

CINDERELLA

By Justin Arnold

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By Justin Arnold

From the stories by Charles Perrault & The Brothers Grimm

SYNOPSIS: “Wear the rags. Sleep by the fireplace. Be a good girl, keep silent. Go to the ball, dance with the prince. Hope he figures out how to save you. Yes, madame. No, madame. Be kind. Be complacent—Wow. Forget. That.” This is not your average Cinderella story—Ella’s got grit and moxie.

A plague ravages the kingdom taking the life of Ella’s mother and brother, causing everything to change. Years pass and the kingdom has not recovered. Her childhood best friend, Prince Max, is still locked away in the castle. Her drunk father is getting remarried to a cold woman with two terrible daughters who take Ella’s identity, dignity, and force her to live as a servant in her own home. Just when Ella feels like giving up, her raven winged godmother appears and works magic. Reminding Ella that she has enough courage to solve her own problems. Based on both the Perrault and Brothers Grimm versions, this rendition of the classic fairy-tale blends light and darkness to create a darkly humorous and emotionally relevant *Cinderella* for today’s audience.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 females, 6 males, 1 either; 4-20+ extras)

ELLA (f)	A young lady grieving the loss of her family. (257 lines)
PRINCE MAX (m)	A young man desperate to move on in his life. (222 lines)
FAIRY GODMOTHER (f)	Half-bird, a spirit who guides lost souls. (85 lines)
MATHILDE (f).....	A cold woman who believes in her twisted way of thinking. (118 lines)
FAUSTINE (f)	Mathilde’s daughter. Boy crazy. (91 lines)

EUGENIE (f)	Mathilde's other daughter who loves dogs. (94 lines)
EDOUARD (m)	Ella's unsupportive father. (45 lines)
KING LAURENT (m)	Max's father, highly emotional and dramatic. (78 lines)
GASTON (m).....	His confidant. (62 lines)
MOTHER (f).....	Ella's mother, who was loving. (3 lines)
LEO (m)	Her brother, who was a soldier. About 18 years old. (5 lines)
QUEEN (f).....	Max's mother, who loved playing the violin. (1 line)
YOUNG ELLA (f)	Ella as a child. Rough and wild. (15 lines)
YOUNG PRINCE MAX (m)	Max as a child. Energetic and goofy. (6 lines)
GUARD (m/f)	(7 lines)

EXTRAS:

ENSEMBLE (m/f)	Guards, Ball Guests, Two Spirits, Etc. (Non-Speaking)
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DURATION: 100 minutes.**SETTING:** A fictional French kingdom.**TIME:** Stylized late 1700s.

SET

PALACE: For Act One, tattered and dusty drapes, a clock that doesn't tick, and a large birdcage housing the Queen's violin like a museum piece. For Act Two, the drapes have been replaced. Large windows and a chandelier would be ideal if more opulence is desired.

PLAGUE PIT: Bare stage with two crudely made grave markers center. Outside the story, it would have been young Ella who made and placed these, so think in those terms. Maybe two sticks tied together to form a cross, or a weathered slab of wood, or even two piles of rocks. If any foliage is desired, it should be bare and dead.

ELLA'S HOME: A table with four chairs, a fireplace, and a trunk for Ella's memorandums of her family are the only required furniture. Some touches utilized in the original production include one of the bottles filled with flowers that died a long time ago, and a laundry hamper that never seems to get emptied. The important thing is that the home is dingy, unhappy, and lacking warmth.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: Palace

SCENE 2: Plague Pit

SCENE 3: Ella's Home

SCENE 4: Palace – Ballroom

SCENE 5: Ella's Home

SCENE 6: Palace, Plague Pit

SCENE 7: Ella's Home

SCENE 8: Plague Pit

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: Palace – Ballroom & Ella's Home

SCENE 2: Plague Pit

SCENE 3: Palace

SCENE 4: Ella's Home & Plague Pit

COSTUMES

Costumes for the original production were designed with the late 1700's in mind, though some liberties were taken to give it a more modern and fairytale-esque feel. The costume list of the original production was as follows:

ELLA – Peasant dress, old walking boots, a walking jacket. For 'Cinderella', remove the jacket and add a soot covered apron and a bandanna or a long scrap of cloth for her hair. For the ballgown, see MOTHER.

PRINCE MAX – A pair of trousers, shirt, and vest that are worn and nearly threadbare. He is barefoot. For the ball and onwards, breeches with new boots, a sash, vest, cravat, and jacket. A crown.

MATHILDE – Black mourning hoopskirt and blouse. No frills on her, though a simple brooch or buckle can add a hint of glamour.

FAUSTINE – Well worn, plain gown with a walking jacket. Ball attire for Act Two. A pair of bloodied socks.

EUGENIE – Well worn, plain gown with a walking jacket. Ball attire for Act Two. A pair of bloodied socks.

KING LAURENT – Royal attire at all times. Think Louis XIV. For scenes outside the prologue and the ball, he may look more disheveled and underdressed. The original production used wigs to give him the historically long hair, which could be tightly curled, or wildly messed up, to great comedic effect. King Laurent is in a wheel chair for part of the production.

GASTON – Colorful, courtier attire. A powdered wig. Buckled shoes with stark white stockings. It is clear that he is a slave to fashion.

EDOUARD – Noble Frenchman, all black and gray.

FAIRY GODMOTHER – Large robe or cloak with hood. Large raven wing arm-piece for less dominant arm. Purple pirate-style shirt with black ribbons and feathers. Black leather riding pants. Black knee high boots.

QUEEN – Brightly colored ball gown.

MOTHER – Gold ball gown. (Gold as in 'silver and gold throw down over thee'). This is what Ella wears to the ball, so depending on casting, two identical dresses may be needed.

LEO – Military suit, medal, sash, and silver jacket. (As in 'silver and gold'...)

SPIRITS – Silver cloaks to suggest a shroud.

BALLGOERS – Ballgowns and noblemen attire.

PROPS**ACT ONE, SCENE 1**

- ☐ footstools (Ensemble)
- ☐ violin (Queen)
- ☐ plague doctor masks (Ensemble)

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

- ☐ lantern (Ella)
- ☐ stick (Ella)
- ☐ twig (Fairy Godmother)
- ☐ pumpkin seed (can be pantomimed) (Fairy Godmother)
- ☐ irons (Guards)

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

- ☐ luggage (Faustine, Eugenie)
- ☐ portrait of Leo

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

- ☐ violin (Prince Max)
- ☐ irons (Prince Max/Guards)

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

- ☐ dinner plates (Ella)
- ☐ bell (Mathilde)
- ☐ pitcher of water
- ☐ cups
- ☐ tray of sweets (Eugenie)
- ☐ invitation (Faustine)
- ☐ bowl of lentils (Ella)
- ☐ tumbler (Edourd)
- ☐ cheese (can be pantomimed) (Fairy Godmother)
- ☐ birdseed (can be pantomimed) (Fairy Godmother)
- ☐ mice puppets (Mother, Leo)
- ☐ flock of ravens puppets (Queen)
- ☐ firewood (Queen, Ella)
- ☐ cleaning tools (mops, buckets, etc.) (Mother, Leo, Ella)

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

- ☐ sticks (Queen)

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

- ☐ gloves (Mathilde)

ACT ONE, SCENE 8

- ☐ birdcage (Spirits)
- ☐ glass slippers (Spirits)

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

- ☐ conductor's baton (Fairy Godmother)

ACT TWO, SCENE 3

- ☐ violin (Max)

ACT TWO, SCENE 4

- ☐ broom (Ella)
- ☐ gag (Mathilde)
- ☐ knife (Mathilde)
- ☐ mirror (Fairy Godmother)

SOUND EFFECTS

- ☐ toll of midnight
- ☐ marching
- ☐ doorbell
- ☐ fluttering of wings
- ☐ marching music
- ☐ mice squeaking
- ☐ party/ball music
- ☐ violin music
- ☐ door locks closing
- ☐ footsteps fading in
- ☐ footsteps fading out

PRODUCTION NOTES

There are magical elements throughout the play. As the director you are welcome to make these elements come to life as fits your imagination and budget. Described below is one way that these elements can be accomplished.

