up in the field, we ride to my parents' place. A new tradition. It always hurt them that you and Berit never came. You hurt my mother's feelings. But, you can set things right. We leave at noon—not a minute a later, alright?

(to CON)

Boy! Scrub your hands.

F/X: *A heavy book closing (transition.)*

ADELINE: *(narrating, to JACOB)* I should've put my chopping knife in his ribs right then. It would've been a mercy—had I known who was waiting on the road.

F/X: *Wind; Mule (and cart.)*

EDSEL: *(in the past)* Damn it all. Your sour mood has gotten mixed up in the weather.

ADELINE: I'm sure that's it.

EDSEL: There's going to be a foot of snow on the ground.

ADELINE: We should try and turn back.

EDSEL: We're more than halfway.

ADELINE: No, that's the Hubers' old farm.

EDSEL: I know which it is—and the Hubers' lies closer to Sturzelbronn than home.

ADELINE: It lies farther from Sturzelbronn.

F/X: *Gust of wind.*

(CON whimpering)

(rubbing his back and arms) It's alright, Con, it's alright, we'll turn around.

(EDSEL grouches)

ADELINE: *(to CON)* We'll be back by the fire in a wink, OK? We'll curl up together with hot cider and when we nod off, Father Christmas—

EDSEL: Don't you blather to him about Father Christmas.

ADELINE: *And when we nod off—*

EDSEL: The fire will go out and the the smoke will rise up into Heaven with your dreams, boy, and the angels will catch 'em in a bottle and when you've been extra good? They'll break your bottle on a mountaintop!

F/X: *SNAP! (wooden wheel breaking); Mule whinnes.*

ALL: Ahh!

F/X: *Cart stops; Wind...*

EDSEL: Well ain't that a Christmas miracle.

ADELINE: Was that the wheel?

EDSEL: Course it was the wheel.

ADELINE: Do we have a spare?

EDSEL: That was the spare.

ADELINE: Can you fix it?

EDSEL: Out here in the ice?

ADELINE: Will you try, please?

EDSEL: Had we set out earlier...

ADELINE: Well, we didn't, so just hop out and...have a peek at it, Edsel.

EDSEL: —It's cracked in two!

ADELINE: Before the three of us turn blue, go see what you can manage already.

EDSEL: *(sighs; heaves himself down, grumbling in frustration as he goes)*

F/X: *Boots (in snow.)*

ADELINE: *(privately)* Are you OK, Son?

(CON pouting: "uh-uhn")

ADELINE: No? Can I blow on your hands? I'm part dragon, you know. Want a bit of dragon breath?

(CON "uh-huh")

ADELINE: OK. Give 'em here.

(blows on his hands)

EDSEL: *(from behind)* Officially broken!

(kicks the wheel)

F/X: *Splintering.*

ADELINE: Hey, no need for that! Put your strength into a plan.

EDSEL: The plan is: wait for a new wheel. Someone's bound to come by.

ADELINE: In this?! I think that we'd better trudge out to the Huber's cottage.

EDSEL: The roof fell in on that hovel years ago.

(CON gives a little gasp—he has seen something; his breath quickens...)

ADELINE: It's the only shelter in three miles, Edsel, and this blizzard is only beginnin'.

EDSEL: —It's a not blizzard, woman.

ADELINE: You said a "foot of snow," what is that?

CON: (*whispering*) Mommy.

EDSEL: —A foot is a foot of snow; it could let up.

ADELINE: It could make us into mannikins till the first of March.

CON: (*whispering*) Mommy.

EDSEL: —If you carry on like that it will.

CON: Mommy.

EDSEL: Not now, boy.

ADELINE: Dontcha give him "Not now" when he's spoken to us! You rail at him for not speaking and then you hit him with "Not now." What is it, darling? Go ahead.

CON: (*very faint*) A man.

ADELINE: A what now? Say it so Mommy can hear you, Con. So we both can hear.

CON: (*loud fearful whisper*) A man.

CREEP OF MUSIC

ADELINE: (*confused*) You saw a man? Where, Sweet?

(*he points*)

Over there?

EDSEL: What's he pointing at?

ADELINE: I...I think that scarecrow there, in the field.

(*CON "uh-uhn"*)

ADELINE: No? Not the scarecrow?

EDSEL: Prob'ly a deer.

ADELINE: He saw someone!

(*into the field*)

Hello?! Is somebody out there?!

