

PANTO CAN BE MURDER

A backstage thriller ... you know, for Christmas

by

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FINAL

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THE CHARACTERS

Most of the performers play two roles: the character they play in the panto that is playing behind the set and the character of the “actor” whom they are portraying. Confusing, isn’t it?

Women

<i>Character</i>	<i>Plays</i>	<i>Description</i>
Jenni Wale	Cinderella	a woman about 20-24
Ruth Buchanan	The Fairy Godmother	a woman of about 50
Taylor Ellis	Stage Manager	a woman of about 24
Meg Proznuk	A.S.M	about 19
W.P.C. Lorraine Duff	of the local constabulary	about 23

Men

<i>Character</i>	<i>Plays</i>	<i>Description</i>
Barry Inman	Buttons, narrator/clown	about 28
Vance Britton	Baron Hardup	40s perhaps
Terry Lavasseur	The Baroness, director/producer	50+
Hugh Coltman	Grizelda Hardup	about 40
Dennis Willett	Ammonia Hardup	about 40
Julian Havers	Dandini	35-45
Ben Roe	Prince Charming, a prince	about 25
Detective Inspector Tuff	an investigating D.I.	50+

THE SCENE

Backstage at the <INSERT TOWN NAME HERE> Civic Theatre, somewhere in England, more or less this year. Throughout the show, we see the back of the set, which faces US, showing us the goings-on behind it.

A NOTE ON THE SCRIPT FORMAT

For the most part, the script is split into two columns. In the *right-hand* column is the script for the Cinderella panto that is being played out on the other side of the set, unseen but heard. In the *left-hand* column is the script of the murder story that is being played out. The two sides need to be timed together, as there are many places where entrances and exits must coincide and a number of **Cinderella** lines (indicated in **BOLD**) that must coincide. The “panto” portion can be read on-book behind the set, making timing of the two sides easier.

NOTE: a detailed soundscape of audience sounds and children’s voices is very helpful for the show.

OTHER NOTE: Tuff says: *Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio*. Pronounce it: Kneel sappy-EN-tea-eye oady-OH-see-us a-COO-min-ay KNEE-me-oh.

Panto Can Be Murder

A backstage mystery-farce in two acts

Act One

(The scene is the back of a set. It extends across the stage, just above mid-stage and has two levels, with doors C, L and R on both levels. It is an impressive set – or would be if we could see the front. But we can't, so we can only imagine the glory that is on the other side of it.)

(Down of the set, there are a number of chairs arranged apparently at random, props and costumes for quick changes hung or set where they can be reached by the performers, a stage manager's station DSR, props tables C, L and R, a doorway DL leading to the outside and one DR leading to dressing rooms.)

(A young woman, TAYLOR, all in black and wearing a headset, comes in from the DR doorway and goes to the SM's station. She looks at the clock above her desk and keys the intercom mic.)

TAYLOR: *(Into the mic.)* Ladies and gentlemen, this is your five-minute call. Your five-minute call.

(We hear this and anything on the mic over the house system.)

(She releases the mic key, then pushes it again.) Please be aware that there may be a hold.

(She releases the key again and opens her prompt book. After a moment, the DR door opens and TERRY, partially dressed as Baroness Hardup and carrying a drink bottle, rushes in)

TERRY: What do you mean, a hold? Why is there a hold?

TAYLOR: There *may* be a hold.

TERRY: Why *may* there be a hold?

TAYLOR: Buttons isn't here, yet.

TERRY: Why not? *(He places his drink bottle on top of the SM's desk.)*

TAYLOR: I don't know.

TERRY: Why don't you know?

TAYLOR: Because, Terry, I'm not god. I'm only a stage manager – close, but not quite the same thing. And, please don't put your bottle there – there's electrics.

TERRY: I'll put it where I like; I'm paying for it. Did you call his cell?

TAYLOR: Yes.

TERRY: Did you call the hospital?

TAYLOR: No, I didn't.

TERRY: Why not?

TAYLOR: Because he has not been hit by a bus and he will be here.

(The DL door bursts open and BARRY runs in, heading across the stage and out the DR door)

BARRY: I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

TAYLOR: *(Keying the mic.)* Ladies and gentlemen, there will be no hold. Starters for Act One, please. Places, Ms. Buchanan, Ms. Wale, Mr. Inman, Mr. Lavasseur. *(She glares at TERRY.)* Mr. Lavasseur.

TERRY: Bloody man! *(He goes toward the DR door.)* If he's late again, I'll . . .

TAYLOR: Wait, you forgot your bottle. *(She holds up TERRY's drink bottle as she keys her headset.)* Stand by, lights. Stand by, sound. Stand by, curtain. *(TERRY takes the bottle. She re-keys the headset.)* Stand by, curtain. Curtain. Meg, are you there?

(TERRY exits through the DR door, as a young woman, MEG, appears from behind the SL side of the set and gives a thumbs up.)

Can you hear me? *(MEG gives another thumbs up)* I can't hear you, so be ready.

(MEG again gives a thumbs up and disappears back to her spot)

Two minutes all.

(The DR door opens and JENNI comes in, pretty and fresh.)

JENNI: Where was he?

TAYLOR: How should I know?

JENNI: Oh, come on, Taylor. Everybody knows.

TAYLOR: Knows what?

JENNI: Buttons and Taylor, sitting in a tree ...

TAYLOR: We are not!

JENNI: Well, not right now.

TAYLOR: Quiet, backstage! Oh, god, I forgot to check the hidey-hole.

(She takes off her headset, leaves her station and goes to the SL side of the set, opens a hatchway and checks that it is ready to use. It is clearly empty and she closes it again. RUTH enters through the DR door.)

RUTH: *(To JENNI.)* So, where was he?

JENNI: She won't say. I think he fell asleep; just plain shagged out.

RUTH: I don't blame him. Shags me out just thinking about it.

(TAYLOR returns to her station and puts on her headset. RUTH and JENNI go to their places. TAYLOR looks around and sees that TERRY isn't in place.)

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TAYLOR: *(She keys the mic.)* Mr. Lavasseur to the stage, immediately. Mr. Lavasseur.

(TERRY comes through the DR door. He starts to put his drink bottle on TAYLOR's desk, then ostentatiously moves it to US of the hidey-hole, out of sight, and goes to his place.)

(She keys her headset again.) All right, people. Here we go. Standby house, LX 1, FX 1 and curtain. *(She watches the clock for a few seconds.)* House to half. *(She pauses for a few seconds.)* House out. FX 1, go.

(We hear music.)

Curtain, go. LX 1, go.

(The lights on the US side of the set change. There is applause from an unseen audience. RUTH waits for a moment, then makes her entrance through the set.)

(From this point, dialogue on the right hand side of the page happens on the US side of the set, ie., unseen, but heard. Dialogue on the left hand side occurs on the DS side of the set, ie., visible to the audience. Right hand dialogue in **BOLD** to be heard distinctly. The rest is just an indistinct mutter.)

(TERRY crosses to her and speaks in a hushed tone.)

TERRY: So where the bloody hell was he this time?

TAYLOR: He was sleeping.

TERRY: Oh, yes? On who? Or rather, on whom?

TAYLOR: I don't know. *(Into her headset.)*
Stand by, FX 2.

TERRY: If he's late one more time, I'll sack him. There's any number who could do it. It's not like it's a hard role.

TAYLOR: Like yours, for instance? *(Into her headset.)* FX 2, go.

TERRY: There aren't that many people left who can still do the Principal Dame. It's a lost art, these days.

TAYLOR: So you keep telling us.

TERRY: You think it's easy? It's bloody hard, young woman. It takes years of experience. And talent.

JENNI: Sssh!

TERRY: Sssh, yourself!

TAYLOR: Terry! Sssh!. *(Into her headset.)*
Stand by, LX2, LX3; FX 3.

TERRY: Shushed by my own staff. The ignominy. *(Moves away.)*

(RUTH comes off the "stage" and back into backstage area.)

TAYLOR: LX2, go. FX 3, go. LX 3, go.

(JENNI makes her entrance. Noises of

(The FAIRY GODMOTHER enters to C.)

FAIRY: **Well, I really had to hurry fast
To get here right on time.**

We have to start right on the dot

To get you home by bedtime.

Now, just a moment, where's me specs?

I know I've got them here.

I'd like to see the girls and boys

Who make the noise I hear.

Oh, there you are! It's nice to see

That you've all come today

To hear the lovely fairy-tale

That we are here to play.

(FX 2: Fairy Underscore)

A pretty girl was born one day,

Her parents loved her true.

Her name was Ella, and I know

That you'll soon love her, too!

Poor Ella's mother died too soon,

With Ella not yet grown,

And Ella's father struggled on

To raise her on his own.

And that's where our story will begin,

That's all you need to know,

So, to the village of Snoresalot,

On magic wings we'll go!

(The FAIRY GODMOTHER waves her wand and then exits.)

*(LX 2: BLACK; FX 3: CINDERS
THEME; LX 3:UP.)*

children cheering.)

JENNI: *(Entering.)* Hello, everybody!

RUTH: One of them's puked in the aisle.

TAYLOR: *(Into the mic.)* Mr. Inman to the stage, please. Mr. Inman to the stage, immediately.

RUTH: Overdid it, last night, did we?

TAYLOR: *(Into the mic.)* Mr. Inman to the stage, please. *(Into headset.)* Standby, LX4, LX5, FX 4.

RUTH: You're only young once, I suppose, but still...

TAYLOR: Be quiet, for god's sake! *(Into the mic.)* Mr. Inman to the stage, immediately. *(Keying headset.)* LX4, go. FX 4, go. *(Into mic.)* Barry!

(She closes her eyes and crosses her fingers. RUTH peeks out onto the stage.)

RUTH: I knew it! Cinders has trodden in it, going up the aisle.

(BARRY rushes in through the DR door, in full "Buttons" costume and runs onto the "stage".)

TAYLOR: *(Keying headset.)* LX 5, go.

BARRY: *(Entering.)* Hi, kids!

TERRY: Living on the edge, isn't he?

RUTH: Aren't we all, Terry, dear?

TAYLOR: Quiet backstage!

TERRY: I pay you, my girl.

TAYLOR: Quiet backstage, please.

TERRY: See? It's not hard to be polite.

TAYLOR: *(She glares at him, then keys the*

CINDERELLA: **Hello, everybody!** My name is Ella. But I spend so much time tending the fires here in draughty old Hardup Hall that everyone calls me "Cinderella" – 'cause I'm always covered in cinders! We don't have much money at Hardup Hall but we try to be happy, especially happy today and do you know why? My father should be home today! He's been trying to find money to keep us going at Hardup Hall. It's been pretty lonely, but my friend Buttons will always cheer us up. He always makes me laugh! Have any of you seen him? He's about this tall and has got buttons all over. Can you help me? We'll just call for him and I'm sure he'll come. Come on ... all together. One, two three...Buttons! ...Buttons!

(FX 4: A sports car approaches and halts with squealing tires.)

That must be his bicycle now. He must out here. *(She exits through the house.)*

(LX 4: FADE TO BLACKOUT.

LX 5: LIGHTS UP .)

BUTTONS: **Hi, kids!** *(Sound of "Hi!" from audience.)* Oh, come on – work with me! I'm called Buttons – 'cause I've got so many buttons! So when I say "Hi, kids!" you all say "Hi, Buttons!" Here we go! Hi, Kids! ... That's it! Cinderella's father's coming home today so I've been doing a bit of shopping. I've bought lots of stuff. *(Holds up odd objects.)* I got this. And this ... and this ... I don't know why I got that, but I did. And I got one of these, too! I mean, you can't have too many of those, can you? Oh, and this book: "Silly Rhymes For

mic.) One minute, Mr. Britton.

(JENNI comes through the DR door, wiping at her costume with a cloth. RUTH helps her.)

JENNI: Bloody hell! Little monsters! Vomit in the aisle and I stepped right into it! I hate children!

TERRY: Did you ruin that costume?

JENNI: I didn't, Terry. The little monster that puked in the aisle did! God!

(VANCE comes through the DR door, dressed as Baron Hardup, with coffee in a styrofoam cup.)

TERRY: You bloody well get any of that on that costume and you'll pay the dry-cleaning.

VANCE: Happily. *(He finishes the coffee and puts the cup in the garbage.)* See? No spills.

(JENNI enters onto the "stage")

JENNI: Promise what, Buttons?

VANCE: Why are you back here, Terry?

TERRY: To protect my investment.

VANCE: Just let us do our job, dear fellow, and your investment will flourish.

TERRY: Or vanish.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* Standby, FX 5.

VANCE: Terry, here's the secret to success. Get a good idea; hire the best people to do it; and then *let* them do it.

TERRY: Thank you, Vance. I'll have to try that sometime.

Modern Times":

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn.
The sheep's in the meadow. The cow's in the corn.

Where's the little boy who looks after the sheep?

He's under the haystack, with Little Bo Peep!

Jack and Jill went up the hill

To fetch a pail of water.

Jack fell down and broke his crown,

And sued for fifteen grand in damages.

Mary had a little lamb.

Its fleece was white as snow

Which everyone thought very strange,

'Cause fleas are black, you know.

So, was Cinderella here? ... Isn't she pretty? ...

Can I tell you a secret? I love her! I do! You can't tell anyone! Especially Cinderella! You promise?

CINDERELLA: *(Entering.)* **Promise what, Buttons?**

BUTTONS: Ah!! That...that...that they'll all brush their teeth after every meal.

CINDERELLA: Odd sort of promise, Buttons.

BUTTONS: Can't be too careful.

CINDERELLA: No! Gum disease is a very serious issue. Oh, Buttons, father's coming home today! Isn't that wonderful?

BUTTONS: Marvellous – and maybe he'll bring home a sack of money.

VANCE: Bloody hell, Terry! You make me so angry, sometimes. . . !

TAYLOR: Quiet backstage! *(She looks at TERRY.)* Please! *(She points at VANCE to indicate his cue.)*

VANCE: Cinderella! Cinderella!

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 5, go.

VANCE: Cinderella! I'm home, my dear!

(VANCE enters to stage. RUTH pulls TERRY aside.)

RUTH: For god's sake, Terry, stop it.

TERRY: Stop what?

RUTH: People will quit.

TERRY: Let them.

RUTH: You can't afford it – I can't afford it!