Hazel Tree Growing: The set of the original production featured a white curtain in the center of the stage. To produce the hazel tree, two actors holding branches at different heights stood back to back behind the curtain. When the light faded up, it created the look of an ethereal tree that was able to sway and shake, and later split in Act Two.

Pumpkin to Carriage: This was done via an overhead projector which we were able to borrow. The projector was placed in a hidden spot just off the apron of the stage. On the table of the projector was a “jack-o-lantern” style cutout of the carriage, so that when the projector flipped on, and its operator turned the dial, the picture grew and created a growing silhouette of the carriage on the stage. This ended up creating a surprisingly elegant and atmospheric effect.

Mice to Horses: MOTHER and LEO exited after Leo's salute. Once offstage they put on horse masks. When it was time for the mice to become horses, they first stuck the mice puppets around the wing, and when the spell was cast, a puff of fog was released, they dropped the mice puppets and clip-clopped like horses out of the wings.

Ella's Dress Change: Ella's ballgown was pre-prepped in the wings prior to the change. Via the white curtain in the center, when the Godmother said “Go to the hazel tree” she would step behind the panel, where an Ella 'Stand-In' in wearing an elongated skirt took over and finished the walk to the tree. Silver and gold flakes were flung by the Godmother in place of the tree. The actors portraying the tree moved apart, each grabbing one end of the stand-in's hem and pulling it out, waving it slightly to give the shadow a ripple effect. This gave the audience the illusion of the dress growing in length. In the wings, Ella was helped into the gown and Leo's jacket put on. When she was ready, the hems were dropped and the stand-in ran toward the edge of the curtain, where the real Ella finished the run back onstage. With good timing and practice, it should flow seamlessly and appear to be the same person.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There are countless adaptations and retellings of Cinderella. So many that I'd long said I couldn't write anything 'new' or 'original' for it and left it off the table. To this day, I don't know what changed my mind, but there came an afternoon when I suddenly felt the need to write Ella's story, and I did something I've never done before – I started writing immediately, without thinking or planning first. By the end of the prologue, after seeing a raven winged godmother and a flurry of plague doctor masks cross the page, I felt like I was discovering the messy side of the story that you don't often see. It became my mission to create a Cinderella with *Deja vu*. You've definitely seen this story before, yet something is disturbingly different.

I decided early on that I didn't want to go the route of “if you're very kind then you'll have a happy ending.” People are more complicated than this, and I personally never liked that Cinderella was always so sticky sweet, though I admired her resilience. Instead, I made her argumentative and frustrated. It was also important to me to develop the character of the prince, and so I gave him sarcasm and cheekiness to balance Ella out (not to mention allow for some fun bickering!), as well as his own journey with finding his place in the world. Beyond this, everyone except for the Fairy Godmother has a name. I did this to keep an air of mystery about her, because I personally like some questions to be left unanswered.

In terms of staging, it was my goal to create a Cinderella that focused on the characters of the story rather than rely on hefty special effects. The original production of this script was presented as part shadow play, with a white scrim upstage center. With footlights placed behind the scrim, we were able to stage several magical moments such as the hazel tree growing, the pumpkin becoming a carriage, Ella's transformation, and the step-family tying on the slipper while Ella was locked in the kitchen. This effect ended up being so striking that we ended up adding the Godmother's shadow (bird wing and all) appearing during the prologue and Max's escape from the palace. If you choose to go this route, there's no end to the images you can create! Projections can also be an effective and simple effect, or you can choose to have the bigger moments like the pumpkin growing or Ella's transformation happen offstage. That said, feel free to make the production as flashy as you can allow! Just know that you're not required to.

At the end of the day, I believe the key ingredient to a production of this script is honesty. Actors should be encouraged to find the real person in these characters, rather than playing to the stereo-type that they're based on. Please feel free to find our own take on this "Once upon a time" in terms of the design and costuming. Bottom line, it is a fairy-tale, and so you should have fun creating it!

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

CINDERELLA premiered at Red Hen Theatre Company in Paris, KY.
Directed by Justin Arnold with the following cast:

CINDERELLA	Skylar Ellegood / Samantha Scott
PRINCE MAX.....	Seth Abner
GODMOTHER.....	Megan Arnold / Katie Bowling
MATHILDE	Heather Thompson
FAUSTINE.....	Chloe Putty
EUGENIE.....	Charli O'Dell
KING LAURENT.....	Walker Nipper
GASTON.....	Javan Thomas
EDOUARD.....	Joseph Pence
ELLA'S MOTHER.....	Samantha Scott / Skylar Ellegood
LEO	Clay Arnold
THE QUEEN.....	Maddy McCord
YOUNG ELLA	Lily Thompson
YOUNG MAX	Isabella Lester
ENSEMBLE.....	Amy Shutz, Cadence Lewis

DEDICATION

For Lily Johnson, the pumpkin-muncher to my mouse-face.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *Palace. Spotlights slowly rise on the FEMALE ENSEMBLE. They are in ball gowns, standing on foot stools, backs turned. They tighten their stays, primp their hair, and squirt perfume on their necks. All of them are, in their own way, the Cinderella we expect. The MALE ENSEMBLE enter, help their ladies down.*

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Pre-recorded or offstage amplified voice.)*

Once upon a time, but not so very long ago, there was a world of beautiful music, and grand balls. It was a storybook ideal of excitement, merriment, and laughter. There were no divisions between royals and their common subjects. For what had anyone to fear?

The ENSEMBLE begins to dance. Lights full on a grand ball. At its center, KING LAURENT and the QUEEN. He holds her from behind as they dance, and she enthusiastically plays a violin. YOUNG PRINCE MAX runs on, knocking into a dancing couple. GASTON chases him.

GASTON: Your highness! Your highness!

YOUNG ELLA: *(Offstage.)* Get back here!

KING LAURENT: Max! Maxence! Stop it at once!

YOUNG PRINCE MAX comes to an indignant halt.

GASTON: I tried, your highness, your majesty, but they just won't be confined.

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: She started it!

YOUNG ELLA runs in.

YOUNG ELLA: Did not!

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: Did too!

YOUNG ELLA: Did not to infinity!

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: Did too to double infinity!

YOUNG ELLA: Did too to triple—quazzipple—trillionwipple—

EDOUARD enters with MOTHER on his arm.

EDOUARD: *(Harshly.)* Ella! Come here.

YOUNG ELLA: Mother! Max called me a pumpkin muncher.

KING LAURENT: Max.

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: She called me Prince Mouse-face!

YOUNG ELLA: Well, you have a mousey face!

EDOUARD: Ella, behave your age.

QUEEN: *(To YOUNG PRINCE MAX.)* And you be a gentleman. You're too old to act that way.

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: *(Over the top.)* But of course! *(Bowing, offering his hand.)* May I have this dance, milady?

YOUNG ELLA: *(Swiping YOUNG PRINCE MAX'S hand away.)* Don't be gross. *(Sees MOTHER.)* Mother! Your gown!

MOTHER: Do you like it?

YOUNG ELLA: Very much.

MOTHER: One day it shall be yours.

LEO: *(Enters.)* Have I missed the last dance?

YOUNG ELLA: Leo!

