

# The Three Billy Goats Gruff

by Hans Christian Andersen and adapted by Bob Wilson

There were three billy goats. Billy goats means they were boys not girls and these billy goats were brothers. Horatio Gruff was the eldest and he was very brave and strong. The middle brother was Chimo Gruff. He wasn't as big and strong as his brother Horatio but he was really clever, especially at talking. The little billy goat Gruff was called Henrik. He was a bit strong and a bit clever and he was also very little.

The Billy Goats Gruff spent their autumns and winters up in the mountains eating berries and shrubs. Every year, when spring arrived, the three billy goats Gruff came down from the mountains, crossed the wooden bridge over the canyon with the river far below, and trotted into the beautiful fields on the other side. These fields were full of bees and other buzzing insects and the grass here was fresh and sweet to taste. There were dandelions too and clover as high as your ankles.

That winter, the government had made the bridge, which had always been free to cross, a toll bridge. This meant that every time you crossed the bridge, you had to pay five gold coins. Everybody thought this was too expensive but the politicians didn't care. They had very expensive lives: lots of lunches in the best restaurants; beautiful holiday homes on the coast and they always flew business class. Besides, they owed the banks a fortune and so to continue with their wonderful lifestyles, they invented new taxes which the people and the goats had to pay. Of course, this wasn't the version they told the people. The politicians lied and said they needed the money to pay for the cost of keeping the bridge safe. So, that winter the politicians had passed the Toll Act by Royal Decree.

And how would they collect the five gold coins from the people and animals who crossed the bridge? Well, the politicians offered the job to a tall green troll, whose name was Magnus Barcenus. The troll's parents were originally from Oslo, the capital city of Norway, but now he lived in Spain. The deal was this: every time someone crossed the bridge, they had to pay the five gold coins to Barcenus, if they wanted to get to the other side. If they didn't pay, he ate them, which was very nasty. The people called the Toll Act the Troll Toll and everybody thought it was really really unfair.

A person who works for the government is called a civil servant and Magnus Barcenus soon found that being a civil servant was great. He was eating so many people and sheep that he was getting very fat. Another thing he enjoyed was that nobody could tell him to stop because he was working for the government.

Now, the goats knew about the troll under the bridge and that he had already eaten a lot of people and sheep. Horatio, Chimo and Henrik put their heads together and soon they had thought up an excellent plan.

Little Henrik would be the first goat to try to cross the bridge. Now goats, especially mountain goats like the Gruff Brothers, have sharp hooves and they made a loud noise on the wooden bridge as Little Henrik trotted on to it.

"Trip-trap trip-trap," was the sound Henrik's hooves made on the wood. Before he got halfway, he heard the terrible voice of the troll.

"Who's that trip-trapping over my bridge," shouted the tall fat green monster in a very fierce way.

"I'm little billy goat Gruff," answered Henrik, who was really really scared.

"Do you have the five gold coins, little Gruff?" enquired the troll.

"I'm really sorry, Mr Barcenus, but I don't have them."

"Then I'm going to kill you right now," roared the tall fat green civil servant. Magnus Barcenus was thinking of taking the dead goat to Cuenca, a very special city built on a cliff high in the Spanish mountains. There was a restaurant there called Pedro's Figon which was very famous for roasting goats really really well.

"I'm too small and thin," squealed Henrik, absolutely terrified. "I've been eating dry sticks all winter. If you let me cross the bridge, I'll get fat on the sweet spring grass and you can eat me on the way back in the autumn."

The troll peered up through the wooden bridge at the little goat. It was true. He was thin and boney.

"Alright then," growled Magnus Barcenus, troll and civil servant. "Be off with you and make sure you enjoy your summer because it will be your last!" And he laughed a disgusting, coughing, spluttering, slimy laugh. He was a smoker.

"I'm across," squealed little Henrik. "So far, so good!" And he gave a jump high into the air and landed in the clover, so sweet, so deep and so delicious.

The troll stayed under the bridge and there he was in the shadows blinking and resting and falling asleep. He had had a tiring start to the day.

"Trip-trap trip-trap." Really it was an annoying sound and it was even louder this time.

"Who is it now?" roared the troll. He was really cheesed off. He felt he'd done enough work for one day. Yes, not only was he overweight, he was lazy too.

"I'm the middle billy goat Gruff."

"Do you have the money?"

"No, I haven't," answered Chimo, getting straight to the point.

"Then I'm going to eat you," snarled the troll. He was getting peckish. A little raw goat would put him in a better mood.

"Eeer," started Chimo, "you've gotten very fat these days, Magnus, and you'll be off for your holidays in Ibiza soon. You should trim down a bit for the beach."

This really upset Barcenus. Ibiza was full of ogres, trolls and lots of other very rich monsters in August. There would be lots of lady trolls too.

"What do you mean?" asked the troll.