TERRY: And, I can't afford for this to fail. I've got my last buttons in this.

RUTH: No, your last Buttons is out on stage, if you keep annoying your cast.

TERRY: They can be as bloody annoyed as they like, as long as there's still five hundred kids in those seats, eight times a week.

RUTH: That's the point! How long until those seats are empty?

TERRY: They come to see me, not a bunch of provincial nobodies.

RUTH: Thank you, so much.

TERRY: Not you, Ruth. *(Indicating those on stage.)* Them!

RUTH: You really think a gaggle of five-year olds are here to see a middle-aged ex-telly star – it's, what, nearly 30 years now, isn't it?

CINDERELLA: You know, Buttons, money can't buy happiness.

BUTTONS: But, it makes an amazing substitute.

CINDERELLA: Buttons, you're always fooling.

(FX 5: BARON'S ENTRANCE)

BUTTONS: The Baron! Theme music, you see.

CINDERELLA: *(As the BARON enters.)* Father!

BUTTONS: What's shakin', Baron?

BARON: Buttons! Still fooling, I see. *(He slaps BUTTONS on the back.)*

BUTTONS: Ow!

CINDERELLA: Have you been home yet, Father?

BARON: No, I was driving to Hardup Hall when I ran into some people from the village.

BUTTONS: Anybody hurt?

BARON: *(To CINDERELLA)* They told me you were here. So I walked over.

CINDERELLA: What about the lovely carriage you spent our last gold piece on?

BARON: Ah! I sent it on ahead because inside is a special surprise ... for you.

CINDERELLA: A special surprise!

TERRY: They know who I am. Just listen to them when I go on stage.

RUTH: I will.

TAYLOR: One minute, Mr. Lavasseur.

TERRY: What?

TAYLOR: One minute to your entrance.

TERRY: I know that, girl.

TAYLOR: 40 seconds. Standby LX 6, FX 6.

TERRY: I've been a professional since you were nothing but a worried look in your grandmother's eye. I've never missed an entrance, yet.

TAYLOR: Then, please, don't break tradition, today.

TERRY: One word from me, my girl . . .

TAYLOR: Twenty seconds.

TERRY: ... and you won't work again.

RUTH: Where's your parasol?

TERRY: *(Reaching for it.)* Oh, bloody hell!

(It's not there. He runs through the DR door and disappears.)

TAYLOR: Where's his parasol, Ruth?

RUTH: Oh, he'll find it. . . I'm almost sure he will.

(TERRY runs back in with a parasol and steps to his entry spot. He puts his drink bottle beside it.)

Told you.

BARON: I talked to my brother who made it big in real estate.

BUTTONS: Re-branding Trump Towers?

BARON: And, he knew of a wealthy widow with two girls of her own! I knew it was more than just a hunch. Ella, my dear, brace yourself. I'm married!

CINDERELLA: Married! I have a stepmother...?

BARON: And a pair of w-w-wonderful stepsisters to boot.

CINDERELLA: We'll brush each other's hair; double date – triple date! And live happily ever after!

BARON: I hope so, but, I never really had a look at her until we said the I do's. But after we did ...

BUTTONS: Did what?

BARON: After the vicar said "man and wife", she threw back her veil ...

BUTTONS/CINDERELLA: She threw back her veil?

BARON: She threw back her veil ...

BUTTONS/CINDERELLA: Uh-huh?

BARON: And my forecast of sunny days turned into a severe thunder storm warning!

TAYLOR: (Into headset.) FX 6, LX 6, go.

(TERRY makes his entrance.)

TERRY: (Entering.) Henry! Henry
Hardup!

(RUTH, laughing, exits through the DR door. TAYLOR is alone backstage. She takes off her headset and lays her head down on the desk, closing her eyes for a long moment. Guilty, she sits up, dons her headset and flips pages in the book to get back on track.)

(HUGH and DENNIS enter DR door as STEPSISTERS.)

TAYLOR: (To them.) Thank you.

DENNIS: For what, love?

TAYLOR: It's nice to have someone eager to get on with it. Someone I don't have to call.

HUGH: Oh, eager little beavers, we.

DENNIS: Speak for yourself.

HUGH: I always do, Dennis.

DENNIS: I sometimes wonder.

HUGH: So, Taylor, where was the lad that he nearly missed the curtain?

TAYLOR: I wouldn't know, Hugh.

DENNIS: That's not the rumour.

HUGH: Not that we listen to rumours, dear, but, you know...

DENNIS: We have to have something to spice up life in this awful little town.

TAYLOR: I'm so pleased I can amuse you.

(FX 6: THUNDER. LX 6: DRAMATIC LIGHTING.)

BARONESS: (Entering.) **Henry! Henry
Hardup!**

BARON: Right here, Imogene.

(LX 7: SLOW RESTORE.)

BARONESS: Henry! Heel!

BARON: Yes, my love.

BARONESS: You said you owned "Hardup Hall". It's more like "hardly habitable hall"!

BARON: There are a few things that need fixing.

BARONESS: Fixing? It needs demolition! Not a servant anywhere to be found.

BARON: Oh, my dear, we have a butler, a footman, a stableboy, a groundskeeper, a ...

BARONESS: Well, then, where are they?

BARON: My dear, meet Buttons. (Indicates him.)

BARONESS: Is that a man or a monkey? Either way, it's got to go.

BUTTONS: You look familiar, ma'am. Didn't a house fall on your sister? (She smacks him.) Ow!

BARONESS: Don't mock my family. Why is this beggar looking at me? Go away, beggar!

BARON: Oh, this isn't a beggar, Imogene. This is my Ella. She's my pride and joy.

BARONESS: You're proud of that ... that ... Cinder-ella?

DENNIS: Don't take it to heart, love.
We're just teasing, you know...

HUGH: Just a little ribbing to –

BOTH: – keep it interesting!

TAYLOR: Don't you have an entrance?

DENNIS: Oodles of time.

HUGH: Nearly a whole page!

TAYLOR: Collect your boxes and baggage!

DENNIS: Oh, very well. *(To HUGH.)*
Come along, baggage.

HUGH: Oh, look who fancies herself a
comedian.

DENNIS: Funnier than you, any day, dear.

HUGH: In at least one sense of the word.

DENNIS: Well, that's funny. No, wait!
That's ironic.

HUGH: How is that ironic?

TAYLOR: Will you be quiet backstage?

BOTH: *(Whispering.)* Sorry.

TAYLOR: What is wrong with people
today? *(Into the mic.)* Two minutes, Ms.
Buchanan. Two minutes.

HUGH: *(Sorting props.)* You've got hold
of my package, there, dear.

DENNIS: Oh, what you said! *(Changes
tone.)* See? That's funny.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 8, standby.
Thirty seconds, you two.

*(HUGH and DENNIS take their places
with boxes and baggage.)*

(JENNI comes back from the "stage".)

JENNI: God, I smell of vomit!
Disgusting!

CINDERELLA: *(Attempting to hug her.)*
Welcome to our family, stepmother.

BARONESS: Paws off! *(Using hand
sanitizer.)* Of course you're delighted.

CINDERELLA: I know you and my new
step-sisters will be very happy at Hardup Hall.

BARONESS: Oh, we shall. The cinder-
creature will be our personal maid. I need a
bath. Go draw me one – not too hot, with
perfumes.

BARON: Buttons, go do that, please.

BARONESS: Henry! The monkey's not
coming anywhere near my ablutions!

BUTTONS: Thank God for that, your
Grueness – I mean, Baroness.

CINDERELLA: Are my new sisters at the
Hall?

BARONESS: They came on the train with all
their baggage. Bottoms! Go fetch the bags.

BUTTONS: – and the luggage, too?

BARONESS: I'm watching you, my boy! My
bath, cinder-creature!

CINDERELLA: Not too hot, with perfumes.

(CINDERELLA exits.)

BARONESS: Henry!

BARON: Yes, dear ... heel!

(The BARONESS exits, followed by the

(TERRY comes back in, followed by VANCE, shrugging back to BUTTONS.)

BARON.)

TAYLOR: (Into headset.) LX 8, go. FX 7, standby.

(LX 8: STATE BRIGHTENS.)

TERRY: Jenni, your dress is covered in vomit. Disgusting! For heaven's sake, do something about it. Taylor, love, Barry is rushing the slap; he forced me to actually hit him, again. Make a note. (Gets his bottle.)

BUTTONS: Do you believe her? Well, I'm staying right here. The gruesome twosome will have to come down this road. That's not fair of me. I'm sure they'll get along so beautifully with Cinders, people will call them the Beautiful Step-sisters. What do you think?

TAYLOR: Right. "Mr. Inman, don't make Mr. Lavasseur hit you again." (Into headset.) FX 7, go.

(FX 7: SISTER'S ENTRANCE.

AMMONIA and GRISELDA weighed down with bags, parcels etc.)

TERRY: It's not like I enjoyed it.

(DENNIS and HUGH make their entrance, with parcels and luggage.)

AMMONIA: It's hot! My feet hurt! How much further is it? Are we there yet?

TERRY: Britton, you're upstage of me during the bath sequence. Play down of me. Jenni, if I could smell, I'd take offense.

GRISELDA: Look at all these people, just sitting here. Waiting for the new iPhone?

(He goes through the DR door and exits.)

AMMONIA: Hands off, mate! Hey, sis! He tried to pinch me package.

VANCE: Yes, of course. I'll upstage myself, instead, then.

GRISELDA: Never heard you complain before. Here's one you'd like, sis.

(He goes through the DR door as well.)

AMMONIA: How's that?

TAYLOR: (Mimicking.) "It's not like I enjoyed it"!

GRISELDA: He's got a pulse!

JENNI: Well, he wouldn't. He's not into that.

AMMONIA: Oh, nice! You only ever said "no" once, and then you didn't hear the question. How about this one? Go for a boy-toy, then?

TAYLOR: What? How do you know?

GRISELDA: Yummy! How old do you think he is?

JENNI: A sadder but wiser girl am I.

AMMONIA: When he was a boy, there were no toys.

TAYLOR: (She opens her mouth and closes it again.) I think there's freshener in wardrobe.

(As they pause for breath, BUTTONS, DSC, speaks.)

JENNI: I hope so.

(She goes out through the DR door as RUTH comes in, reacting to the smell of vomit as JENNI passes her.)

RUTH: *(She goes over to TAYLOR.)*
What's put Terry in such a foul mood?

TAYLOR: He had to hit Barry again.

RUTH: I'd have thought he'd enjoy that.

TAYLOR: Apparently not.

(BEN comes through the DR door; he immediately goes to the Last Chance and preens.)

RUTH: *(Interested in TAYLOR's statement.)* Do tell.

TAYLOR: Nothing to tell. That's all I heard.

RUTH: Well, pooh, then.

TAYLOR: You've known him a long time.

RUTH: Too long, love. We were in weekly rep, oh, ages ago. Terry was Wishee-Washee to my Jasmine.

TAYLOR: Never mind. I'm sure your Jasmine was very good.

RUTH: No, he *played* Wishee-Washee. And dear Arthur Askey was Widow Twankey. In Aladdin.

TAYLOR: Oh, I see.

RUTH: I'm sure you do.

TAYLOR: Was he ever married?

RUTH: Terry? No! I don't think. Why?

TAYLOR: Nothing. Just something I'd heard. Yesterday.

RUTH: What?

TAYLOR: Just about a wife and...

BUTTONS: Oh, my word! What a pair! They make their mother look good!

AMMONIA: *(On stage.)* Look, sis. The bell-hop.

BUTTONS: I'm Buttons. I'm Baron Hardup's handyman.

GRISELDA: Really? We're the Baron's new step-daughters.

AMMONIA: I'm Ammonia, but my friends call me Moanie! You can call me Miss Hardup.

GRISELDA: Now, I know you look at me and say "Kate Middleton", but I'm Griselda!

Gristle to my friends.

AMMONIA: If you had any friends. Now, make yourself useful, you handsome cab and call me a fool.

BUTTONS: No problem. You're a fool!

AMMONIA: I mean, make yourself foolish, you useful cab and call me handsome.

BUTTONS: No, I cannot tell a lie!

AMMONIA: Make yourself useful, you fool, and call me a hansom cab.

BUTTONS: In this town? Not likely. It's shank's mares for you.

GRISELDA: I can't walk anymore! You! Take this luggage to Hardup Hall.

BEN: *(Coming over.)* How's the house?

TAYLOR: Not bad. About three-quarters.

BEN: And that's good?

TAYLOR: Pretty good. Not bad, like I said.

BEN: I'm not used to playing to less than a full house. It puts me off.

RUTH: Well, dear, just close your eyes and think back to the glory days of your youth. Back when you were still playing the juvenile lead.

BEN: *I am* still playing the juvenile lead.

RUTH: Oh, yes. Who'd have thought?

BEN: Exactly. *(Smiles and wanders off.)*

RUTH: Shooting fish in a barrel, really.

(BARRY comes back from on "stage".)

What were you saying about Terry and a wife?

TAYLOR: I really don't know. It was... it was something in confidence and I shouldn't...

RUTH: Of course, you should.

BARRY: *(Coming up to them.)* Lor, can you make sure the front of house clean up that mess in the aisle at intermission? It's awful.

TAYLOR: I've made a note.

BARRY: Thanks. *(He gazes at her a moment.)* How are you?

TAYLOR: I'm fine. Thank you.

BARRY: Fine.

TAYLOR: How are you?

BARRY: Fine. *Very* fine.

TAYLOR: That's fine.

AMMONIA: And don't drop it! It's all top line: Wal-mart, Giant Tiger – not easily replaced.

(AMMONIA and GRISELDA pile their luggage into BUTTONS' arms.)

BUTTONS: How about a tip?

GRISELDA: Fine. Here's a tip. Ready? *(She slaps him on the ear.)* Watch it, bub! When you get to the Hall, draw our baths.

AMMONIA: Turn down our beds.

SISTERS: And get our dinner on the table!

BUTTONS: Right! Dinner in the bath, table on your bed and your drawers down. Got it!

(BUTTONS exits.)

GRISELDA: Moanie, look! Little children! We love children, don't we, Moanie?

AMMONIA: Of course, we do – FRIED!

(The SISTERS laugh.)

GRISELDA: 'Course, we don't know them, really. They've never had the pleasure.