YOUNG ELLA jumps into LEO'S arms.

EDOUARD: Well it's about time.

LEO: The army doesn't take orders from tinkers, sir.

YOUNG ELLA: Max called me a pumpkin muncher.

LEO: Well, you do eat a lot of pumpkin.

YOUNG ELLA: Do not!

LEO: Speak your age.

YOUNG ELLA: But I love to argue.

EDOUARD: Of all the girls you could have bore, it's this one.

MOTHER: Edouard.

YOUNG ELLA: I'll dance with you, Leo!

LEO: Thanks but—*(Eyeing a young lady across the room.)* we'll catch the next one, alright?

YOUNG ELLA: *(A bit hurt.)* Alright.

LEO goes to the young lady. Soon ALL are dancing again except for YOUNG PRINCE MAX and YOUNG ELLA.

YOUNG PRINCE MAX: Are you certain you won't dance with me?

YOUNG ELLA: Dance with the prince? Gross.

YOUNG ELLA and YOUNG PRINCE MAX disappear into the crowd.

GASTON: Almost midnight!

SFX: the toll of midnight sounds. Lights dim, ALL turn and freeze, as the scene slowly turns red.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Pre-recorded or offstage amplified voice.)* But, it was not meant to last. Tragedy befell the kingdom, bringing with it a mysterious illness. Its name was plague *(Some of the ENSEMBLE have now donned plague doctor masks. Others begin to fall as they walk slowly through the scene.)* and it killed as quickly as it infected. None were safe of its clutches. Not the wealthy. *(The QUEEN falls.)* Not the poor. *(MOTHER falls, and LEO soon after.)*

The only piece of stage not covered in red is center, where YOUNG ELLA watches her world crumble with bewildered fright. Slowly, the ball turns into a funeral procession.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Pre-recorded or offstage amplified voice.)* The kingdom, once so free of care, was injected with fear. The palace shut its doors and windows. No one saw King Laurent, young Prince Maxence, or their servants again for a very long time. *(YOUNG ELLA walks solemnly along the procession. She begins to cry.)* And what of the girl called Ella?

EDOUARD takes YOUNG ELLA'S arm firmly.

EDOUARD: Don't you cry. Don't you dare cry.

YOUNG ELLA sucks in her tears. She turns and slowly walks upstream of the procession.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Pre-recorded or offstage amplified voice.)*

Well, that is where our next story begins.

As YOUNG ELLA nears the end of the procession, she vanishes and is replaced by ELLA—eighteen years old. ELLA kneels at the back of the stage.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Pre-recorded or offstage amplified voice.)*

Once upon a time, there was a young girl, who missed her mother and her brother very much.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *Plague Pit. 10 years later. Lights full on the site of a plague pit at night. Two crude grave markers sit on either side of ELLA. She holds a lantern to them, as well as a stick for protection.*

ELLA: Still no flowers. I'd have thought they'd grow by now.

FAIRY GODMOTHER appears, face and arms unseen beneath a cloak.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: The ground is too dead for flowers.

ELLA: Whose there? Show yourself!

FAIRY GODMOTHER steps forward.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: What is a young thing like you doing out in this plague pit? At night?

ELLA: Minding my own business.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: It is nights like these that spirits rise.

ELLA: I'm not afraid of ghosts. *(Gives FAIRY GODMOTHER a closer look anyway.)* Why do you wear that hood?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Because I can.

ELLA: Why don't you take it off?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Because then you will be afraid.

ELLA: *(Unnerved, she holds her stick high.)* Go away, or I'll scream!

FAIRY GODMOTHER: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I only wished to give you this. (*Produces a twig.*) The twig of a hazel tree. It isn't a flower, but at least it's a bit of nature in this sad place.

ELLA slowly takes the twig.

ELLA: That's... nice.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Ah! And one more thing. (*Produces a pumpkin seed.*) A bit of vegetation perhaps.

FAIRY GODMOTHER drops the seed in ELLA'S hand.

ELLA: A pumpkin seed?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: They'll soon be in season.

ELLA: Alright then.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Goodnight, child, and be careful. Who knows what could appear at this time, after all. (*Mimics a ghost, cackles, and exits disappearing into the shadows.*)

ELLA: What do we need with a pumpkin seed, crazy old woman? (*Tosses it over her shoulder.*) Strange. Well, it's not a flower, but hazel was your favorite, Mother. (*Stabs the twig into the ground between the graves.*) Goodnight, Mother. Goodnight, Leo. (*Curls on the ground with her stick and is soon asleep.*)

FAIRY GODMOTHER: (*Enters.*) Little did Ella know that the small hazel twig was actually an enchanted twig, which soon would allow all of her wishes to come true.

FAIRY GODMOTHER gestures to the twig. A cloud moves toward the empty space between the graves, a hazel tree appears.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: And now, as all pairs of shoes come in twos, so do tales. Sooner or later they are bound to collide. And it just so happened that on this same night, there was a young man, really still a boy, who longed for his own escape.

KING LAURENT: (*Calling from offstage.*) Max! Maxence! Where are you, you foolish boy!

The silhouette of PRINCE MAX enters, stealthily sneaking upstage.

KING LAURENT: (*Calling from offstage.*) Guards! Quickly! The Prince has escaped! Again!

ALL GUARDS: (*Offstage.*) Yes, your highness!

SFX: sound of marching. PRINCE MAX runs across the stage in tattered clothing that he has outgrown. He darts into the plague pit, where he soon stumbles and falls on top of the sleeping ELLA. She awakes with a start.

ELLA: Ah!

PRINCE MAX: Ah!

ELLA: What do you think you're doing?!

PRINCE MAX: Just passing through!

ELLA: I'll bet!

ELLA pummels PRINCE MAX'S head with her stick. Then again. And again.

ELLA: Get away from me!

PRINCE MAX: Gladly, just—just—STOP!

PRINCE MAX manages the stick out of ELLA'S grip and tosses it away.

PRINCE MAX: Well, now that I have disarmed you, I believe a retreat is in order.

ELLA: If you don't leave, I'll scream.

PRINCE MAX: I'll be long gone before anyone comes to rescue you.

ELLA: Why are you running?

PRINCE MAX: Why are you sleeping on the site of a mass grave?

ELLA: My business is my own.

PRINCE MAX: Oh? Well! Then my business is—too—my own. (*Spots the hazel tree.*) I never thought a tree would grow here.

ELLA turns and promptly cries out in surprise.

PRINCE MAX: What?

ELLA: Where did it come from?

PRINCE MAX: My guess is the ground.

ELLA: It wasn't there when I fell asleep.

PRINCE MAX: How long did you sleep?

ELLA: It must have been the old woman! (*To herself.*) I'm not afraid of ghosts.

PRINCE MAX: Of all the plague pits in the world, I chose the one with the crazy.

ELLA: Excuse me?

PRINCE MAX: A tree doesn't grow over night. It's impossible!

ELLA: Well, this one did.

PRINCE MAX: Did not.

ELLA: Did too!

PRINCE MAX: Did not!

ELLA: Did too!

PRINCE MAX: Did not!

ELLA: Are you nine?

PRINCE MAX: Nine-teen.

ELLA: Wait—Max?

PRINCE MAX stares at her, confused. Then he slowly recognizes her.

PRINCE MAX: Ella?

ELLA immediately hugs PRINCE MAX.

ELLA: I didn't recognize you!

PRINCE MAX: I didn't either! You've gotten so— (*Noticing she is now very attractive to him.*) uh—taller.

ELLA: And you're so— (*She can't admit he's very handsome.*) pointy.

PRINCE MAX: What?

ELLA: Your nose. It's so pointy now.