"Well, you've eaten so many people and so many sheep recently, why don't you save me for later? I'll be full of sweet clover by the autumn and I could bring you some cheese. Five gold coins worth of goats cheese, no less." Chimo hoped that the troll wouldn't realise that you can't get cheese from a billy goat. You need a mummy goat.

"Five gold coins worth of goats' cheese," thought Barcenus, "is a lot of cheese. I love goats's cheese and besides, I'm getting bored of eating people and sheep.

"Very well," bellowed the troll. "Now be off with you."

Chimo was munching on a dandelion in the lushious field when he heard the troll shouting in the distance, in a furious rage.

"You cheeky goat! You can't make cheese any more than I can. You're a billy goat. Why, just you wait till Autumn. I'll get you for this!"

Chimo and Henrik laughed. Now, so far everything was going to plan. Two of the billy goats Gruff had made it safely across the troll toll bridge. Now it was Horatio's turn, the biggest billy goat Gruff.

"Trip-trap trip-trap."

“Now who is it?” screamed the troll who was boiling with anger because he was having a bad day.

“Billy goat Gruff,” replied Horatio, the largest of the three goats, “Big billy goat Gruff.”

“Do you have the five gold coins?”

“Nope.”

“Then I'm going to eat you.”

“Come on then,” challenged Horatio on the bridge.

So, it was the first time that day the troll had climbed up onto the bridge. He didn't like doing that very much because he was allergic to the sunlight.

Anyway, there was this huge, tall, ugly troll standing on the bridge facing Horatio, the biggest of the three goats Gruff. Magnus Barcenus the troll was huffing and puffing from the effort of climbing up onto the bridge. Besides having gotten very fat on eating so many people and sheep, he was also very unfit because he was a lazy bones and never did any exercise.

“That goat's quite big,” he said to himself in a whisper, “and his horns are really long and really sharp.”

“I'm going to eat you,” shouted the troll bravely, as he walked towards the goat, the wood creaking loudly under his huge and really smelly feet. They stank, actually, because he never washed them. The bridge creaked some more.

Horatio billy goat Gruff, looking very handsome, lowered his head and charged at the enormous troll.

“It's enormous!” said the troll to himself as the goat rushed towards him, head down. Magnus Barcenus, the huge, tall, ugly troll turned around and ran away as fast as he could, which was really slow because he was so fat and unfit. Magnus Barcenus was not very brave. The wood under the troll's feet broke with a horrible splintering crash and Barcenus fell through the hole in the bridge. He just managed to grasp the edge of the hole with one of his huge hairy hands. He was hanging on, and far down below him at the bottom of the canyon the river rushed and flowed between the rocks and big rocks, which are called boulders.

The goat was there, looking down at the troll hanging on by one hand. Horatio thought of all the sheep and people who had suffered at the hands of this huge green civil servant, Magnus Barcenus.

Horatio's first thought was to stamp on the troll's hand to make him fall. But then he thought, “That would not be wise. The government will come and arrest me for killing their civil servant and send me to prison for ever or take me to Cuenca and roast me.”

So, the goat just stared down through the hole into the troll's evil eyes and simply waited. The troll stared back. He knew his end had come. No more holidays in Ibiza, no more crunchy humans and worst of all no more goats' cheese. He really loved goats' cheese. Magnus Barcenus lost his grip and fell.

The big billy goat Gruff jumped over the hole in the bridge with grace and ease and joined his brothers who were overjoyed to see him alive and well. That afternoon, after a sensational siesta – they had stuffed their tummies with lushious spring grass for lunch – the three billy goats Gruff went back to the bridge and found the big bag of gold coins which they dragged to the village at the top of the hill. They gave away all the gold coins to the people in the village.

“But what about the troll?” asked the villagers.

“Dead,” replied Horatio.

The villages were so happy they promised to look after the goats for the rest of their lives. There would be no more tough winters in the mountains.

But then the village chief spoke. "But what about the government? They will come with soldiers and riot police and attack us. They will take away all the gold coins and send us to prison for killing the troll, their trusted civil servant."

The three billy goats Gruff put their heads together for a second time. Soon, they had a plan.

So, the villagers burnt down the bridge and the village chief, with the help of his lawyer, wrote a letter to the government explaining that the bridge had been struck by lightning and caught fire and that the troll had run off with all the money, probably to Ibiza because he was always talking about it. And here was the really really clever bit. In the letter the village chief begged the government to send engineers at once to build a new bridge. Now bridges, like the new bridge in Venice, cost lots and lots of money to make so he knew the politicians would never agree. They needed the money for their nice lunches and travel expenses. And so, the government never came and the villagers were safe. Even today, there is still no bridge where the troll once upon a time had lived.

A bit further down the river, the canyon stopped and the river was very wide and very shallow. This became a ford which is a place where the villagers and travellers were able to cross the village in their horse and carts and carriages.

So what happened to the three billy goats Gruff? Well, as I said, they didn't need to cross the river anymore and soon they were happily married to lady goats from the villages and had lots and lots of kids. The villagers used their gold coins well and their village quickly became famous for its very splendid goats' cheese.