AMMONIA: Allow us. We're the Beautiful Step-sisters. *(“Oh, no, you're not!”)*

SISTERS: Oh, yes we are! ... *(Oh, no you're not!)* Oh, yes we are! ... *(Oh, no you're not!)* We are! We are! We are! ... *(You're not! You're not! You're not!)* We are! We are! We are! ... *(You're not! You're not! You're not!)* We are! *(You're not!)* We are! *(You're not!)* We are! *(You're not!)* This could go on all night.

GRISELDA: And who's the most beautiful? Me, right? *(No!)*

RUTH: I'm fine, too, in case anyone is interested.

TAYLOR/BARRY: That's fine.

BARRY: *(Breaks his reverie.)* Fine!

TAYLOR: Fine!

RUTH: Fine.

(BARRY goes out the DR door.)

Worst kept secret in history, love.

TAYLOR: Where are we? *(She flips pages in her prompt book. Into headset.)* Standby, FX 8, LX 9. 30 seconds, Ms. Buchanan.

RUTH: Thank you.

(She crosses to prepare for her entrance. JULIAN comes through the DR door and joins BEN.)

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 8, LX 9, go. Standby, LX 10, FX 9.

JULIAN: How's the house?

BEN: Don't ask.

JULIAN: That bad?

BEN: Three-quarters.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 10, FX 9, go. Standby, LX 11. *(HUGH and DENNIS come from the "stage".*

LX 11, go. Standby, LX 12.

JULIAN: That's not bad. Not *too* bad.

(RUTH makes her entrance.)

BEN: It puts me off.

HUGH: Did you see the one in the second row giving me the eye?

DENNIS: You're fooling yourself, you are.

AMMONIA: They're not that stupid! People, people, in the hall, aren't I the most beautiful of all? *(No!)* Who asked you?

GRISELDA: You're fooling yourself, Moanie. I've got a face like a movie star.

AMMONIA: Yeah – Sponge Bob Square Pants!

GRISELDA: Why you -

(The SISTERS begin a screeching slap-fight. Finally:)

AMMONIA: Let's not quarrel, Gristle! You'll meet Mr. Right one day. Or Mr. One Day, right?

GRISELDA: Oh, I'm in love already. *(Points at someone in the audience)* That one down there's been making kissy faces at me.

AMMONIA: *(Looks out)* That's not a kissy face – he's choking on his toffee!

SISTERS: And, *I'm* the most beautiful! *(No!!)*

(The SISTERS exit. LX 10: BLACKOUT. FX 9: FAIRY ENTRANCE)

(LX 11: LIGHTS UP DSR.)

(Enter The FAIRY GODMOTHER.)

FAIRY: What a pair those two girls are! The way they dress is quite bizarre! And really they're so very mean – The meanest pair I've ever seen. But now we'll have to change the scene To the Royal Forest, all in green.

HUGH: No, really.

I'll simply wave my magic wand . . .
Blasted thing! The battery's gone!

DENNIS:: The only eye you're getting is the
stink eye.

*(She bangs her wand and waves again. It
works this time.)*

TAYLOR: LX 12, go.

(LX 12: LIGHTS REVEALING...)

DENNIS: How are you fixed for cash?

*SCENE TWO: THE EDGE OF THE
FOREST*

HUGH: Terry promised an advance, but
nothing's forthcoming. Bastard's as tight as a
duck's arse. Why?

FAIRY: And here's the Prince's Royal
Green! Oops! I'm not supposed to be in this
scene. Later, taters!

DENNIS: I thought I'd run up and see my
old mum on the day off, but... no funds, dear.

*(TAYLOR mimes giving cue. RUTH
comes back in from the "stage".
JULIAN makes his entrance.)*

(She exits; FX 10 and DANDINI enters.)

HUGH: Same here. No funds and no fun,
either.

DANDINI: There it is, your highness! Yonder
lies the castle of your father!

(BEN makes his entrance.)

(Enter PRINCE CHARMING.)

DENNIS: That one never seems to want.

PRINCE: I see it, Dandini. But why do my
steps grow slower with each pace I take?

HUGH: Terry's fair-haired boy, you know.

DANDINI: I dunno, but it's really a pain.
Don't you want to see your chums again?

DENNIS: Terry's something.

TAYLOR: Will you take it somewhere else?

PRINCE: A prince has no friends.

DENNIS/HUGH: *(Whispering.)* Sorry!

DANDINI: Ta very much, I think!

DENNIS: *(Under his breath.)* Don't poke
the dragon!

PRINCE: Apart from you, Dandini. It's so
hard to live in a Royal Palace, with everyone
bowing and scraping.

TAYLOR: Don't you two have a costume
change to make?

HUGH/DENNIS: To hear is to obey!

DANDINI: Must have been awful.

*(They exit through the DR door. RUTH
comes back to TAYLOR's station.)*

PRINCE: And, now with my father dead, I
am the Crown Prince for real. Endless tedium
and affairs of state. A wearisome burden.

RUTH: So, what did you mean, a wife?

TAYLOR: What?

RUTH: Come on, you can't just drop something like that and play innocent. Terry had a wife?

TAYLOR: I don't know. It was just...

RUTH: Just?

TAYLOR: Just something Jenni said.

RUTH: I'm all ears.

TAYLOR: I shouldn't be saying anything. It's just gossip.

RUTH: Don't let that stop you.

TAYLOR: Jenni said that Terry had let drop something about a wife and kid.

RUTH: I didn't think he had it in him.

TAYLOR: Neither did I

RUTH: He's never mentioned them to me.

TAYLOR: Apparently he hasn't seen them in decades.

RUTH: There you go. We worked together a lot early on, but then I didn't see him for fifteen, twenty years.

TAYLOR: Anyway, that's what Jenni said.

RUTH: And where is this family now?

TAYLOR: I've no idea.

RUTH: The plot thickens! And I do not lisp.

TAYLOR: Don't mention this to anyone.

RUTH: Of course not! Lips are locked!

DANDINI: Yeah, you might get carpal tunnel. (*Mimes signing*)

PRINCE: Oh, I know the toil is not hard – but it's so boring! Would that I were free to be an everyday, common-as-muck sort of person ... like you, Dandini.

DANDINI: Ta very much. (*Aside*) "Charmin", my Aunt Fanny!

PRINCE: Ah, the poor are so much happier than the rich!

DANDINI: When was the last time you wore a pair of socks twice?

PRINCE: Don't try to cheer me, my friend. I know! Let us change habits – let me be you and you be me! And then you might see how hard it is to be a prince.

DANDINI: And you can wear socks that didn't come fresh out of a plastic bag.

PRINCE: That sounds wonderful! Everyone's always said we look alike.

DANDINI: No one ever said that! Who's going to believe that I'm you and you're me?

PRINCE: Dandini, we've been away for so long, who'll know what we look like?

DANDINI: Maybe, but what are you going to do about your accent?

PRINCE: Eck-sent? What eck-sent?

TAYLOR: Ruth...

RUTH: I swear on my honour as a fairy godmother. So, how did Terry come to confide this to Jenni?

TAYLOR: I don't know. Pillow talk, maybe.

RUTH: Wait! Wait! Wait! What? What?

TAYLOR: Apparently.

RUTH: Oh. My. God.

TAYLOR: I know!

(JENNI comes through the DR door and goes to the Last Chance. TAYLOR and RUTH look at her. JENNI, becoming aware of their stares, turns to look at them. They smile and wave non-chalantly. JENNI goes back to the mirror.)

RUTH: *(To TAYLOR.)* No!

TAYLOR: Yes!

(TERRY comes through the DR door, puts his drink bottle on TAYLOR's stand and goes over to the Last Chance beside JENNI. They each adjust their costume in silence, then walk away without looking at each other. JENNI exits DR door.)

RUTH: *(To TAYLOR.)* No!

TAYLOR: Yes!

(TERRY comes to TAYLOR's station. TAYLOR looks at her prompt book.)

TERRY: Listen, I want to work the bath sequence before the run Tuesday. It's sloppy – and Britton's further and further upstage of me.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* Standby, FX 10, LX 13, LX 14. *(To TERRY.)* Equity says no, Terry. You can't.

DANDINI: You talk like you've got a mouth full of marbles.

PRINCE: Should I talk like you do, then? "Oi sigh, guv'nah, pip-pip, cheery-ho."

DANDINI: Not bad. But 'ow am I gonna sound like a toff?

PRINCE: Oh, that's not hard, at all. First thing.

DANDINI: Right. First thing.

PRINCE: When you breath, your lungs fill with what?

DANDINI: Smog.

PRINCE: Very funny. Air! Now, what do you have on your head?

DANDINI: An 'at.

PRINCE: Hair! And you find wolves in a ...?

DANDINI: Forest.

PRINCE: Lair! Now put them all together.

DANDINI: Smog-'at-forest?

PRINCE: Air-hair-lair!

DANDINI: Air-hair-lair?

PRINCE: Air-hair-lair! *(Holds out his hand)*

DANDINI: Air-hair-lair! *(Etc. They shake*

TERRY: Union be damned! I'm not going to let this show get sloppy because of a stupid Equity rule.

TAYLOR: I can make a note. "Mr. Britton, don't take attention away from the man in the orange wig and four-foot wide dress." How's that?

TERRY: Young woman, you really need to remember that *I* hired *you*. And I can *un*hire you.

RUTH: For enforcing Equity rules? That'd go over well.

TERRY: Don't you have an entrance?

RUTH: Not for ages.

TERRY: About two lines, I think.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 10, go. LX 13, go. LX 14, go. *(JULIAN and BEN return from the stage. She points RUTH to the stage.)* GO!

RUTH: Oh, bloody hell!

(RUTH runs to her entrance spot, waits a moment and makes her entrance. TERRY listens to her first lines. BARRY comes through the DR door, winks at TAYLOR.)

TERRY: If we didn't go so far back. I was—

TAYLOR: —Wishee-Washee to her Jasmine. *(Into headset.)* Standby, FX 11, LX 15.

TERRY: Well, there was more to it than that, of course.

TAYLOR: You were in rep together.

TERRY: We were in a lot of things together. *(He smiles reminiscently.)* On stage and off.

TAYLOR: What? Oh, for heaven's sake, would people please stop confiding in me?

hands with people in the audience.)

PRINCE: Brilliant! Tomorrow, I'll declare a Royal Hunt and give every one a chance to meet "your 'ighness" *(Bows. Putting his sash on DANDINI.)* If you wear this, no one will know that I'm me and you're you. I mean, you're you and I'm me. I mean ... Never mind. Yonder lies the castle of my father.

DANDINI: I beg your pardon! *(Brushing him aside.)* Two paces behind, meh good fellow – or it's off with your head!

PRINCE: *(Bows.)* Forgive me, your Royal 'ighness. A'ter you, your Royal 'ighness!

(They exit. LX 13: BLACKOUT. FX 10: PRINCE MUSIC TO FAIRY. LX 14: DR again.)

(Enter The FAIRY GODMOTHER.)

FAIRY: Did you all hear what I just heard?
There's a Royal Hunt next day
I'll set it up so Cinder's there
And let Nature take its way.
But, I've no time right now to rhyme!
(Grimaces.)

I'll write Cinderella a note!
It's down here somewhere!

(Takes a Post-it™ notepad from her bodice.)

I'll leave her a couple of tiny hints:
"There's a Royal Hunt in the Forest
tomorrow,
So be there – and meet your Royal

TERRY: I haven't confided anything.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes, you have.

TERRY: Oh, no I haven't.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes, you have.

TERRY: Oh, no I haven't.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes, you . . . *(Into headset.)*
FX 11, go. LX 15, go.

(RUTH comes off the stage. BARRY goes to his spot. VANCE comes through the DR door. BARRY makes his entrance.)

TERRY: *(To RUTH.)* Well done. Try not to miss your entrance, next time.

RUTH: Isn't there an Equity rule about directors backstage?

(DENNIS and HUGH come through the DR door in night-gowns.)

TERRY: I'm an actor, right now, dear.

RUTH: Then act like it.

VANCE: *(Waiting for a cue.)* Really, people!

(VANCE makes his entrance. DENNIS and HUGH come through the DR door, in nightgowns.)

DENNIS: Taylor – ! Oh, Terry! Just the man. I think there's something living in our dressing room.

HUGH: And, I'm sure it has teeth.

TERRY: What would you like me to do about it?

HUGH: Remove it at once.

TERRY: I only rent the theatre. Talk to the owner.

Prince." *(She writes the note.)*

I'll put this note by the kitchen stove,
And then, she'll find true ... loave!

Look, you think it's easy rhyming all
the time?

Try it for a while and see.

I'll just stick it here.

(She sticks the note to the scenery. FX 11: SCENE CHANGE; LX 15: LIGHTS UP. The FAIRY GODMOTHER exits.)

(Enter BUTTONS.)

BUTTONS: Hi, kids! ... Has Cinderella been here? ... Her two step-sisters have got her working so hard. Are they ever mean! And are they ever ug – oh, look! A note.

(BUTTONS takes the note and reads it.)

"There's a Royal Hunt in the Forest tomorrow, so be there – and meet your Royal Prince."

(The BARON enters behind BUTTONS.)

Well, what does that mean?

(The BARON taps BUTTONS who jumps.)

BUTTONS: Yeech! Stop doing that!

BARON: What's up?

BUTTONS: There's a strange note –

BARON: Yes, I've heard you sing! But what's that piece of paper?

BUTTONS: It's a strange note.

DENNIS: And who's that?

TERRY: How should I know? I'm not a census taker. I'm an artist.

HUGH: Have you looked in the mirror?

TERRY: Have you, my lad? Pot. Kettle.

HUGH: Really! I've half a notion to quit this bloody show!

TERRY: Go ahead. You couldn't get work anywhere else.

HUGH: I've got offers pouring in.

TERRY: Yes, but not for acting jobs.

HUGH: How dare you...?

DENNIS: All right, Hughie. Entrance-time!

HUGH: Yes! Saved by the bell, Terry.

TERRY: Any time, ducks.

(DENNIS & HUGH begin to sing.)

DENNIS/HUGH: I feel pretty, oh so pretty.
I feel pretty and witty and bright!

TERRY: How hard can it be to put on a dress and some lipstick and run around a stage?

(DENNIS and HUGH enter to the stage.)