PRINCE MAX: Is not, you pumpkin muncher!

ELLA: Mouse-face!

PRINCE MAX: This is fun! I haven't talked like this since I was—

ELLA: Nine. You were nine.

PRINCE MAX: It hasn't been that long. I haven't talked much lately at all. No one really around.

ELLA: Well, that's what happens when you lock yourself in a tower and ignore the world.

PRINCE MAX: My father's doing, not mine. *(An uncomfortable pause.)*
So, how've you been?

ELLA: *(Gesturing to the graves.)* Oh, it's been a big party.

PRINCE MAX: Oh. Right. I—I'm sorry.

ELLA: Everyone says that.

PRINCE MAX: I know. I've heard it all since mother... well, you know.

ELLA: *(A solemn vow.)* I'm done with false respects.

PRINCE MAX: Yes! If I hear "she's in a better place" one more time—
(Wrings his hands.) Well, from those of us left in there anyways.

ELLA: Who's left?

PRINCE MAX: A few servants. Guards. Gaston and my father. No tutor. No friends. *(Gestures to his clothing.)* No tailor. You?

ELLA: Only my father.

EDOUARD: *(Offstage.)* Ella!

PRINCE MAX: You spoke of the devil.

ELLA: You'd better hide. He's sure to turn you in!

PRINCE MAX backs into the shadows. EDOUARD stumbles on, clearly intoxicated.

EDOUARD: Th-ere you a-are, wicked child. Come home at once!

ELLA: No.

EDOUARD: You'd just as soon be in the ground with them.

ELLA: And you would just as soon forget you ever loved them!

EDOUARD: Get home and sleep in your bed.

ELLA: You smell foul.

EDOUARD: It is the mask of my grief.

ELLA: Is that grief? Or is that gin?

EDOUARD raises his hand to strike but he restrains himself.

EDOUARD: Time does not stop for anything. Sooner or later—sooner than later, we must move with it. *(Starts to exit.)* This nonsense will stop. I'll see to that. Oh yes my girl, I'll see to that.

EDOUARD exits. PRINCE MAX emerges from the shadows.

PRINCE MAX: He was always fun at parties.

ELLA: (*More to herself.*) I wouldn't sleep here if you were here.

(*Suddenly guilty.*) Oh—I don't—that's a terrible thing to say, I know.

Sometimes my heart speaks before my mind can—

PRINCE MAX: I understand.

Another uncomfortable silence. PRINCE MAX tries to lighten it with an over the top bow to the grave markers.

PRINCE MAX: I've forgotten my manners! Leo, old beam, how good it is to see you again. And of course your mother.

ELLA: Do you remember her name?

PRINCE MAX: I was too young to call her by her first name.

ELLA: I don't remember. I've asked father but he always changes the subject.

PRINCE MAX: Well, my father—

GUARD: (*Offstage.*) Seize him!

ELLA: Now you've spoken of the devil.

GUARDS enter suddenly and take PRINCE MAX into custody.

PRINCE MAX: Easy, boys, it's not a toy!

GUARD: Silence! We have orders to bring you back to your father by any means necessary.

GUARDS put PRINCE MAX in irons.

PRINCE MAX: This is necessary?

GUARD: Oh, come on. We hardly get to use them anymore.

PRINCE MAX: Very well. Er—would you like me to struggle a bit?

GUARD: Would you?

PRINCE MAX starts to fake fight the GUARDS.

PRINCE MAX: You'll never take me alive! Viva la revolution!

GUARDS exit with PRINCE MAX. ELLA, at first perplexed, begins to laugh uncontrollably. Lights dim and the FAIRY GODMOTHER enters.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: That was the first time in years that Ella truly laughed, and it might have been the last time. For soon after, another dark shadow would befall her household...

Light shift.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT START: *The main room of Ella's home. A fireplace, a table and chairs, a trunk. A dark figure of makes her way inside the home. Her back is to the audience. It is MATHILDE. EDOUARD slowly follows her.*

MATHILDE: It is... lovely, darling.

EDOUARD: I know it is not what you are used to.

MATHILDE: We will manage. And where is your daughter? I so wish to meet Ella.

EDOUARD: She will be down soon. I'm afraid I didn't have much time to tell her the news, and well, like I told you—she still needs to learn her place.

MATHILDE: Never fear, Edouard. I am certain she will become everything a lady should be under my guidance. Just like my own daughters. Isn't that right?

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE enter with their luggage.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: Yes, Mother.

MATHILDE: And what have you to say to this kind man?

FAUSTINE: Our home is adorable, Father.

EUGENIE: May we call you father?

EDOUARD: Please do!

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: Thank you, Father.

EDOUARD: They are so mannered.

MATHILDE: I will not tolerate disrespect in adolescence.

ELLA enters and stiffens at the sight of them all.

EDOUARD: Yes, and that is precisely what my daughter needs.

ELLA: You don't know what your daughter needs.

EDOUARD: Ah, here she is! Come here, Ella. I wish you to meet—

MATHILDE goes to ELLA, puts her hand out regally.

MATHILDE: You may call me Mathilde.

ELLA: *(Not taking her hand.)* I may...?

MATHILDE: Of course. I'm not your mother, nor do I intend to be. You already have a lovely mother, don't you?

EDOUARD: Had.

MATHILDE: Has. For she is still here— *(Gestures to ELLA'S heart.)* in there. Isn't she?

ELLA: *(A beat.)* Yes.

MATHILDE: Think of me as... a teacher. A governess of sorts. I will look after you properly, and perhaps we can create a strong bond. How does that sound?

ELLA: What are you playing at?

MATHILDE: I beg your pardon?

ELLA: You barely know my father and now you're married to him? When was this wedding? Do you love each other?

EDOUARD: Ella—

MATHILDE: No, dear, it's alright. *(To ELLA.)* It's quite a shock, I know. I don't expect you to like me at first. But give it time, and I think you will understand that I have your best interests at heart. *(Gesturing to EDOUARD.)* And we all need companionship! We've all suffered loss. Perhaps we can find harmony together.

ELLA: Is she sleeping in my mother's bed?

ALL glance at ELLA, but ignore her words.

MATHILDE: And you shan't be alone, either. These are my daughters, Faustine and Eugenie.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE curtsy.

EDOUARD: Perhaps we should let them get acquainted freely. If you will allow me, I'll show you the rest of the house.

MATHILDE: (*Taking his arm.*) Let me pour you a drink first, darling.

EDOUARD: (*To ELLA.*) Behave yourself.

MATHILDE and EDOUARD exit. ELLA sizes up EUGENIE and FAUSTINE before taking a seat. She avoids eye contact.

EUGENIE: We know how you feel.

FAUSTINE: Our father died.

EUGENIE: So did our dog.

FAUSTINE: But more importantly, our father.

EUGENIE pets ELLA'S head.

EUGENIE: Your hair is so pretty!

ELLA: (*Bolts up.*) Don't touch me!

FAUSTINE: Don't talk to my sister that way!

ELLA: Then your sister shouldn't pet people!

EUGENIE: There's no need to be rude to us.

ELLA: I just don't know how to feel right now, alright? (*Sits back down.*)

EUGENIE: How much does your father drink, anyway?

ELLA: Too much.

FAUSTINE: He's still handsome, don't you think? In a certain way?

EUGENIE: Faustine, he's your father.

FAUSTINE: Step-father.

EUGENIE: Stop that!

ELLA: Please do.

FAUSTINE: Does he drink because everyone died?

ELLA: Not only that, but yes.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: Ohhhhhh.

EUGENIE: That's so sad.

EUGENIE and FAUSTINE sit at ELLA'S feet.

FAUSTINE: We're sorry.