MUSICAL STING

(*narrating to JACOB*)

As we trod through the snow to the farmhouse—

F/X: *Boots (in snow)...*

I kept my eye on that sagging lonely scarecrow in the winter wheat. Edsel had a mean barking laugh at me for “talking to an empty field,” but...I grew up in a place where a girl has to pay attention, Mr. Grimm. You town folk’ll say, “Hans Trapp is coming!” to scare a girl into soapin’ behind her ears. If we say it, we mean the man’s shadow is in your yard. So if I was keepin’ one eye on that scarecrow, I had my reasons: Who put a scarecrow in a field that’s gone half wild? Who needs a scarecrow that’s six-and-half feet? Why was it not swayin’ in the wind?

F/X: *A door (smashed in); Wind.*

EDSEL: Ah ha! Looks like some boy adventurers have been here. Patched it all up. Come on in. ...
What’s the matter with you two? Come in. This was your idea.

F/X: *Boots on the threshold; Door shut (imperfectly.)*

(ADELINE & CON are chattering)

(claps; rubs) Well hey now: they left some logs for us. How considerate. And the ashes...feel warm. You’re going to get that fire in the end, boy.

F/X: *Logs.*

No Father Christmas, but you’ll soon find a fire is more reliable, Con.

ADELINE: Edsel. Stop. Someone’s living here.

EDSEL: Pshh. Here? This is nothing more than a hideout—the kind you build when you’re eight or nine. Look how they mended the roof here: it’s a shamble of sticks, every which way, pine and spruce and beech, no plan at all.

ADELINE: Suppose there’s a vagrant.

EDSEL: Do you see pots and pans, a man’s bedroll? All I see are...what? Wooden horse, a lost marble, a little shoe. Have you seen many drifters playing at marbles, Adeline?

ADELINE: Con! Drop that now.

F/X: *Marble drops, rolls.*

EDSEL: Oh for Pete’s sake: it’s a piece of glass. He found it fair and square. Pick it up, Con, it’s yours.

ADELINE: Leave it; it’s tainted.

EDSEL: Boy, your mother’s more superstitious than a goat; it’s yours if you want.

ADELINE: The Holy Spirit has fled from this house, Edsel. The air tastes of sulfur.

EDSEL: It tastes like piss—because the boys were pissin’ in the corner prob’ly.

ADELINE: —If you bothered with the Bible more than settin’ it out for company—

EDSEL: You point me to where the Bible has two words on empty farmhouses.

ADELINE: I can *feel* it.

EDSEL: You're just being jumpy.

F/X: *Thud!*

(ADELINE & CON gasp; quickened breath)

ADELINE: He's coming.

EDSEL: "He" is a dollop of wet snow that just fell on the roo(f)—

F/X: *Unnaturally heavy footfalls (on the roof.)*

(CON whimpering)

MUSIC

(low) Might be a bear.

ADELINE: *(low)* A bear? How'd it get up there?

EDSEL: *(low)* They can climb, Adeline.

F/X: *More footfalls (on the roof.)*

ADELINE: *(low)* Sounds like two feet to me.

EDSEL: *(low)* Maybe it's your scarecrow. Maybe you've been a bad boy, Con, and it's old Hans Trapp out of stories.

ADELINE: *(low)* —Don't say his name.

EDSEL: *(getting louder with each one)* Hans Trapp. Ooo, Hans Trapp. Hans Trapp!

F/X: *The door (smashed in); Wind.*

(ALL THREE gasp)

F/X: *Boots on the threshold; Bells (throughout) Door shutting (imperfectly.)*

HANS TRAPP: *(gentlemanly; stomps off the snow)* Some storm, eh? If the clouds don't break, our bodies may never be found. Although I see you found my fire.

(silence)

Oh, my heavens, I've frightened you, haven't I? Apologies. When the wind screams like this, I invariably fail to recognize that I have guests until I'm bursting in on them. I assume that *is* your wagon on the roadside and your mule tethered to the sapling out there. On Christmas Eve too. Of all the bad luck.

(silence)

Are you a family of mutes? Speak.

EDSEL: *(clears his throat)* Did you not...see the bear, sir?

HANS TRAPP: Bear? Was there a bear? A Forest King? Here, at my sweet humble abode?

EDSEL: It was on the roof. Not two minutes past.

HANS TRAPP: (*chuckles*) I can't believe you. I must see this for myself.

F/X: *Door; Wind; Boots (in the snow.)*

(*outside*) HUH! WELL, THERE'S THE ROOF...BUT I SEE NO CLAWS! NO JAWS, NO
MATTED FUR!

ADELINE: (*privately*) Edsel. The man's clothes. His clothes—

EDSEL: (*privately*) Hush up. I see what he is.

ADELINE: (*privately*) The straw, in his sleeves. The silver bells.

NINE more pages to the end of this script.