RUTH: As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me, what's put you in such a foul mood today, Terry?

(JENNI enters through the DR door.)

TERRY: I'm not in a foul mood. I'm worried over gate receipts, that's all.

RUTH: Should I be? I've got twenty per cent of this show, remember. I thought we were doing well.

BARON: And what's it say?

BUTTONS: Nothing. It can't talk. It's paper.

BARON: What's written on it?

BUTTONS: There's a Roy'l 'unt.

BARON: Don't know them.

BUTTONS: Don't know who?

BARON: The Lunts. Roy and his wife.

BUTTONS: Not Roy Lunt! A. Royal. Hunt! It says I'll meet my Prince. Look! *(Shows him.)*

BARON: *(Reads it.)* Well, it's not for me!

BUTTONS: It's not for me!

BARON: Well, who can it be for?

SISTERS: *(OFF.)* I feel pretty, oh, so pretty, I feel pretty and witty and bright!

(The BARON and BUTTONS exchange a look and shudder.)

BUTTONS & BARON: I hope it's not for them!

(Enter the SISTERS, in night attire.)

SISTERS: *(Sung)...* Oh, I pity
Any man who tries to run, tonight!
Daiddle-diddle-deedle-day! Tradition!

BARON: Ah, my ug ... mazing step-daughters! Relaxing, are you?

GRISELDA: This amount of hotness takes work.

TERRY: We are, but look out there. Three-quarter houses. It should be better.

RUTH: It's what it is.

TERRY: And, who's to blame for that?

RUTH: Blame? The kids are loving it. Listen to them!

TERRY: Oh, sure, the kids are there; the moms are there; the grannies are there. You know who's not there? Dads! No dads! And why is that? No legs!

RUTH: No legs?

TERRY: No legs! Jenni's got legs! Show us your legs, Jenni.

(JENNI looks at him for a moment, then lifts her dress a little before dropping it.)

You've got legs – I've seen those. But even *I* don't want to see Ben's legs!

(VANCE comes off the "stage".)

RUTH: Ben's legs?

TERRY: We've got a *male* Principal Boy – no women in tights -- and 25 percent of our audience – the dads – are staying home.

VANCE: That's rather sexist, Terry.

TERRY: Doesn't make it wrong. If we had a female Principal Boy, we'd be full every show. *(BARRY comes off the stage.)* And who was it persuaded me not to? You, love.

(JENNI makes her entrance.)

RUTH: It's sexist.

TERRY: It's show biz.

VANCE: It's old-fashioned.

AMMONIA: We're turning in early to get our beauty sleep.

BUTTONS: I'd sleep in late, if I were you.

GRISELDA: Disgusting thought. And, here's the list of what Cinderella has to do while we're sleeping.

AMMONIA: Where is Miss Prissy No-shoes?

BUTTONS: Cleaning your combat boots.

GRISELDA: Well, fetch her in, step-meal-ticket!

BARON: At once, my dear ... *(He turns away.)* ... lummox. I'm sorry, my boy, you're on your own.

BUTTONS: Oh, thanks a lot.

(The BARON exits.)

AMMONIA: Oh, Buttons!

BUTTONS: Yes?

AMMONIA: Remember that beauty sleep comment?

BUTTONS: Yes. *(AMMONIA pokes him in the eye.)* Ow! That was wicked of you!

(BUTTONS exits, holding his face.)

GRISELDA/AMMONIA: *(High-fiving.)* Wicked!

(Enter CINDERELLA.)

CINDERELLA: Did you want me, step-sisters?

AMMONIA: No, but we're stuck with you.

GRISELDA: Listen, Cinder-one, we noticed

TERRY: It's tradition – and if there's anything that's about tradition, it's panto!

(He goes up to where he had placed his drink bottle earlier and retrieves it, taking a long drink as he comes back.)

You know about that tradition, the pair of you. The grand tradition of the theatre, of happy children's entertainment that –

TERRY/BARRY/VANCE/RUTH: – stretches all the way back to the great Grimaldi, who first put on a wig and false bosoms to – *(TERRY stops.)*

BARRY/VANCE/RUTH: – bring joy to the hearts of little ones –

RUTH: Blah, blah, blah.

TERRY: Mock if you will ...

VANCE: We will.

TERRY: Scoff if you like ...

RUTH: We like.

TERRY: ... but it won't bring any of you a pay cheque when I close the show next week.

BARRY: Bloody hell!

TAYLOR: One minute, Mr. Lavasseur.

TERRY: Thank you, my dear. It's lovely to know there is still one professional in this company.

(He crosses to the hidey-hole, places his drink bottle out of sight behind it and opens the door. He comes back to the group.)

Britton, upstage me one more time and I'll fire you, Equity or no Equity.

that you had all of fifteen minutes to eat today.

AMMONIA: So – ! Here's a to-do list – to do before you go to bed!

(AMMONIA pulls out a multi-page document.)

CINDERELLA: That's a long list.

(The SISTERS back CINDERELLA around the stage as they read the list.)

AMMONIA: Before tomorrow, you must: Clean up my mess and hem up my dress!

GRISELDA: Darn my socks and wind the clocks!

AMMONIA: Boil us some porridge and clean out the storage!

GRISELDA: Sweep off the mats and re-block our hats!

AMMONIA: Make up my bed and build us a shed!

GRISELDA: And when you've done that – Page Two ... *(Turns the page.)*

AMMONIA: Go feed the hen and clean out her pen!

GRISELDA: Fetch in some sticks and point up the bricks!

AMMONIA: Weed all the flowers and scrub out the showers!

GRISELDA: Rake up the leaves and bring in the sheaves!

AMMONIA: Distill me a simple!

GRISELDA: And – squeeze my pimple!

SISTERS: Want to hear page three? Ha-ha-

Inman, late one more time and even Equity will side with me when I fire you. Ruth, dear, we've had so many good times together, but I must tell you – you were one of the lousiest lays I've ever had in my life.

(He goes back to the hidey-hole, climbs in and closes the door.)

BARRY: I haven't been late that often!

VANCE: Just walking onto the stage with that ham is upstaging him!

RUTH: Lousy lay! I'll sue the bastard! How dare he! Like he was any great shakes!

TAYLOR: Ruth! Quiet backstage!

RUTH: *(Quieter.)* Bloody cheek . . .

VANCE: I'm sure you're a terrific lay, Ruth. Any man would be happy to lay you – I'd happily do it myself... *(TAYLOR, BARRY and RUTH look at him.)*... except I'm... married. That sounded better in my head than when it came out.

RUTH: He is *so* infuriating. I didn't talk to him for *fifteen years* because he ticked me off so badly. And then he can be so sweet...

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* Standby, FX 13, LX 15.

BARRY: Why does he make that entrance from the hidey-hole? Why not just walk in through a doorway like the rest of us?

VANCE: Dramatic effect. Thunder; flashpot; smoke and – poof! – a poof appears.

RUTH: He's not really – or not totally.

VANCE: So, we have just discovered, dear.

BARRY: What's this about Ben's legs?

ha!

CINDERELLA: But, I can't possibly do those jobs tonight! Can you help?

GRISELDA: No way. We're off on an excursion to the spa over in *(nearby town)*.

AMMONIA: They do a complete beauty make-over in thirty minutes.

CINDERELLA: So, you'll be ... how long?

GRISELDA: Three days.

CINDERELLA: I guess no one from Hardup Hall will be going to the Royal Hunt.

AMMONIA: Obviously not.

GRISELDA: Don't be foolish.

SISTERS: Royal Hunt! What Royal Hunt?

CINDERELLA: *(Takes the note from her pocket. Reads.)* "There's a Royal Hunt in the Forest tomorrow, so be there – and meet your Royal Prince."

AMMONIA: Griselda!

GRISELDA: Ammonia!

SISTERS: A Prince! *(To CINDERELLA.)* Give it!

CINDERELLA: Daddy gave it to me!

AMMONIA: And we're taking it from you! Give it!

CINDERELLA: No! No! No!

GRISELDA: Yes! Yes! Yes!

CINDERELLA: No! No! No!

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 13, go. LX 15, go.

VANCE: Really, he's got me so angry I could just bloody well kill him.

RUTH: I've got half my savings sunk into this production and he knows it, but do you think I have any say in what's happening? Do I, 'eck!

VANCE: Well, I don't have my savings in it, but I still have a lot riding on it and he's practically sabotaging the whole show.

RUTH: Sabotage is a strong word, Vance.

(TAYLOR realizes there's something wrong on stage and flips pages in her script. She looks around for TERRY.)

TAYLOR: *(Whispering.)* Terry! *(Into headset.)* FX 13, go! Again! *(Into mic.)* Mr. Lavasseur to the stage – NOW!

VANCE: Where's the bloody man, now?

RUTH: I didn't see him leave the backstage.

VANCE: Taylor, should we go and look for him?

RUTH: He wouldn't have popped out for a drink, would he?

VANCE: Would he?

(JENNI sticks her head out from the "stage" to see what's happening, goes back on.)

RUTH: He hasn't done that in years.

VANCE: Wonderful time to relapse. I'll check the dressing rooms.

RUTH: I'll check the bar.

TAYLOR: Ruth, check the dressing rooms. Vance, look in the bar.

(The SISTERS chase CINDERELLA but she avoids them until: FX 13:

THUNDER. LX 15: DRAMATIC STATE. THE BARONESS DOES NOT APPEAR! A long moment of hesitation on stage.)

AMMONIA: Mummy!

GRISELDA: Mummy!

AMMONIA: She hit me back, Mummy!

GRISELDA: You should come and see this!

CINDERELLA: It's my note. They can't have it!

(A pause while they look around.)

GRISELDA: Well, you should have given it to us!

CINDERELLA: No, Daddy gave it ... !

AMMONIA: Oh, did he? And, why should you have a note and not my daughters? Not us?

GRISELDA: That note says that the Prince will be at the Royal Ball – Royal Hunt ... Mummy.

SISTERS: We want to go to the Hunt! *(Pause.)* And we shall! *(Pause.)* Yippee!

(The SISTERS celebrate like little girls.)

CINDERELLA: *(Looking off.)* But, I want to go to the Hunt, too!

AMMONIA: How can you go to a Royal Hunt, you dirty girl? You haven't a thing to wear.

CINDERELLA: I'll wear this. It's my best dress.

GRISELDA: Wrong! It's your only dress.

BOTH: Right.

(They go out the DR door. BARRY comes through the DR door to see what's happening.)

BARRY: Lor, where is he?

TAYLOR: I don't know. He got into the hidey-hole – I saw him – but he must have gone off for something.

BARRY: Maybe, he got taken short.

TAYLOR: *(Into the mic.)* Mr. Lavoisier to the stage – Terry, RIGHT NOW!

(RUTH and JULIAN come through the DR door.)

RUTH: He's not in his dressing room.

JULIAN: Or in the green room.

BARRY: *(A thought.)* He's not stuck in the hidey-hole, is he?

TAYLOR: I tested it pre-show. It's fine.

(She crosses to the hidey-hole and opens it. TERRY falls out.)

ALL: Oh, no!

TERRY: *(Nearly his last breath.)* Oh, yes.

(DENNIS and HUGH come back from the stage. They take in the scene in shock.)

(TAYLOR kneels beside TERRY. He pulls her head down and whispers into her ear, then falls back dead.)

RUTH: Drunk as a lord.

TAYLOR: No. *(She checks the pulse at his neck.)* He's dead.

RUTH: *(Sincerely.)* Oh, no! He isn't!

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. He is.

CINDERELLA: My only dress?

GRISELDA: I ... uh ... we ... uh ... Mummy put all your clothes in the bonfire.

CINDERELLA: No!

AMMONIA: Right, because, uh, you really have no, what do you call it – fashion sense, ducky. I mean look at that ... you call that a sleeve ... *(Tears the sleeve.)* The other one's just as bad ... *(Tears the other.)* You call that a hemline? ... *(Tears the hem.)* ... and, and, and just look at that collar! *(Tears the collar.)*

CINDERELLA: My lovely dress! It's nothing but rags, now!

GRISELDA: So put on your big-girl panties and deal with it!

AMMONIA: Oh, I forgot!

SISTERS: We burned them! Ha-ha-ha! Don't you think we're sweet? *(No!)* Go lick a parking meter!

(AMMONIA and GRISELDA exit. CINDERELLA is left alone on stage.)

CINDERELLA: Well, boys and girls, they certainly are mean, aren't they? *(Cries of "Yes!" from the CHILDREN.)* Yes, they sure are mean. *(Pause.)* I wonder where Buttons is? You haven't seen him, have you? *(Cries of "No!" from the CHILDREN.)* Maybe, if we all called for him, he'd come. Buttons! Buttons!

(The CHILDREN join in. This continues until BUTTONS's entrance. CINDERELLA looks for BUTTONS around the stage, and out the doors, calling for him.)

BARRY/HUGH/DENNISJULIAN: (*Automatically.*) Oh, no, he isn't!

TAYLOR/RUTH: Oh, yes, he is!

(*JENNI sticks her head out from the "stage", then goes back.*)

(*CINDERELLA sticks her head out the exit and calls.*)

JENNI: Buttons! BUTTONS!

CINDERELLA: Buttons! BUTTONS!

(*BARRY runs out onto the "stage".*)

(*Enter BUTTONS.*)

RUTH: What did he whisper to you?

BUTTONS: Hi, kids! ... Is Cinderella here? Oh, Cinders! Your pretty dress!

TAYLOR: He said: "No refunds."

DENNIS: Oh, that's so like him.

CINDERELLA: My Stepmother ... my stepsisters tore it to shreds.

(*VANCE enters through the DR door wearing pyjamas and a dressing gown with the medals he was wearing in the first scene.*)

BUTTONS: Oh, dear. That's too bad.

CINDERELLA: What's going on, Buttons? Why were you so late?

VANCE: He's not in the washroom and he's not out in the lobby. (*He sees TERRY's body.*) Oh, my god! Is he ... ?

BUTTONS: Tell you later, Cinders. Well ... how about that Royal Hunt?

ALL: Yes!

CINDERELLA: What? Yes! I so wanted to meet Prince Charming.

VANCE: That's just like him. The bloody man! He knows I just put a down payment on a car!

BUTTONS: What for?

TAYLOR: What do we do?

CINDERELLA: Well, he might look like the star of a movie.