EUGENIE: We didn't mean to make you feel so terrible.

FAUSTINE: We're still in shock, too.

EUGENIE: And we aren't used to other girls.

FAUSTINE: It was always just us.

EUGENIE: And the dog.

FAUSTINE: Please forgive us.

ELLA: Well, alright.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: (*Sweet.*) Ohhhhhh!

FAUSTINE: I'm sure we'll all become good friends. So tell me, are there any good looking boys around here?

EUGENIE: Or dogs?

ELLA: I don't pay much attention.

FAUSTINE notices a miniature portrait of LEO.

FAUSTINE: Is this your brother?

ELLA: Yes.

FAUSTINE: He's even more handsome than your father!

ELLA: Ew. He's my brother.

FAUSTINE: May I have this?

ELLA: Oh. Um—

FAUSTINE: I wouldn't ask, except it's just I'll never know him. And in a way he's my brother too, now. So I would like to get to know him in some way. Since he's so important to you.

ELLA: (*Awkwardly.*) I... suppose...

FAUSTINE: Oh, thank you! It's perfectly sweet of you. (*Sneaks a kiss on LEO'S portrait and pockets it.*)

EUGENIE: I'm so glad we're friends now! Let's play a game!

FAUSTINE: Yes, let's!

ELLA: What sort of a game?

EUGENIE: Let's see... how about animal?

ELLA: I don't know how to play that.

EUGENIE: It's easy! You just pretend to be an animal.

ELLA: What animal?

EUGENIE: A dog!

FAUSTINE: A little puppy dog.

ELLA: Oh, I don't know about that—

EUGENIE: Please? Don't spoil the fun.

FAUSTINE: Besides, we're all friends now!

EUGENIE: Best friends.

FAUSTINE: Always.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: Play.

ELLA is unsure what to do. Finally, she slowly gets on the floor, and awkwardly pretends to be a dog.

EUGENIE: *(Squealing with delight.)* Such a good dog!

EUGENIE and FAUSTINE pat ELLA on the head. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

AT START: *Palace – Ballroom. Lights up. Tattered old curtains, dusty armor, the clock is broken. To the side, a large birdcage, inside of which the Queen's violin is showcased.*

KING LAURENT: *(Offstage.)* Ungrateful, foolish boy!

GASTON enters, pushing KING LAURENT in a wheel chair. Their clothes, once elegant and royal, have seen better days.

GASTON: Quite right.

KING LAURENT: Could you imagine if I had treated my own father this way? Oh, whatever will I do with that boy?

GASTON: Well, perhaps you could start by letting him out of the dungeon.

KING LAURENT: Let him out?

GASTON: It has been a week, sire.

KING LAURENT: Oh? Oh. Yes. Well—guards!

GUARDS enter and bow.

GUARD: Yes, my king?

KING LAURENT: Bring up the ruffian.

GUARD: Yes, my king. *(Exits.)*

GASTON: Now remember, my lord, that you, too, were his age once.

KING LAURENT: When I was his age, the world was a happier place.

Now look out there. Disease? Famine? Revolutions?

GASTON: I understand, but you could be a bit easier.

KING LAURENT: Easier. Right. I'll try it.

GUARDS enter, bringing in PRINCE MAX who is still in irons.

GASTON: Easy.... Easy....

KING LAURENT: *(A deep breath.)* Ah, there's the prodigal son. Now tell me— *(Quickly losing his temper.)* what in the devil were you thinking?!

GASTON puts his face in his palm. During the following, the GUARDS remove the irons.

PRINCE MAX: I thought it might be a good night for a stroll.

KING LAURENT: Ah, a stroll. I see. And tell me, was it lovely to stroll back in irons?

PRINCE MAX: To tell you the truth, sir, we did have fun with it.

PRINCE MAX and GUARDS laugh.

KING LAURENT: Silence! *(GUARDS come to attention.)* You may go.

GUARDS make their exit, and PRINCE MAX tries to follow.

KING LAURENT: Not you!

PRINCE MAX halts.

PRINCE MAX: Shall I go to bed without supper? Or shall we skip straight to the village stocks?

KING LAURENT: *(He could strangle him.)* Oh!

GASTON: Sire! Sire! Remember! Your happy song! *(Child-like dance hands. Singing.)*

ALOUETTE/ GENTILLE ALOUETTE—

GASTON and KING LAURENT: *(Singing.)*

ALOUETTE/ GENTILLE PLUMERAI—

KING LAURENT: That doesn't help at all! (*Deep breath.*) It upsets me.

I'm old and sick, and he mocks me!

PRINCE MAX: You aren't old enough to say you're old, and as for being sick, you're perfectly healthy.

KING LAURENT: You call being bound to this chair healthy?

PRINCE MAX: You don't have to stop living because of it.

KING LAURENT: And running away is living?

PRINCE MAX: I can't stay here forever.

KING LAURENT: Why not?

PRINCE MAX: No sunlight? No air? Windows barred and shuttered.

No one to talk to—

GASTON: No one? Well, that's fine!

PRINCE MAX: Oh, you know what I mean. No friends.

GASTON: Well!

PRINCE MAX: My age.

GASTON: He's got me there.

KING LAURENT: You want to run off and get sick? Die like your mother? Be unable to walk, like myself? Is that what you want?

PRINCE MAX: The plague has run through, father. For a while now. People are moving on. And so should we! We need our subjects. And sunlight, and entertainment!

GASTON: (*Smitten with the idea.*) Oh, yes! Entertainment! It's been years since I've heard music!

PRINCE MAX: Mother would have wanted that. (*Goes to the caged violin.*)

KING LAURENT: Don't you touch that!

PRINCE MAX: She taught me to play. I haven't done it in years. (*Pulls out the violin.*)

KING LAURENT: Put that down immediately.

PRINCE MAX: She would have wanted—

KING LAURENT: I say put that down!

PRINCE MAX obeys. A long silence.

GASTON: Sire, if I may. Perhaps not that violin, but the boy has a point.

KING LAURENT: What do you mean, Gaston?

GASTON: If the prince cannot go to the world, why not let the world come to him?

PRINCE MAX: Like a party?

GASTON: Why not an entire ball?

PRINCE MAX: Why not two?

GASTON: Or three? Three entire nights of dancing and music, and showing this kingdom there's still life in the royal bloodline.

KING LAURENT: Open my palace to the entire kingdom?! Never!

PRINCE MAX: Father—

KING LAURENT: In here, touching our things, germs everywhere. No! I can't, I won't!

GASTON: You know, my king, your son was not old enough for the last war. If there were to be a revolt, there'd be a great risk.

PRINCE MAX: If I even made it to battle.

GASTON: They might overthrow you—

PRINCE MAX: Execute me—

GASTON: *(Suddenly an over the top revolutionary.)* And I shall pull the lever! HI-YA!

GASTON playfully smacks the back of PRINCE MAX'S head who falls down eyes-crossed and "dead".

KING LAURENT: Foul play! *(To PRINCE MAX.)* You're strange, you know.

PRINCE MAX: *(Slides only his eyes to KING LAURENT.)* Where do you think I got it from?

KING LAURENT waves his hand dismissing PRINCE MAX'S comment.

GASTON: Morbid yes, but what can I say? I want to dance!

PRINCE MAX: You dance?

GASTON does some footwork.

GASTON: I've been known to cut the rug, as they say. You know what they used to call me? *(Proud and regal.)* Lord Tippy-Toes.

GASTON reminisces while PRINCE MAX and KING LAURENT silently judge.

PRINCE MAX: So how about it, Father?

KING LAURENT: What do I say? What can I say? It's either "yes" or Gaston will dance me down a flight of stairs.

PRINCE MAX: I knew you'd understand!

KING LAURENT: But only one ball, one night only! Let's not push it.

PRINCE MAX: (*A solemn bow.*) Very well. (*Unable to contain his excitement.*) I'm going to go choose music! (*Begins to rush out, stops. Goes to KING LAURENT.*) Thanks, Dad.

PRINCE MAX runs out. KING LAURENT is misty-eyed. He rolls to the violin, looks at it.

GASTON: My lord, are you teary?

KING LAURENT: He hasn't called me dad since before his mother died.

GASTON: It's alright. This is healthy.

KING LAURENT: (*Put upon.*) Let's get to it. We have a lot of planning to do.

GASTON: For the ball?

KING LAURENT: No, Lord Tippy-Toes, for my funeral. Yes, the ball!

GASTON exits, dancing KING LAURENT out in his wheelchair. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

AT START: *Ella's Home. Lights up on MATHILDE, FAUSTINE, and EUGENIE at the dinner table. EDOUARD stands by the fireplace, drink in hand.*

EDOUARD: I must say, Mathilde, that Ella has shown a lot of progress under your hand. Barely a sound.

MATHILDE: It's like I told you, darling. A firm hand and responsibility. Occupy her mind with menial tasks, and she'll come through. Besides, it's good practice to be a dutiful wife.

EUGENIE: She's such a good friend.

FAUSTINE: Always does our laundry so well. Hardly ever a crease!

EUGENIE: You're such a good father, Father.

FAUSTINE: The best father!

EDOUARD: (*Taking his seat at the table.*) Well! Isn't that nice to hear, finally.

MATHILDE rings a bell. ELLA enters with dinner plates. She wears a dirty apron and her face is now smudged with the cinders of the fire place. Her eyes are cast down with suppressed anger.

MATHILDE: Here's the little homemaker now.

FAUSTINE: Why is your face so dirty?

EUGENIE: It's rude not to wash.

ELLA: I'm always by the fireplace.

FAUSTINE: Rolling in the fireplace more like.

MATHILDE: Faustine.

FAUSTINE: Mother, she's covered in soot! What if it were to get in our food?

EUGENIE: Little cinderwench.

MATHILDE: You must be careful of the cinders, Ella.

FAUSTINE: (*Light bulb.*) Hey, that's what we'll call you. Cinders Ella. Cindersella. Cinder-Ella!

EUGENIE: Cinderella! (*Pats ELLA'S head like a dog.*) Good girl.

ELLA restrains herself.

EDOUARD: Cinderella. (*Laughs.*) It suits her.

FAUSTINE: You mean it soots her.

MATHILDE: (*A healthy laugh.*) Oh dear.

EDOUARD: How did I come to deserve such clever daughters?

EUGENIE: Mother, may Ella have a sweet?

MATHILDE: Oh, Eugenie, you'll spoil her.

FAUSTINE: She's been so good. Let her have one.

EUGENIE: Just one wouldn't be bad for her.

MATHILDE considers ELLA, who is standing silently, fuming, in the corner with her eyes at her feet.

MATHILDE: Cinderella, would you like a sweet?

ELLA: *(Almost inaudible.)* Yes.

EUGENIE smiles and lifts a sweet from the table. She holds it out. ELLA stiffly goes to her. As she holds her hand out, EUGENIE pulls it back. She places it in the palm of her hand and lowers it to the floor. ELLA looks at EDOUARD, who takes an uncomfortable sip of his drink. ELLA gets down on her knees, lowers her face and eats the sweet from EUGENIE'S palm. The entire step-family bursts into fits of laughter.

FAUSTINE: She's so dear!

EUGENIE: I've taught her a trick.

MATHILDE: Oh girls, you're too much.

EUGENIE: May she have another?

FAUSTINE: Yes, mother, may she?

MATHILDE: I don't know—

EUGENIE: It would reinforce her good behavior.

MATHILDE: Cinderella, would you like another?

ELLA: *(Almost shaking.)* Yes.

Satisfied, EUGENIE takes another sweet and lowers it. ELLA lowers her face to her palm and—bites her.

EUGENIE: Ow! She bit me!

MATHILDE: *(Standing in a storm.)* You dirty little mutt!

ELLA is smiling and stands as she takes the uneaten sweet out of EUGENIE'S wounded hand.

FAUSTINE: That's the thanks you get!

EUGENIE: I'm bleeding!

MATHILDE: What do you have to say for yourself?

ELLA: *(Taking a bite of the sweet.)* Needs a little more sugar.

MATHILDE slaps ELLA so hard that it knocks her to the floor.

EDOUARD: Alright. Settle down. Settle down, girls.

SFX: the doorbell rings.

MATHILDE: Faustine, answer the door.

FAUSTINE quickly obeys.

EUGENIE: I'm bleeding to death!

MATHILDE: Oh, shut up. Press a piece of bread to it. (*Lowers her face to ELLA'S.*) Don't bite a hand that feeds.

ELLA: (*Looks at EDOUARD.*) Are you going to do something about this?

EDOUARD is silent. FAUSTINE returns carrying an invitation. She is wild with excitement.

FAUSTINE: You'll never believe—oh! It's all so—I can't believe—oh!

EUGENIE: What is it?

FAUSTINE: Where is the one place in this god forsaken kingdom you've always wanted to go?

EUGENIE: The pet shop.

FAUSTINE: No—no—the place you've always wanted to go, but never could?

EUGENIE: The palace?

FAUSTINE: And so we shall!

FAUSTINE hands the invitation to EUGENIE. EUGENIE squints at it, then she too is wild with excitement.

EUGENIE: Oh! Oh! Oh!

MATHILDE: What is all this— (*Inspects the invite.*) oh my.

EDOUARD: What is it?

MATHILDE: King Laurent is holding a ball. The first since the plague.

ELLA leans in with great interest.

FAUSTINE: Read on, Mother, read on!

MATHILDE: And it seems— (*Light bulb.*) oh my.

EDOUARD: What? What?

MATHILDE: Prince Maxence. He's coming out.

EUGENIE: Oh. Well. Good for him!

FAUSTINE: You idiot! It's a debut! No one has seen him in years!

MATHILDE: I wonder how nicely he's grown. (*An aside to EUGENIE and FAUSTINE.*) Of course, he's been in there so long, he hardly knows what a girl looks like anymore. I would fancy he'd enjoy some companionship.

EUGENIE: You don't mean—

FAUSTINE: Us?

EUGENIE: He could marry us?

MATHILDE: Well—one of you at least.

EUGENIE: Then I'm going!

FAUSTINE: And I'm going!

ELLA: And I'm going.

MATHILDE: What? After that savage display? Why do you think you deserve to go?

ELLA: Because if you knew what I've wanted to do and haven't, you'd consider me very ladylike indeed.

FAUSTINE: She can't!

EUGENIE: She'll bite the prince!

ELLA: If he deserves it.

FAUSTINE: Oh! Don't let her go, mother!

MATHILDE: Of course she won't go, girls.

ELLA: It's not your decision. I'm going, Mathilde.

MATHILDE: Hold your tongue, and mind as I say.

ELLA: I'll leave.

MATHILDE: Where will you go?

ELLA: I'll find work.

MATHILDE: (*A laugh.*) Who's going to pay a woman a living wage? Especially one who talks back?

ELLA is silently fuming. MATHILDE believes she has the upper hand.

MATHILDE: Well then. Go do a chore, Cinderella.

ELLA resists herself from attacking MATHILDE. She storms out.

MATHILDE: Two steps forward, one straight back. (*A thought.*) But you know, perhaps we could compromise a bit.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE: But mother!