DENNIS: Call an ambulance.

BUTTONS: Yeah, but it might be Sharknado.

TAYLOR: He's dead, Dennis.

HUGH: Call an undertaker.

CINDERELLA: Yes, that'd be awful. I wonder where the Baron – I mean, where my father is?

VANCE: He's not *that* dead.

RUTH: Call the police.

BUTTONS: Right. Baron! Baron! No, I'm not supposed to see ... So, Cinders, how've you been keeping? Been to any good balls, lately?

TAYLOR: Vance, that's your cue!

VANCE: I'm not calling the police. You call the police!

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons – you are so funny! Ha, ha, ha!

TAYLOR: No! That's your cue! Get

onstage!

(VANCE rushes onto the stage.)

RUTH: Lor, call the police!

TAYLOR: Right. *(She pulls out her cell phone and tries to make a call.)* Oh, for... it's turned off! *(She turns it on and waits.)* Oh, god! What's the number for nine-nine-nine?

ALL: *(Beat.)* Nine-nine-nine!

TAYLOR: Right! *(She punches in the digits, waits.)* What's going on out there?

RUTH: *(Goes to the set and listens.)*
They're on track – sort of.

TAYLOR: *(Into phone.)* Yes, come quickly. Our Dame is dead! ... Our Principal Dame. ... Baroness Hardup! ... No, it's not a prank. He's died. Yes, he. Well, he's a man, but he's a woman.

(JENNI comes off the stage, sees what is happening behind the set, gasps.)

TAYLOR: *(Into phone.)* I mean, he's dressed as a woman. Well, it's at the theatre. ... Yes, you're right. That explains it. ... What do you mean, are we sure he's dead? *(To the others.)* Are we sure he's dead?

ALL: *(Look to TERRY, back to TAYLOR.)*
Yes!

TAYLOR: He's dead all right.

HUGH/DENNIS: *(Like a "bit".)* How dead is he?

TAYLOR: He's very dead ... Yes, the *(Insert name of town here.)* Theatre. Send someone, please. Stage door! *(She ends the call.)* They're on their way.

JENNI: What do we do, meantime? Hold a wake?

HUGH.: I suppose we should make an announcement.

BOTH: Baron!

(The BARON enters behind BUTTONS and taps BUTTONS on the shoulder, scaring him.)

BUTTONS: Ah! Will you stop that?

BARON: Force of habit. If you knew what's been going on out there – I mean, what's been going on here – Cinderella?

CINDERELLA: Buttons was cheering me up.

BARON: What did he do? Fall down dead? Ha, ha! Sorry, not funny. *(Notices CINDERELLA's dress)* Goodness me! How did your dress get torn?

CINDERELLA: You'd better ask Mummy – I mean, Step-mummy – I mean, my step-sisters!

(CINDERELLA exits, crying.)

BARON: I wish I could. I mean, oh dear, she's awfully excitable.

BUTTONS: Nothing gets past you, does it, Baron? It's the Baroness.

BARON: Her step-mother can be somewhat harsh, I fear.

BUTTONS: You fear? I'm shakin' in me old boots! And, speaking of old boots, why on Earth did you marry her?

BARON: Plainly speaking, we needed money!

BUTTONS: Why not sell the family heirlooms?

BARON: Pawned those ages ago!

BUTTONS: Well, you've got a chest full of medals, there. Hock them!

RUTH: Yes. *(Beat.)* Who'll do that?

(They all do a take to TAYLOR.)

TAYLOR: Oh, no, I won't!

THE REST: Oh, yes, you will!

TAYLOR: Oh, no, I won't!

THE REST: Oh, yes, you will!

DENNIS: Wait! If we stop the show, we'd have to give money back.

RUTH: That's right. And remember, poor Terry's last words ...

ALL: No refunds!

(VANCE comes back in from the stage.)

RUTH: Well, we're all agreed, then?

(BARRY comes back in from the stage, which is now empty and silent.)

ALL BUT BARRY: The show must go on!

(They all listen to silence for a moment.)

RUTH: Taylor! Scene change!

(TAYLOR rushes to her station and puts on the headset.)

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* Standby, LX ... oh, for god's sake! Go, sound! Go, lights!

(BEN, dressed as DANDINI, enters from the DR door, oblivious to everything else, steps OVER the body of TERRY and takes his position. JULIAN, still in his DANDINI costume, stares astonished, then rushes over to him trying to draw his attention to TERRY. BEN makes his entrance.)

BEN: *(As he enters.)* My lords, ladies and gentleman - pray silence for His Highness, Prince Charming!

BARON: I couldn't! My medals are very important to me! I wear them everywhere. I pin them on my morning suit, on my evening suit.

BUTTONS: Did you wear them on your birthday?

BARON: Of course! I pinned them on my birthday suit!

BUTTONS: Ouch!

BARON: So, don't try to interfere with my medals – don't meddle with my medals! Ha-ha-ha! *(To audience.)* Meddle with my medals? You get it? Oh, well, please yourselves. *(The BARON exits – laughing.)* It's the way I tell 'em!

BUTTONS: Well, at least somebody laughs at his jokes! Caio, caio!

(BUTTONS exits.)

(A BIG pause.)

(FX 13b: SCENE CHANGE)

(LX 17: BLACKOUT.)

(LX 18: LIGHTS UP.)

(Enter PRINCE CHARMING.)

PRINCE: **My lords, ladies and gentleman - pray silence for His Highness, Prince Charming!**

TAYLOR: Uhm... *(Into headset.)* Go, sound!
... Never mind, I'll tell you later.

(JULIAN makes his entrance.)

VANCE: How can the show go on without
a Principal Dame?

RUTH: That was Terry's whole
argument.

VANCE: Argument?

RUTH: He said that nobody bought
tickets to see a bunch of provincial has-beens
like us perform. The whole show was him!

VANCE: Oh, was it?

RUTH: I don't say it was, but I guess
those kids out there really only wanted to see
him.

VANCE: I see what you're doing.

DENNIS: I don't.

HUGH: She's playing us off, one against
the other, silly.

DENNIS: Oh, I see! *(Pause.)* Why?

VANCE/HUGH: To get us to find a way to
keep the show going!

DENNIS: Oh, I say! Very clever, Ruth!

RUTH: So, is it working?

VANCE: Hell, yes!

DENNIS: Nobody's calling me a
provincial!

HUGH: Or a has-been. I've got months
before I'm a has-been.

DENNIS: *(Picking up a hobby-horse)*
We've got an entrance coming up, Taylor!

TAYLOR: So, enter.

HUGH: We need the music cue!

(FX 13: ROYAL FANFARE.)

DANDINI: *(Entering.)* A very subjective
morning to all my peasants! *(The PRINCE*
coughs.) I mean ... a very pleasant morning to
all my subjects. My lords; my ladies; my all the
rest of you. Welcome to the Roy'l 'unt. This is
an 'unt with a difference. This 'unt is a treasure
'unt! Why, did I hear you ask?

PRINCE: I don't think you did.

DANDINI: Because chasing a frightened little
fox all over the countryside is cruelty to
animals. That's wrong! Cruelty should be
restricted to people.

PRINCE: That's not what ...

DANDINI: Instead, you will be chasing
something more valuable than a mangy old fox-
skin. My servant Dandini, here, has hidden a
shiny new gold piece somewhere in the forest.
So, on your marks; get set; take off! *(Turns to*
PRINCE.) Not bad, eh?

PRINCE: For a beginner ... your 'ighness!
Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll take off!

DANDINI: Take off? Take off where?

PRINCE: The point was to allow me to get
away from me du'ies – I mean, my duties.

DANDINI: Yeah, but what happens when this
lot don't find a gold piece hid in the woods?

PRINCE: Why wouldn't they find it?

DANDINI: Well, it looks just like this one ...
(DANDINI produces the coin.) ... because it is
this one. I was too busy picking up your socks to

TAYLOR: Music?

DENNIS: Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!

HUGH: Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!

DENNIS: I don't enter without music. I'm an artiste, I am. Mount up, Griz. *(They straddle their hobby horses.)*

TAYLOR: Oh, for... *(Into headset.)* Go, FX whatever the hell it is!... I told you I'll tell you later.

DENNIS/HUGH: Yoicks. Tally-ho! Yoicks, tallyho!

(DENNIS and HUGH make their entrances, with hobby horses.)

(The rest gather around TERRY's body and look at him.)

JENNI: What do we do now?

BARRY: Wait, I suppose.

RUTH: Poor Terry.

JENNI: Poor Terry.

VANCE: Never mind that. Poor us.

RUTH: What do you mean?

VANCE: As soon as that curtain comes down, this show is closed.

RUTH: I hadn't thought of that.

BARRY: I've got a flat to pay for.

VANCE: I've got a car to pay for.

JENNI: I've got a boob job to pay for!

(They all look at JENNI's face, her boobs, then back to her face.)

hide it.

PRINCE: Well, just put it ... uh ... put it over ... *(Puts coin behind a tree.)* ... there! Someone's sure to find it there.

DANDINI: Yeah, stuck behind a tree, in the middle of a forest. Blindingly obvious, there!

(FX 14: SISTERS' ENTRANCE)

SISTERS: *(OFF.)* Yoicks, tallyho! Yoicks, tallyho!

(The SISTERS enter, riding hobby-horses.)

GRISELDA: Where's everyone gone? Are we late? Where's the prince?

AMMONIA: Sorry for our tardiness. Griselda was trying to get mounted. But he wouldn't cooperate.

GRISELDA: Oh, what you said! *(AMMONIA's hobby-horse 'rears' up)* Easy, big fellow! Moanie often gives her mount a pain in the ... hind-quarters!

AMMONIA: Yes, and I'm looking at her.

GRISELDA: Eyes to yourself! Oo, look at this one, Moanie.

AMMONIA: Ain't he pretty? Got a girlfriend, dimples?

PRINCE: No.

GRISELDA: Want one?

PRINCE: I am the Prince! – s's servant.

SISTERS: Servant! Eeeuww! Servant cooties!

They're not, you know. Best that money can buy. And, Terry was going to pay for them.

TAYLOR/RUTH: Oh, now, I get it!

JENNI: What?

TAYLOR/RUTH: Nothing.

JENNI: The bastard was going to cut a cheque tomorrow out of this week's profits...

RUTH: And, now I get *that*!

JENNI: ... but instead, he's lying there like a lump. *(They all look at him.)*

BARRY: We shouldn't just leave him there.

VANCE: Yes. Let's take him to the green room. He can wait there.

RUTH: Right. *(They each grab a limb and shuffle him toward the DR door. Halfway:)* Wait! Wait! Wait!

VANCE: What? What? What?

RUTH: We shouldn't move him.

BARRY: Why?

RUTH: Don't you watch CSI?

(They shuffle him back to where he was and deposit him.)

JENNI: There! Good as new – or good as dead –

TAYLOR: But he wasn't lying like that!

(They pick him up and reposition him, several times.)

(The SISTERS push the PRINCE away.)

GRISELDA: *(Affecting a bad posh accent.)* Ay've nevah bin 'andled layk thet in me laif.

AMMONIA: Not since last Saturday night.

PRINCE: *(Indicates DANDINI.)* This is the Prince.

AMMONIA: Oh, yummie! 'ere – 'old hower 'orses.

(The SISTERS step off the hobby-horses and give them to the PRINCE.)

GRISELDA: *(Vamps DANDINI.)* So we're 'ere; we've got hower 'orses. Where's the 'unt?

DANDINI: The "unt"? Well, yes, it's an 'unt – a hunt – but not for foxes.

AMMONIA: Oh, I was looking forward to squishing some defenceless creatures. *(Referring to the audience.)* Starting right out there!

DANDINI: We don't hunt cuddly little creatures anymore. This hunt is for hidden treasure.

AMMONIA: Treasure! I love it! Let's go. It's been ages since I went for a tramp in the woods!

GRISELDA: Yes, I remember his screams when you finally caught him.

AMMONIA: I let him go – he was 'way under the limit! What's the treasure then?

RUTH: Right. That's *exactly* how he fell – sort of.

(FX 14a: ambient. From outside, we hear a police siren approach and stop.)

RUTH: Oh, thank god, the police are here.

VANCE: I never thought I'd be happy to hear someone say that.

BARRY: The police can take over, now.

VANCE: And, if anyone asks, we never moved him, right?

JENNI: Moved who?

VANCE: Clever girl! *(He puts his arm around her.)* And those *aren't* real?

JENNI: Six weeks old.

VANCE: Hardly old enough to vote. Would you mind if I... uh...

JENNI: *(Slaps his hand.)* You're married!

VANCE: Right.

(He gives up and goes into a corner. TAYLOR is back at her station.)

BARRY: *(To TAYLOR.)* You all right?

TAYLOR: Why wouldn't I be? *(BARRY points to TERRY's body.)* The show goes on. *(BARRY goes to his position. She speaks into the headset.)* Standby, LX 19, FX – what number are we at? – FX 15. *(JENNI passes her.)* Jenni – you did it with Terry – for a boob job?

JENNI: Why not? Honey, I'm not getting younger and these puppies don't stay in their prime forever. With these, I'm good for another ten years.

TAYLOR: Yes, but – *(Into headset.)* LX 19, FX 15, go. *(To JENNI.)* But Terry?

JENNI: He's not so bad, really. I mean,

PRINCE: A gold piece!

AMMONIA: Did someone pull your chain, Mr. Whiskers?

GRISELDA: Yeah, shut it! Sophistica'ed folk is talkin'.

DANDINI: Good luck.

AMMONIA: What, you think we're going to go tromping through these woods?

GRISELDA: If you tell us where it is, we'd both be so grateful to you – know what I mean?

DANDINI: I'm afraid I do! But what about the other people?

AMMONIA: We won't tell if you don't!

GRISELDA: *(Draws a water-pistol.)* Now, where's that gold piece hidden?

DANDINI: But, I'm the prince!

GRISELDA: *(Draws a water-pistol.)* We've soaked better princes than you. Where's the gold?

DANDINI: Shan't say.

GRISELDA: Right! Waterlogged prince, it is!

(FX 15: CHASE MUSIC (INSTRUMENTAL); LX CUE 19: LIGHTS UP IN AUDITORIUM. The ensuing chase goes around the stage and

he can be a right old bastard, but he's not so bad, in the end. Or he was.