MATHILDE: *Be nice. (Calling.) Cinderella!*

ELLA enters, carrying a bowl.

MATHILDE: Nice to see she can be obedient.

ELLA: What do you want?

EUGENIE: Don't be rude!

FAUSTINE: We have a surprise for you.

EUGENIE: Even though you bit me.

MATHILDE: (*Gesturing to the bowl.*) What are these?

ELLA: Lentils, for tomorrow.

MATHILDE: Ah. (*A thought.*) Perhaps I was a bit harsh on you, Cinderella. Sometimes I forget it is all still new to you. I thought, perhaps, I could give you the chance to go to the ball with us.

ELLA: If?

MATHILDE: If you behave. Finish the chores in time. Prove that you won't be too distracted from your work.

ELLA: (*Distrusting.*) Thank you. That's very kind.

MATHILDE: And to show you I'm being serious, I'll even help you by putting away these—lentils. (*Stands and takes the bowl, pretending to trip. All of the lentils go into the fire place.*) Oh dear! I'm so sorry.

ELLA: (*To EDOUARD.*) She did that on purpose!

EDOUARD: I'll be in my study... (*Exits.*)

MATHILDE: You'll have to pick them all out I'm afraid and clean it again. On top of everything else.

ELLA: But—

MATHILDE: Won't the ball be worth it? (*A cold smile.*) Come girls, we must start preparations.

EUGENIE: (*Scratching behind ELLA'S ears.*) Have fun!

FAUSTINE: Good luck.

FAUSTINE and EUGENIE follow MATHILDE out.

ELLA: Liars. I'll never finish in time.

FAIRY GODMOTHER appears in her hood.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Not with that thinking.

ELLA: You! What are you doing in here?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Just passing by. I couldn't help but overhear.

ELLA: Get out of my house—

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Of course. Perchance, could I trouble you for a glass of water?

ELLA is put out but still gives the FAIRY GODMOTHER a drink.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Still a kind soul behind that angry exterior.

ELLA: You don't know me.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Of course not. However, to repay your small kindness, a small token.

FAIRY GODMOTHER drops a birdseed in ELLA'S palm.

ELLA: Birdseed.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: To bring the lovely birds. Oh, and another thing.

FAIRY GODMOTHER drops cheese in ELLA'S palm.

ELLA: Cheese...

FAIRY GODMOTHER: To bring the adorable mice.

ELLA: *(Trying to give the cheese back.)* No. Rodents bring in disease.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Do you want to do all of this by yourself?

ELLA: What are you talking about?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Toss the seed in the fireplace, and place the cheese on the hearth. *(Starts to exit.)*

ELLA: Who are you?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Just a crazy old woman with crazy ideas.

FAIRY GODMOTHER laughs and seemingly disappears. ELLA looks at the seed and the cheese, perplexed. Finally, she shrugs and does as she was told. She begins to pick through the lentils. SFX: mice scurrying. White mice, puppeteered by the ghosts of MOTHER and LEO enter. When ELLA sees them, she jumps with a start.

ELLA: No! No! Get out!

ELLA wields a broom. The mice seem to laugh. They begin to clean the kitchen.

ELLA: This makes no sense.

SFX: The fluttering of wings. A flock of ravens puppeteered by the QUEEN swoop in through the fire place. ELLA shields herself.

ELLA: What is happening?! Stop!

The ravens and the mice freeze. ELLA looks at them in amazement.

ELLA: Um... Mice, you clean. Uh—birds—can you pick these lentils from the fireplace? *(They're frozen.)* Please? *(Frozen.)* At once!

At her command, the ravens resume flight and swarm the fireplace, where every last lentil is picked. The mice scurry through housework. ELLA laughs in amazement. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 6

AT START: *SFX: marching music. Lights slowly rise on a series of small scenes.*

- *The mice march across stage as ELLA points the way. They exit.*
- *PRINCE MAX stands in new boots, trousers, a sash and a shirt as the tailor finishes his trousers. He steps center, back turned.*
- *ELLA enters, followed by the mice. The ravens drop sticks on the ground and ELLA picks them up.*

- *The mice and the ravens scurry off stage as PRINCE MAX covers ELLA'S eyes from behind.*
- *Stop music.*

PRINCE MAX: Guess who!

ELLA drops the sticks and elbows PRINCE MAX.

PRINCE MAX: Ouch! Why would you do that?

ELLA: Don't ever do that again!

PRINCE MAX: Oh, don't be such a girl.

ELLA: Then don't be such a creep.

PRINCE MAX acts offended. He turns from ELLA and scoffs.

PRINCE MAX: Just for that, I'm not inviting you to my ball!

ELLA swats him with a stick.

PRINCE MAX: What was that for?

ELLA: *(Playfully.)* Being a brat.

PRINCE MAX: *(Picking up the sticks for ELLA.)* I guess I had it coming.

So, you've heard about the ball?

ELLA: I have.

PRINCE MAX: *(Holding out the bundle.)* So you'll come?

ELLA: *(A smirk as she takes the sticks.)* We'll see.

ELLA starts to exit. PRINCE MAX stands.

PRINCE MAX: Was that a yes?

ELLA: *(Calling back.)* Maybe. *(Exits.)*

SFX: marching music begins again. The sequence of scenes below begins:

- *PRINCE MAX does a victory move and returns to the back of the stage, where KING LAURENT enters with GASTON, who helps PRINCE MAX put on his new jacket.*

- *ELLA enters, cuddling the ravens and waving them goodbye. She salutes each mouse as they march out.*
- *PRINCE MAX kneels, and KING LAURENT places the crown on his head.*
- *ELLA puts her fists on her hips as she looks about to see that all chores are finished.*

Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 7

AT START: *Ella's Home. Lights up on the main room. There is a burning fire in the fireplace. EUGENIE, FAUSTINE, and MATHILDE are dressed for the ball, putting on their finishing touches. EDOUARD enters.*

EDOUARD: I have been waiting ten minutes.

MATHILDE: You can't rush beauty, dear.

EDOUARD: If you are not out of this house in the next ten, I'm leaving without you.

MATHILDE: Yes, dear.

EDOUARD poises for a kiss. MATHILDE withholds the affection and instead gives him her hand. He kisses that and exits.

MATHILDE: To think, one of my girls may soon be a princess.

EUGENIE: Or both of us!

FAUSTINE: Don't be stupid. The prince can only marry one of us!

MATHILDE: Stranger things have happened, Faustine.

FAUSTINE: I hope he's handsome!

EUGENIE: I hope he likes dogs.

MATHILDE: Use enough charm, Eugenie, and you could have a new pet.

MATHILDE winks and they ALL laugh. ELLA enters proudly.

MATHILDE: Ah, Cinderella. You've been hard at work, I suppose.

ELLA: Yes.

MATHILDE: So unfortunate you cannot join us. But if you are very good, I shall bring you a plate of dessert.

ELLA: I'll have it at the ball, thank you. (*MATHILDE gives her a look.*)
I've finished everything.

EUGENIE: Impossible!

FAUSTINE: You can't have.

ELLA: I did. So, I shall see you at the ball.

FAUSTINE: Mother, no!

EUGENIE: She'll scratch the furniture!

FAUSTINE: She'll bite my prince!

MATHILDE: Now, girls. You know as well as I do that Cinderella isn't going. She only just finished and has no time to ready herself. Besides, she has nothing suitable to wear to a grand ball.

*ELLA goes to the trunk and pulls out her mother's ball gown.
FAUSTINE and EUGENIE are smitten.*

ELLA: Is this not suitable?

EUGENIE: Oh, it's beautiful!

FAUSTINE: Gorgeous!

MATHILDE: Where did you get that?

ELLA: It is my mother's.

EUGENIE: Was.