(TUFF and DUFF enter through the DL door and, hearing the onstage commotion, assume that a crime is in progress.)

TUFF: All right, what's going on here? W.P.C. Duff, put a stop to that riot. We may need the rapid response squad.

TAYLOR: Quiet backstage! *(To DUFF.)* And, don't you dare go through that door!

TUFF: I am Detective Inspector Tuff and I say she is.

(JULIAN comes back from the stage.)

TAYLOR: She isn't!

TUFF: She is!

ALL: Oh, no, she isn't!

TUFF: *(To TAYLOR)* Just who are you?

RUTH: She's the Stage Manager, dear, and around here, she outranks you.

TUFF: Now, look, you'd better not be wasting police time. We were told there's a dead person here.

TAYLOR: There certainly is. Over there. *(Points to TERRY, just as BEN comes out and trips over him.)*

TUFF: Here, now! That's tampering with evidence! W.P.C. Duff, place him under... !

TAYLOR: He's not tampering with evidence. He's making an exit. I don't expect you to know the difference. *(Into headset.)* Go, FX 16!

TUFF: I know the difference. I've trodden the boards myself on more than one occasion, but this, my girl, is serious.

into the auditorium, squirting as much of the audience as possible. The PRINCE watches them and laughs. Eventually DANDINI regains the stage.)

DANDINI: Here, I thought servants like you were supposed to protect princes like me!

(The SISTERS regain the stage.)

GRISELDA: We're going to find you, Princey!

AMMONIA: Where are you?

DANDINI: It's every prince for himself!

(DANDINI exits.)

AMMONIA: *(To GRISELDA.)* Can't half run, can he, Gristle?

PRINCE: His highness was a varsity track-man.

GRISELDA: Did you hear something, Moanie?

AMMONIA: Yes. It sounded like a fish flapping its gums. Shut up, fish face!

(The SISTERS squirt with him. The PRINCE exits.)

GRISELDA: Me squirter's nearly empty! Where did that miniature prince go?

AMMONIA: Let's head him off. He's in the woods; we can grab him by those walnuts!

GRISELDA: Oh, what you said!

(FX 16: PLAYOFF.)

SISTERS: Don't you just love us? *(No!)* Blow it out your ear!

(DENNIS and HUGH come off, as
JENNI goes on.)

JULIAN: And to an actor, there is nothing more serious than the performance. Terry wouldn't want anything to interfere with his last ...

(RUTH wails and make her entrance.)

TUFF: Terry?

VANCE: Yes, Terrance Lavoisier.
(Points.) Him.

TUFF: That's Terrance Lavoisier? I saw his Widow Twankey in Aladdin here last year. What a performance!

DUFF: I've seen his Twankey. It's nothing to write home about.

DENNIS/HUGH: Oh, what you said!

HUGH: You're right! That *is* funny!

TUFF: All right, now. The first thing we do is shut down this performance and send all those people out there home.

TAYLOR: We do not!

DENNIS/HUGH/JULIAN: The show must go on!

TUFF: (To TAYLOR.) Am I going to have a problem with you?

TAYLOR: I don't know. Am I going to have a problem with you?

TUFF: Do you want to be arrested for interfering with police business?

TAYLOR: Do you want to go out *there* and tell 500 sugar-hyped children that the show is over? They'll tear you limb from limb.

(The SISTERS exit. Enter CINDERELLA with a bundle of sticks.)

CINDERELLA: Hello, boys and girls! ... I need some firewood for the fires at Hardup Hall. Actually, I thought I might catch a glimpse of the Prince, too. You can't blame me for that, can you?

(Enter The FAIRY GODMOTHER disguised as an old woman.)

FAIRY: Oh, goodness me! Oh, gracious! I'm so lost – so lost in the dark forest.

CINDERELLA: Pardon me, grandmother, but you seem to be troubled. May I help you?

FAIRY: I was trying to find the path, but the forest is so dark.

CINDERELLA: Which path did you want?

FAIRY: I was gathering firewood. I was going that way ... no that way ... no, that way.

CINDERELLA: Take this bundle, grandmother. It's enough for, tonight. (Gives her the sticks.)

FAIRY: But, you'll need it.

CINDERELLA: No, I won't – really.

FAIRY: There's some wood by that tree, yonder.

CINDERELLA: This tree?

FAIRY: No, that tree! (The one with the gold coin behind it.)

CINDERELLA: Well, I'll just go pick them up, right now. (CINDERELLA goes to the trees.) And I'll have plenty, too ... oh! Look at this! It's a gold piece! (Picks up the sovereign.)

FAIRY: Really? Why, that must be the treasure for the Royal Hunt!

CINDERELLA: Roy Lunt?

TUFF: Five hundred of ‘em?

TAYLOR: And their grannies.

TUFF: *(Glances to stage and back.)*
God.

TAYLOR: So, the show must go on.

TUFF: Right. The show must go on.

DENNIS/HUGH/JULIAN: Told you.

TUFF: Right then. Let’s have a look at the subject. W.P.C. Duff, take notes, please.

DUFF: Sir. *(She tries to find a notepad and pencil.)*

TUFF: Subject is an apparent... I don’t know *what* the subject is, subjectively speaking. Subject is wearing an orange wig, a multi-coloured period dress and over-stuffed comedy bazzooms. Subject is... *(A slight pause as he looks under the dress to check.)*... equipped as a male, but I withhold final judgement. Information has been given that subject is one Terrance Lavasseur; occupation: actor.

TAYLOR: And producer. LX 20, FX 17, go.

TUFF: And producer. From the position of the subject’s limbs, it is apparent that the subject has been moved from its final resting position.

VANCE: Oh, my god, he’s good!

TUFF: Subject would appear to have fallen from a perch in what is known in theatrical parlance as an “hidey-hole”.

JULIAN: He’s amazing.

TUFF: However, the height of the hidey-hole makes it unlikely that a fall from it would have resulted in fatal injuries.

(RUTH comes back in from the “stage”).

FAIRY: And, now it’s yours, to do with as you will.

CINDERELLA: Really? Mine? I could buy a new dress – a beautiful new dress.

FAIRY: Why do you want a new dress?

CINDERELLA: My step-sisters ruined this dress and burned all the rest of my clothes!

FAIRY: *(Coughing.)* Oh, oh, my lungs. Oh, dear.

CINDERELLA: Are you ill?

FAIRY: I haven’t eaten a thing for days.

CINDERELLA: No food? Oh, I’ve been so selfish! Here! You need this more than I.

FAIRY: But you wanted a new dress!

CINDERELLA: What’s a dress, compared with food for a kindly old woman? Take it, please!

FAIRY: *(Taking the coin.)* God bless you, Cinderella. You’ve your mother’s kind spirit.

CINDERELLA: Take care of yourself. Good ...

(As CINDERELLA turns to go The FAIRY GODMOTHER gestures. LX 20: SPECIAL ON CINDERELLA. FX 17: SPELL UNDERSCORE. CINDERELLA is frozen to the spot. The FAIRY GODMOTHER throws back her hood.)

FAIRY: Who could doubt Cinderella was good?
She gave sticks and gold for warmth and food!
The least I can do is help her out;
That’s what Fairy Godmothers are all about.
The prince and she must fall in love.
All it will take is a little shove
From me – and won’t that be lovely, then?

(The FAIRY GODMOTHER gestures and exits. CINDERELLA “awakens”)

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 21, go.

(LX 21: RESTORE.)

TUFF: Removing some of the heavy theatrical makeup... *(He takes out a handkerchief and rubs TERRY's face.)* ... subject appears to be about 55 years of age.

(BEN again enters OVER TERRY, tripping as he goes. TUFF continues.)

From the growth of stubble on the subject's chin, I am willing to conclude that the subject is a practicing male, and, as the stubble is present during a matinee performance, that he had not had time to shave this morning due to having sex with a member of the cast.

(All of the actors applaud.)

VANCE: How did you know that last?

TUFF: I didn't, but I thank you for confirming it. Read that back, W.P.C. Duff.

DUFF: *(Still finding her pad.)* Read what back, sir?

TUFF: *(A beat.)* Never mind. *(Rising.)* I think we can wrap this up quickly. The evidence is quite ... evident, to the trained eye. So, the first question, ladies and gentlemen (if I may term thespians so), is "oo moved the stiff?"

(Slowly, VANCE, TAYLOR, BARRY and RUTH each put up a hand.)

TAYLOR: And Jenni.

TUFF: Jenni?

CINDERELLA: ...bye! Old woman! Where'd she go? And, how did she know my name?

(The PRINCE enters.)

CINDERELLA: Old woman! Old woman!

PRINCE: I'm sorry, were you talking to me?

CINDERELLA: Oh! You're not an old woman!

PRINCE: Not the last time I checked. Are you in need of help? May I offer some assistance?

CINDERELLA: There was an old woman here, just a moment ago. I gave her my firewood, but she's gone and left that. And, I found a gold coin and gave it to her. I see she's taken that.

PRINCE: I've seen no one but you, young ... lady.

CINDERELLA: Well, that's strange. Who are you?

PRINCE: I am the ... Dandini. That's right, I am the Dandini – of the Prince's staff.

CINDERELLA: Oh, your royalness, sir. *(She bows.)*

PRINCE: Oh, none of that, please! I'm ... just the Prince's valet. I'm a servant.

CINDERELLA: Oh! That's what my step-sisters have made of me. A ragged servant.

PRINCE: Your step-sisters?

CINDERELLA: Oh, my story would be dull after life at the Palace: the Royal Prince, the lords, the ladies, the beautiful people in beautiful clothes.

RUTH: Cinders. The one that stopped him shaving this morning.

TUFF: *(With a sniff.)* Quite an ‘appy little company.

RUTH: We get along.

TUFF: Really? *He* might disagree.

RUTH: Oh, no! Nobody would want to hurt Terry! Strangle him, occasionally, sure, but ... *(She laughs.)*

TUFF: I see. *(He looks around.)* Yes. I see.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 22, FX 18, go.

TUFF: Now, the second question is “*why did you move the stiff?*”

JULIAN: Your Highness! Charming! Your Royal Prince-ness!

(JENNI comes back in; JULIAN makes his entrance.)

TAYLOR: We didn’t think it right for him to be lying there like that. *(Into headset.)* LX 23, go. *(To TUFF.)* And people kept tripping on him. *(Into headset.)* LX 23A, go. *(To TUFF.)* And, I’m Health and Safety Officer.

TUFF: Oh, well, if it’s an ‘Ealth and Safety issue...

TAYLOR: So, it’s all right, then?

TUFF: No, it’s not all right! *(He stares at each in order.)* I ought to lock up the bunch of you. And, I still might – *(In front of DENNIS and HUGH.)* – if I don’t get some straight answers.

DENNIS/HUGH: Oh, what you said!

PRINCE: There are ugly people in beautiful clothes, too. Have you never met a lord or lady?

CINDERELLA: Well, my father’s a baron, actually, but we’re awfully poor. And, even if there are ugly people in beautiful clothes at the Palace, nobody wears rags like these.

PRINCE: *(Takes her hand.)* My dear, I think you are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen!

CINDERELLA: But, I’m just a little cinder girl.

PRINCE: A cinder girl? I’ll change that, if you’ll be mine.

CINDERELLA: Be yours? Oh, my!

(The PRINCE holds her close and they nearly kiss. LX 22: RESTORE STATE. FX 18: Dandini music.)

DANDINI: **Your Highness! Charming! Your Royal Prince-ness!**

(The PRINCE is distracted and CINDERELLA, confused by her emotions, runs away. A dishevelled DANDINI enters.)

PRINCE: Young lady! Young lady!

DANDINI: That’s it – I quit! I’ll wash your socks and pick up your underwear, but I won’t be chased through the woods by those two thugs. I’m going back to beauty school.

PRINCE: *(Shouts after CINDERELLA.)* Don’t leave! Come back! Come back!

DANDINI: No, you can’t sweet talk me into staying. I’ve quit. It’s hair and nails for me.

PRINCE: Oh, my friend, I’ve lost her. The woman of my dreams – and she didn’t even tell me her name!

TUFF: *(Running his hand over his face.)*
God! W.P.C. Duff, read that back.

DUFF: *(Proudly.)*“We didn’t think it right for him to be lying there like that. LX 23, go. And people kept tripping on him. LX 23A, go. And, I’m Health and Safety Officer.”

TUFF: That’s enough, thank you.

DUFF: Sir.

TUFF: Now, everyone stand very still while I ask some questions.

HUGH: ‘Scuse me, Sergeant?

TUFF: Detective Inspector.

HUGH: Ooh, we *are* getting on, aren’t we? Dennis and I have a costume change to make. We have to get our runners on.

TUFF: Your what?

DENNIS: Joggers. Next scene, dear. Charming and Dandini are coming off and Cinders and the Baron are going on. Then Hugh and I and then Terry ... oh, dear!

OTHER ACTORS: Oh, dear! Oh, no! Etc.

TUFF: What, now?

TAYLOR: Terry has another scene this act. The Baroness is on in about, uhm ... *(Checking)* ... three pages. *(Into headset.)* Standby, LX 24, FX 19.

TUFF: Well, do it without her – him – them.

RUTH: Can’t be done! It’s the cusp of the first act gyre.

DUFF: Isn’t that a little early in the complication for the cusp of the first act gyre?

DANDINI: I’ve noticed that about women in my dreams. ’oo are you talkin’ about?

PRINCE: The woman I’ve searched for all my life!

DANDINI: Ain’t you the lucky one, then? All’s I got was Frick and Frack, back there!

PRINCE: Dandini, she’s perfection, itself!

DANDINI: Except she’s a little – *(He looks around.)* – incorporeal.

PRINCE: I turned my head and she disappeared. I can’t lose her! What shall I do?

DANDINI: Call out the Guard. Have ‘em turn over every tree and drag her back.

PRINCE: Fool! *(Snaps his fingers.)* I have it! Dandini, announce a Royal Ball – and command every girl of marriageable age in the Kingdom to attend!

DANDINI: Every one? Even those two gorgons from the last scene? I’ll quit, I will.

PRINCE: No, you won’t. I command you to remain at my side, old comrade!

DANDINI: That’s lovely for some, innit?

PRINCE: To the Palace! You’ve ten thousand invitations to write out – then deliver them by hand to every girl in the land!

DANDINI: How about this? We go back to the palace ...

PRINCE: And ...?

DANDINI: I’ll send ‘em all a text!

PRINCE: Ha, ha! You cheer me up, Dandini! Now, get writing! The sooner you finish, the sooner I see my cinder girl again! To the

(A beat.) What? I read!

Palace!

TAYLOR: (Into headset.) LX 24, FX 19, go.

(BEN and JULIAN come back.)

TAYLOR: LX 25, LX 26, FX 21, go. LX 27, standby. LX 27, go.

TUFF: So, you cut the *agon* with the subject and go directly to the first act *parabasis*. (Beat.) I read, too.

TAYLOR: Right. We cut the ... scene with Terry and Jenni. Got that, Jenni?

(JENNI nods and makes her entrance.)

TUFF: I will need to interview every person who was present backstage at the time of the subject's decease—ing. Deceasion. Demise.

(VANCE makes his entrance.)

(To BARRY.) You! Get a blanket and cover this poor man. (BARRY goes off.)

TAYLOR: Not easy to do – we *are* in the middle of a performance.

TUFF: And, I am in the middle of an investigation. The Metropolitan Police handbook is quite clear.

TAYLOR: So is the Equity rulebook. You're going to have to interview them on the fly.

TUFF: (Pointing up.) In the flies?

TAYLOR: As they go past.

TUFF: Right. (To DENNIS and HUGH.) You two. What was your relationship with the deceased?

DENNIS/HUGH: (Suddenly singing.) "Physical! Physical! Let's get physical!"

(TAYLOR gives a cue into her headset. DENNIS and HUGH make their

(The PRINCE and DANDINI exit. LX 24: BLACKOUT. FX 20: SCENE CHANGE LX 25:DUMMY; FX 21: DUMMY; LX 26:DUMMY. LX 27: LIGHTS UP)

CINDERELLA: (Entering.) Oh, good morning, boys and girls! (She yawns) Oh! I was working so late and up so early, too, but I've done every single task that my wicked step-sisters gave me.

(Enter The BARON.)

BARON: Ella! What are you doing, working so early? You're just like your mother. (Kisses her forehead.) Always thinking of others. I wish some in this house had the same disposition – but I'm not saying who.

CINDERELLA: Griselda and Ammonia came in late last night. Perhaps they're still asleep.

SISTERS: (OFF.) "Physical! Physical! Let's get physical!"

(FX 22. Enter GRISELDA, energetically, and AMMONIA, tuckered out. Both

entrances. BARRY returns with a blanket and covers TERRY.)

TUFF: Unbelievable!

DUFF: You'll have to be faster than that ... sir.

TUFF: W.P.C. Duff, I don't need any more of your guff.

DUFF: Sorry, sir. What do we do now, sir? Interview more suspects?

TUFF: Let us continue with the examination of the scene of the incident.

DUFF: Right, sir. Shall I take notes?

TUFF: By all means. Amuse yourself.

(They go up to TERRY and TUFF examines the body and the area.)

I note that the subject is wearing multi-coloured stockings.

DUFF: Is that significant, sir?

TUFF: Traditionally, the Baroness wears uni-coloured hosiery.

DUFF: Meaning?

TUFF: Meaning that the costume designer and, by inference, the producer have a penchant for breaking the rules.

DUFF: Yes, sir. *(She writes.)* "Breaking the rules."

TUFF: That was dramatic criticism, not forensic investigation.

DUFF: *(Crestfallen.)* Sir.

TUFF: However, continue making notes. I may offer a review of the production to the local press. *(He stands up and looks around at the actors.)* Very well. I have completed my investigation of the incident scene and that leads me to only one conclusion -- this man has been

wear track suits. They jazzercise.)

GRISELDA: Well, that's got my juices pumping! Princey won't be able to keep his hands off. *(AMMONIA collapses on a chair.)* 'Smatter, Moanie? Too much getting "Physical! Physical!"

AMMONIA: Not the kind of physical I thought you meant. I'll need a physical.

GRISELDA: It works for me. I've lost forty pounds of ugly fat.

AMMONIA: Did you look behind you?

GRISELDA: The Prince'll drop dead when he sees me.

AMMONIA: Shock will do that to you.

BARON: What's with the sudden physical fitness craze?

GRISELDA: There's a Prince out there in the wild, roaming about. We need to be in shape to reel him in!

BARON: Well, lumpy's a shape.

GRISELDA: How dare you! I have the body of a goddess!

BARON: Well, give it back – you're stretching it!

AMMONIA: I've been told my skin is like peaches and cream.

BARON: What, fuzzy and curdled?

murdered!

(TAYLOR uses a hammer to knock "V")

RUTH: He hasn't!

TUFF: He has.

BARRY: He hasn't!

TUFF: Look, why do you think I said it?
For comic effect?

BARRY: It's been known to happen.

(JENNI comes off and gets invitations.)

TUFF: Exactly who was in the building
at the time of the incident?

TAYLOR: Well – *(Checks call list.)* –
there's me, Terry, Jenni, Ruth, Barry, Vance,
Julian, Ben, Dennis and Hugh, Meg the curtain
girl, Sandy and Eric the tech guys, the front of
house staff – and about 500 screaming children
and their mommies and grannies!

(JENNI makes her entrance.)

TUFF: So a wealth of suspects, then.

RUTH: My bet's on one of the kids.

TUFF: Why do you say that?

RUTH: Well, listen to them! I don't
know what's worse: Boxing Day shoppers or a
kids' matinee crowd.

TUFF: Rough house, is it?

RUTH: Believe me, panto can be murder.

TUFF: Oh, I know. As a matter of fact, I
played Baroness Hardup with the Knocking-on-
the-Pate Thespian Society two years ago.

RUTH: Hardup?

(Four thunderous door-knocks.)

CINDERELLA: Oh, someone knocked.

GRISELDA: I told you she was smarter than
she looks.

AMMONIA: She'd have to be!

SISTERS: Hey, cinder-girl, answer it!

CINDERELLA: Yes, step-sisters.

(CINDERELLA exits.)

BARON: Ella's done nothing to deserve your
unkindness. You've got her waiting on your
every whim.

AMMONIA: We don't have her waiting. We
tell her our every whim as soon as we think of it
– and she'd better get cracking on it, pronto!

*(Enter CINDERELLA with four
invitations.)*

BARON: Was someone at the door?

CINDERELLA: Someone from the Prince!
We are commanded to attend the Royal Ball
tonight!

*(CINDERELLA gives the invitations to
the BARON.)*

GRISELDA: I knew the Prince had the hots
for me! One taste of the Gristle and they come
begging for more.

AMMONIA: Fat chance, fat fanny. It's me
he's after.

GRISELDA: Give us the invites! Give!

BARON: Take it easy! Everyone gets one.

TUFF: They were, yes, but I think I pulled it off. Now, where were you when the incident – the murder – took place?

RUTH: Oh, in and out; here and there.

TUFF: Could you be more specific, please?

RUTH: I was either in my dressing room, standing here or on the stage.

TUFF: Did you at any time go near the hidey-hole?

RUTH: Of course. I had to go past it to make some of my entrances. We all did.

TUFF: And, by “all”, you mean ...?

RUTH: The cast.

TUFF: Yes! Write that down, W.P.C. Duff.

DUFF: Yes, sir. *(She writes.)* “Cast made entrances during performance.”

TUFF: Tell me, W.P.C. Duff, did you actually graduate from the training school?

DUFF: Near the top of my class, sir.

TUFF: God help us. *(To BARRY.)* And where were you?

BARRY: Well, I was just ... uh ... I wasn't doing ... I just ... I didn't ... I was here.

TUFF: I detect a note of nervous tension in your voice.

RUTH: *(Ironically.)* My god, he's good!

TUFF: Tell me, how long have you been sleeping with the Stage Manager?

RUTH: *(Seriously.)* My god, he *is* good!

BARRY: What makes you think that?

TUFF: When she mentioned your name a few minutes ago, her vocal inflection rose

The Baron and Baroness Hardup, Miss Ammonia Hardup ... Miss Griselda Hardup ... and Miss Ella Hardup.

CINDERELLA: Oh, thank you!

GRISELDA: Don't bother with one for that little rag-ball. She's not going!

AMMONIA: She sure isn't – give it!

(AMMONIA grabs at CINDERELLA's invitation)

BARON: If my daughter wishes to go to the Ball, she certainly shall. Ella?

GRISELDA: Look at the rags she wears! She'd be a disgrace to Hardup Hall – if that's possible.

(GRISELDA grabs at CINDERELLA's invitation.)

BARON: If my daughter wishes to go to the ball, then she may!

CINDERELLA: Oh, don't quarrel, please! They're right. I've nothing to wear except these rags.

BARON: Then, we'll get you all new clothes!

AMMONIA: Not with Mummy's money, you won't!

BARON: Very well, I've not been able to bring myself to do it, yet, but – tomorrow, my medals go up on Ebay.

CINDERELLA: Daddy, not your medals!

GRISELDA: How much do you think you'd get for those dirty old things?

BARON: Look here, the Victoria Cross ...

three and one half semi-tones in pitch and the visible pulse at her neck increased by a full ten beats per minute. At the same time, the lobes of her ears flushed four shades of red darker than their usual colour. This naturally leads me to suspect a physical relationship between the pair of you beginning not more than three and not less than one and one-half weeks ago. Well, sir?

BARRY: T–t–two week ago.

DUFF: Oh, well done, sir!

TUFF: *(With a withering look to her.)* I graduated *at* the top of my class. *(Whirling on BEN.)* And your relationship with the deceased?

BEN: With who?

TUFF: With whom! The victim!

BEN: What victim?

TUFF: Mr. Terrance Lavasseur – the dead man over there!

BEN: Terry's dead! *(He breaks down.)* Oh, my god! *(He bursts into tears and runs out the DR door.)*

TUFF: Hmm. Perhaps we'll come back to you. *(To TAYLOR.)* Bit emotional, isn't he?

TAYLOR: A bit of a favourite.

TUFF: I see. *(He looks at JULIAN.)* Interesting. Very interesting. Julian Havers. *(He chuckles.)* Well, Mr. Havers – *(He rips up a piece of paper from DUFF's notepad.)* Give that to the Baron.

(VANCE starts to come off; JULIAN pushes the ripped up paper into his hands and shoves him back on.)

Well, Mr. Havers, we have got a hot sheet on you as long as my arm.

RUTH: Julian!

TUFF: Parking tickets, lad. Pay 'em or

the Military Cross ... and the ... er ...
(Examines it closely) ... the ... er ...

AMMONIA: The Hot Cross Bun?

BARON: The India Cross! Worth maybe five thousand.

AMMONIA: And you told Mummy you were skint! Things are going to get pretty nasty around here when she finds out you lied!

BARON: Nastier than they already are? And how are you going to tell her?

(The SISTERS exchange a look and take deep breaths.)

SISTERS: Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!

BARON: You can shout till the cows come home ... or you can cow till the shout comes home ... because your Mother is not home. And, now, dear Ella – let us find you the most beautiful dress we can, so you can go to the ball!

CINDERELLA: Oh, Daddy, thank you!

GRISELDA: You're mean!

AMMONIA: I want a new dress!

BARON: Go to the barn and get a horse blanket. There's some oats out there, too. Goodbye, girls! *(He exits...)*

... And comes back on with ripped pieces of paper.) And . . . *(There is a long pause.)* Oh, dear! Oh, look what's happened! Your evil mother, my wife, Cinderella's stepmother has torn poor Cinderella's invitation to the ball into pieces! Now, poor Cinderella can't go to the ball!

the long arm of the law will be all over you.

(VANCE, DENNIS & HUGH come back.)

BARRY: *(Whispers to them.)* Beautifully improv'ed.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 23 and LX 28 are skipped – ignore them! ... Because I said so! *(To BARRY.)* Barry! Sweetie! Get on there!

BARRY: Not yet.

TAYLOR: We cut the *agon ... the parabas ... the Baroness scene. Go, now!*

(BARRY makes his entrance.)

TUFF: *(Eyeing VANCE.)* So, now we come to the really interesting ones.

VANCE: Are you talking to me?

TUFF: Who do you *think* I'm talking to?

DENNIS: Well, there's nothing interesting about *us*, is there, Hughie?

HUGH: Poker straight, Dennie.

TUFF: I'll get to you two in a moment, but, first – *(To VANCE.)* – hold out your hands, sir. *(VANCE does. TUFF looks at both sides.)* Just as I thought. Perhaps you can tell me, sir, how, in an economy when fewer than one actor in fifty makes £20,000 annually, how is it, sir, that you can suddenly afford to purchase a vintage 1952 MG-TD sports car, a vehicle being sold in today's market for more than twice your annual income?

VANCE: Well, Terry loaned me enough for a down payment and I was counting on this show to help with the monthlies. It's a mid-life thing.

AMMONIA: Oh, well, then . . . there's no reason for us to stay, is there? Come along, Moanie – I mean Gristle – elda.

(The SISTERS exit, followed by the BARON.)

CINDERELLA: I only want to go to the Ball, because I might see Dandini again, and now I've lost the chance. Oh, my Wicked Step-mother and my Ugly Step-sisters have made my life so miserable!

(She breaks down and cries.)

(And continues to cry.)

(And continues to cry.)

(BUTTONS enters.)

BUTTONS: Hi, kids! ... *(Kneels beside her)* Cinders! Are you crying?

CINDERELLA: No, Buttons, I'm all right. What are you doing here – already? My step-mother and -sisters haven't left for the ball, yet.

BUTTONS: Don't hand me that! Actually, your step-mother and sisters have already gone to the ball – already – remember?

CINDERELLA: Oh, right! And ... my invitation to the Royal Ball got torn up!

BUTTONS: Oh, no! Who did it? As if I didn't know.

CINDERELLA: My Wicked Stepmother did.

BUTTONS: Don't cry – we'll just Scotch Tape™ it back together. *(Begins to arrange the pieces)* Oh, no! I just realized something!

CINDERELLA: What?

BUTTONS: I'd have to invent Scotch Tape™ first! I know! Let's have a ball of our own, right here!

TUFF: And now, with Mr. Lavoisier dead, you no longer have to pay back the loan! Very interesting.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 24, go!