ELLA: She always said I'd wear it to a ball some day.

FAUSTINE: But I want to wear it!

EUGENIE: No, I want to wear it!

FAUSTINE: I said so first!

EUGENIE: I almost got rabies from her biting! Haven't I suffered enough?

MATHILDE: Settle down, girls.

EUGENIE: Give it to me, Cinderella. As a tribute to our friendship.

FAUSTINE: No, give it to me!

EUGENIE: You gave Faustine that old portrait. She goes to bed with it every night.

FAUSTINE: How dare you tell her that!

EUGENIE: It's morbid.

FAUSTINE: He's handsome!

EUGENIE snatches the dress from ELLA and darts about.

EUGENIE: It's mine! I want it!

FAUSTINE: Hand it over!

ELLA: Give it back!

EUGENIE, FAUSTINE, and ELLA are chasing each other around, EUGENIE waving the dress like a flag. Finally, MATHILDE steps in.

MATHILDE: GIRLS! (ALL stop.) Hand it over, Eugenie.

EUGENIE obeys.

MATHILDE: Faustine, bring me the trunk, please.

ELLA: Don't touch it!

FAUSTINE drags the trunk to MATHILDE, who begins to pull things out. A military jacket, a medal, a sash. Things belonging to Ella's mother and brother.

MATHILDE: All this, over clothing?

ELLA: Put them down.

MATHILDE: They're just clothes, darling. Nothing more.

ELLA: They're important to me, please give them to me.

MATHILDE clutches them tightly to herself.

ELLA: Please. Please.

MATHILDE: You're far too attached.

ELLA: I want to wear that to the ball.

MATHILDE: I don't think that would be very healthy.

MATHILDE drops all of the items into the fireplace.

ELLA: No! (Runs to the fireplace, drops next to it.) Please, hurry, get some water!

MATHILDE: It's already done.

ELLA: No—No—Hurry, please—please help—

MATHILDE: Come, girls. Your father is waiting.

EUGENIE and FAUSTINE prepare to leave.

ELLA: Please—Mathilde, please, please, please!

MATHILDE: Ella, listen to me.

ELLA: I'm begging you, please—please help me put it out.

MATHILDE bends down and takes ELLA'S face.

MATHILDE: Stop it! I'm sure that they were lovely people, Ella. But they are gone now. And they are in a better place. *(Tighter grip.)* And you need to move on. *(Stands and turns away, puts on her gloves.)*

ELLA: *(Whispering.)* Please, please.

The fire is burning out. ELLA turns to MATHILDE. Crawls nearer to her turned back.

ELLA: Why are you like this? Who treated you like this? You're y—you're wicked. You are a predator. An evil—twisted—! You're a—sociopath. I hate you. I hate you—Mathilde. I hope this plague comes back and that you die slowly in miserable pain, you horrible, awful—

MATHILDE turns so quickly that ELLA is silenced.

MATHILDE: Do you feel better now?

MATHILDE, EUGENIE, and FAUSTINE make their exit as ELLA'S lungs fill with screams.

ELLA: No!

ELLA exits, fleeing the house. Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 8

AT START: *The plague pit. Lights fade in. ELLA runs to the hazel tree and drops to the ground.*

ELLA: I've tried to do as they ask. I've done my best to keep to myself.
But I just can't anymore.

The mice enter and comfort ELLA.

ELLA: Thank you for all your help. I'm sorry it was for nothing.
(*Epiphany.*) No. No, it won't be for nothing. I don't need fine clothes.
Prince Max doesn't mind what I wear. I'm going to that ball.

SFX: the mice squeak. The ravens swarm in and the FAIRY GODMOTHER appears.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Of course you are, child.

ELLA: You again.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Me as always.

ELLA: What now? Barleycorn?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: The only seed I can find now is the one within
your heart.

ELLA: What are you talking about now?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Your wish to go to the ball.

ELLA: All I want is one promise kept. So many have been broken
already.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: I know, dear Ella. But all that shall change very
soon. For you are not alone. The ones you loved have helped you
and will continue to do so. All you need is to feel them close by, and
your strength shall renew.

ELLA: Who are you?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: (*A laugh.*) Haven't you figured that out yet?

SFX: a flash. FAIRY GODMOTHER removes the cloak and for the first time we see her full self. She is an elegant and ageless woman, except—the right side of her torso is that of a raven.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: I am your guardian spirit. A keeper of lost souls. The guide of your destiny.

ELLA: *(Takes in FAIRY GODMOTHER'S unearthly appearance.)*
You're... my...

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Let's go with fairy godmother. It sounds less frightening.

ELLA: I'm not afraid of ghosts.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Laughs.)* So you've said. So, shall we make your wish come true?

ELLA: Can you bring my family back?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: No.

ELLA: Can you make Mathilde and her daughters vanish?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: No.

ELLA: Then what can you do?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: See to it that you take the necessary steps to be happy.

ELLA: All of that would make me very happy.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Can you bring your family back? Make your step-mother vanish?

ELLA: No.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: There, you see. It is all inside of you. You just need some help.

ELLA: By going to a ball?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: I sense resistance.

ELLA: The last time I went to a ball.... What if something horrible happens when I go?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: You can't let fear of what could happen keep you from living life. That's how fear wins. *(ELLA nods.)* Now, you'll need to get there somehow. Where is the pumpkin seed I gave you?

ELLA: The—oh—it's um— *(Gestures to the plague pit.)* it's here somewhere.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Very well. Let's comb the pit, shall we?

FAIRY GODMOTHER stretches out her arms and swirls about. SFX: a flash, and a pumpkin on carriage wheels grows in the distance.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: There it is!

ELLA: A pumpkin carriage?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: It's in season. Now, you'll need horses to pull it.

The mice march forward. LEO'S mouse salutes. The FAIRY GODMOTHER flicks her wrist. SFX: a flash, and the mice are now horses. They march to the carriage.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Noble creatures. (*Ponders.*) Driver, coachman. Let's see. Have you any lizards, per chance?

ELLA: N-no?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Very well, I'll have to improvise.

FAIRY GODMOTHER works a bit more magic. Soon, two SPIRITS appear and join the carriage.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Now, go to the hazel tree.

ELLA obeys. FAIRY GODMOTHER lifts her hands.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Shiver and quiver, little tree. Silver and gold, throw down over thee!

FAIRY GODMOTHER tosses flakes of gold and silver toward ELLA. ELLA'S rags disappear, replaced by her mother's ball gown. Then—a sash. And finally—her brother's military jacket. She steps forward, barefoot.

ELLA: How did you...

FAIRY GODMOTHER: You wanted it badly enough.

ELLA: How is this possible?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: It's nights like this that spirits rise. Oh, and I almost forgot.

One SPIRIT produces a bird cage, inside of which sits a pair of slippers made entirely of glass. The SPIRIT places them on ELLA'S feet.

ELLA: They're so beautiful.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: How could anyone look anywhere else?

ELLA: *(A realization.)* Mathilde! She'll surely recognize me.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: I personally see to it that no one recognizes you. Except your best friend, that is.

ELLA: My best friend?

FAIRY GODMOTHER: The prince?

ELLA: Oh. Yes, I suppose if I have a best friend, he'd be it.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: See? Never alone. Now, look at yourself, child. Who are you now?

ELLA: *(Looking herself over.)* I'm just Ella. And I'm going to a ball. *(Exits.)*

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Oh, wait! Ella! Take heed! Magic is very fickle and the spell will become twisted at midnight! You'd best leave before then!

ELLA is gone.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Ella, did you hear? Ella!

The carriage speeds away.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: *(Calling after ELLA.)* Before midnight, Ella!

Lights out.

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