DUFF: *(Under her breath to TUFF.)* Well done, sir! How did you know that from examining his hands?

TUFF: Every new owner of a vintage sports car buys knuckle-less driving gloves. He has fresh tan marks on his knuckles – and I’ve noticed a vintage MG about town this past week.

DUFF: *(Looking at him with hero worship.)* Wonderful, sir.

TUFF: I’m not done yet. *(Turning on DENNIS and HUGH.)* You two. *(He circles them, shaking his head.)* You seem so perfectly normal, don’t you?

HUGH: Is he talking to us?

TUFF: Anywhere you go, you’d just blend into the crowd, wouldn’t you?

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 24a, go.

DENNIS: Oh, yes, it must be us.

TUFF: Who would know that under that perfectly average exterior you harbour a deep secret.

HUGH: Oh, no, we don’t.

TUFF: Oh, yes, you do! My interest in the stage may be strictly amateur, but that doesn’t mean I don’t follow the trade papers. For instance, buried on page 34 of last week’s issue of *The Stage* was a tiny 1 inch by 1 column advert, calling for resumé submissions for a panto to open next Christmas. And who do you think had placed this advert?

CINDERELLA: A ball of our own?

BUTTONS: We just have to pretend.

(FX 24: WALTZ.)

Just imagine – the Royal Palace! The Royal Footmen! The Royal Ballroom! The Royal Musicians begin to play ...

The Blue Danube – or the other one. And there! Waiting for you with open arms is a man who loves you better than anyone else.

(BUTTONS takes CINDERELLA in his arms: they begin to dance.)

CINDERELLA: Where did you learn to waltz, Buttons?

BUTTONS: I got a free six-month trial at the Arthur Murray dance school once. The instructor said there wasn’t a thing they could teach me. Do you feel better, now?

CINDERELLA: I do, Buttons – for a while. And, then I remember how terrible my life is!

(The music fades as CINDERELLA turns away and cries.)

BUTTONS: Cinders, you do know there are people who love you, don’t you? Someone in this very room, for instance.

CINDERELLA: This room? *(She looks around, then.)* Oh! I love you too, Buttons.

BUTTONS: No, Cinders. I love you!

DENNIS: Well ...

TUFF: I'll tell you, shall I?

HUGH: By all means.

TUFF: It was a production company I'd never heard of before: Col-tett Productions. Well, the conclusion is all too apparent. Yes, it's *pret-ty* obvious. *(He chuckles.)*

(There is a pause.)

RUTH: No. Sorry. We're not getting it.

TUFF: Try to keep up, people! Mr. Hugh Coltman and Mr. Dennis Willett – Col-tett Productions. These two intend to mount their own panto next year, trying to corner the panto market for this region.

RUTH: Dennis! Hugh! You wouldn't!

DENNIS: Why wouldn't we? We're not getting any younger. We don't intend to play ugly step-sisters the rest of our lives.

HUGH: No! We have the right to play ugly step-mothers, too!

(BARRY comes back in from stage.)

TUFF: And, with Mr. Lavasseur's company out of the way, your chances of success are all the better. *(Suddenly.)* Fairy Godmother, *you* – have an entrance.

(RUTH knocks and makes her entrance.)

So, every one of you has a motive for murder. *(To BARRY and TAYLOR.)* You, to hide a love affair that could jeopardize your employment. *(To JULIAN.)* You to cover up a criminal past. *(Of RUTH.)* She, as revenge for past wrongs. *(To BEN.)* You, for lover's spite. *(To VANCE.)* You, for monetary gain. *(To DENNIS and HUGH.)* You, for professional gain. And that leaves us only one, the most interesting one of all – Cinderella!

CINDERELLA: And I love you, too. We're the best of friends, aren't we, Buttons?

BUTTONS: No, Cinders, I love you! Marry me. I've got nearly six quid saved up. We could have a wonderful life together, with the pitter-patter of tiny Buttons.

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons – I didn't realize. I'm sorry, I don't love you that way. But we'll always be friends, won't we?

BUTTONS: What? Oh, sure! Sure! What fellow doesn't want to always be friends? Well, I guess I'll be off to bed, now, Cinders. Goodnight. See you in the morning. As always. As if nothing has changed.

(BUTTONS exits slowly.)

CINDERELLA: And, now Buttons' feelings are hurt! Nothing is going right.

(A knock at the door. The FAIRY GODMOTHER enters, in her cloak.)

FAIRY: Oh, help me, please. May I warm myself at your fire?

CINDERELLA: Oh, dear. Grandmother, you must come in. Sit down by the fire.

FAIRY: I shall, my dear. Were you talking about a Royal Ball?

CINDERELLA: The Royal Ball at the Palace. But how can I go, in rags, with no invitation?

FAIRY: Anything is possible if you believe

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 29, FX 25, go.

ALL: Cinderella!

TUFF: Certainly, Cinderella. A woman who has gotten the obvious enhancement she wanted from her relationship with the victim and needs to cover up the awful truth *(He chuckles.)* – OR a woman who feels spurned and rejected by a lover’s choice of another. *(He chuckles.)* – OR a woman who feels wrongs from the past that she must right somehow. *(He chuckles.)* OR –

RUTH: We have too many oars in the water as it is, thank you.

DUFF: *(To HUGH, DENNIS, VANCE and JULIAN.)* You four, take this man down to the green room and lay him out properly. *(They pick up TERRY and carry him OFF.)*

DUFF: *(Under her breath to TUFF.)* How did you know Cinderella was having a love affair with the victim, sir?

TUFF: They told us that, ten minutes after we got here. Pay attention, W.P.C. Duff, or you’ll be W.P.C. Duff all your life.

DUFF: Yes, sir.

TUFF: You’re a very promising police officer, W.P.C. Duff, but you have much to learn yet.

(BARRY, having donned a night-shirt and holding a teddy bear, makes his entrance.)

DUFF: I’m eager to learn, sir.

TUFF: I’m sure you are. Now, where are we?

DUFF: *(Reading from her notes.)* Buttons has confessed his love for Cinderella, but she says she doesn’t love him “that way.” Buttons, rejected, has gone off to bed and the

hard enough, Cinderella!

(LX CUE 29: BLACKOUT. FX 25: Thunder. During the Blackout the FAIRY GODMOTHER’s cloak is removed. On the restore, she is revealed in all her glory. LX CUE 30: RESTORE.)

You shall go to The Ball!

CINDERELLA: Who are you?

FAIRY: I’ve got wings, a wand and sound effects. Who do you think I am?

CINDERELLA: The Tooth Fairy?

FAIRY: I’m your Fairy Godmother! Yesterday, you helped me in the woods, now I shall help you to go to the Ball! First we’ll need some extra hands. Is there someone who can help?

CINDERELLA: Well, there’s Buttons, but he’s sleeping.

FAIRY: Then let’s wake him up, again! Children, you can help. We’ll all call Buttons three times, but very loudly Ready? Buttons! Buttons! Buttons!

(She gestures with her wand. BUTTONS enters in a night-shirt, and holding his teddy-bear.)

BUTTONS: Where am I? *(Sees The FAIRY GODMOTHER.)* Wow! I’m on Dancing With The Stars!

CINDERELLA: Buttons! This is my Fairy Godmother.

BUTTONS: Pull the other one!

FAIRY: And we are going to make sure Cinderella goes to the Ball!

Old Lady from the earlier scene has appeared, revealing herself to be Cinderella's Fairy Godmother. The Fairy Godmother says she shall use her magic to help Cinderella go to the ball and recruits Buttons to assist in gathering paraphernalia for the process. *(She thinks.)* And that takes us up to the moment, sir.

TUFF: Nothing to do with the case, but nicely recapped, W.P.C. Duff.

DUFF: Thank you, sir.

(BARRY comes back in; gets pumpkin.)

TAYLOR: *(Rushing past with a fake lizard.)* Look, it gets really busy from here, so either help or stay out of the way.

(BARRY makes entrance with pumpkin.)

TUFF: Help? How?

TAYLOR: Do Terry's stuff. Get those mice and stand at the stage right door!

TUFF: Right! The cage, W.P.C. Duff!

(They hold the mice ready.)

It's the smell of adrenalin and sweat, my girl. Once it gets into your lungs, you'll never shake it.

DUFF: Yes, sir. Adrenalin and sweat, sir.

TAYLOR: When Jenni takes the cage and enters, go over to the props table and get the rat.

(JENNI comes back in; gets the mice.)

TUFF/DUFF: Right! Rat! *(They go to the props table and look for the rat.)* It's not here!

BUTTONS: To the Ball? I'm your man, your Fairy-ship!

FAIRY: First, go get a pumpkin.

BUTTONS: A pumpkin! We've got those!

FAIRY: Wait, wait, wait!

BUTTONS: Right, right, right.

FAIRY: The biggest one you've got!

BUTTONS: The biggest? Oh, me aching back!

(BUTTONS exits.)

CINDERELLA: How can a pumpkin help?

FAIRY: Have a little faith, my dear. You must believe!

(Enter BUTTONS, pushing a large pumpkin.)

FAIRY: *(Patting the table.)* Now, up here with it.

(BUTTONS can't lift the pumpkin.)

A big strong boy like you?

(She lifts the pumpkin with one hand and puts it on the table.)

BUTTONS: Wow! Are you on the Russian women's track and field team?

FAIRY: *(She consults a paper.)* Two white mice!

CINDERELLA: I've got two pet mice!

FAIRY: Fetch them in!

(CINDERELLA exits.)

FAIRY: *(Checks the paper.)* Buttons, get a rat.

BUTTONS: A rat? I'll catch me death of plague.

(BARRY comes back; JENNI enters.)

TAYLOR: Look on the other tables!

TUFF: *(At props table SR.)* Found it!

TAYLOR: Stage left!

(DUFF is C.; TUFF throws the rat to her; she passes it to BARRY.)

TUFF: *(Tossing it.)* Rat!

(JENNI comes off; gets the fake lizard.)

DUFF: *(Catching it.)* Rat! *(Tossing it.)* Rat!

BARRY: Right.

(BARRY makes entrance with fake rat.)

TAYLOR: Quick changes coming up. Tuff, you help Meg. Duff, help Cinders.

TUFF: Help them what?

(JENNI makes her entrance with the fake lizard.)

TAYLOR: Jenni's dress comes off – Meg puts it on and enters as Cinders. Jenni puts the ball gown on. She enters timed with the special effect as Meg comes off and, presto!, quick change!

TUFF: Right. We can do that.

(TUFF gets ready. MEG comes from her spot and pulls off her top and pants.)

Here! Steady on!

TAYLOR: It's theatre, Detective Inspector!

(BARRY comes back with a table.)

(JENNI comes back and DUFF helps her do a quick change as TUFF helps MEG.)

(BUTTONS exits; CINDERELLA enters with the mice.)

CINDERELLA: Here are the mice.

(The FAIRY GODMOTHER puts the mice on the table.)

FAIRY: *(Checks the paper.)* Got a lizard?

CINDERELLA: Maybe in the garden? *(She starts out.)* Oh, it's raining!

(CINDERELLA exits.)

FAIRY: *(Calls after her.)* Never mind the rain, dear!

(BUTONS enters with rat.)

BUTTONS: A reindeer! Do I look like Santa Claus?

FAIRY: Never mind. Rat on the table, please.

BUTTONS: *(As a hippy.)* Rat on! Rat on!

(Enter CINDERELLA with lizard.)

CINDERELLA: Would you believe it? There was lizard right outside the door!

FAIRY: *(Checking her paper.)* Now: the pumpkin for a coach; the mice for horses; the rat, a coachman, and the lizard, a tall and good-looking footman.

BUTTONS: You may be stretching that last.

FAIRY: But you'd better take everything out into the garden, Buttons.

BUTTONS: But I... just... brought it...! Ahhh!

(BUTTONS exits SR pushing the table.)

FAIRY: Now, leaves and moss for your gown.

(CINDERELLA goes off and exits.)

TAYLOR: FX 26, go! Standby, LX 31.

(FX 26: TRANSFORMATION.)

JENNI: Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow! Be careful.

FAIRY: All right, it's magic time, boys and girls. You have to help me now. Cross your fingers and say "She shall go to the ball! She shall go to the ball!" That's it! Keep going! Now, Cinderella! Steady!

TUFF: I do love the magic of theatre!

JENNI: *You get stuffed into this eight times a week! Ow!*

(MEG makes an entrance, carrying leaves, etc.)

(CINDERELLA'S double enters, back to the audience.)

TAYLOR: Well done! But this is all useless unless we have a Baroness Hardup for the second act!

With shining silk and fine-spun thread,
Gems to sparkle on your head,
Jewels made of stardust,
Sparkling as they fall,
Ready, Princess Cendrillon?
You shall go to the Ball!

TUFF: But who knows the part? You'd have to have someone who's done it recently.

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 31, go!

(LX 31:TRANSFORMATION. There is a pyro flash (or blackout/restore) and she is replaced by the real CINDERELLA in a ballgown)

(MEG runs off; JENNI runs on, effectively changing before the audience's eyes.)

TAYLOR: Detective Inspector! You've got to go on as Baroness Hardup! FX 27, LX 32, standby.

CINDERELLA: Oh, Fairy Godmother, is this real?

DUFF: Go on?

FAIRY: Not real; better! It's magic! But listen, Cinderella! This magic will fade at midnight. So you must be home by twelve o'clock, for on the last stroke of twelve, your beautiful gown will turn to rags, your coach become a pumpkin. Now, to the Ball in Royal state, away you go, my dear, but keep in mind that at midnight, the magic will disappear!

TUFF: As Baroness Hardup?

DUFF: He won't.

ALL BUT DUFF/TUFF: He will!

TUFF: He bloody well won't, you know!

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* FX 27, go. You have to! To save the show! *(Into headset.)* LX 32, go. Curtain, go. House, go. And, thank god, that's the interval!

(CINDERELLA exits. FX 27: coach, then music.)

FAIRY: Don't forget, dear! The stroke of midnight!

(Lights down)

(LX CUE 32: BLACK.)

END OF ACT ONE

END OF ACT ONE

Panto Can Be Murder

A backstage mystery-farce in two acts

Act Two

(The setting as before – fifteen minutes later, in fact (or however long your intermission is). TERRY doesn't come back for this act, so TERRY gets to go the pub (remembering to return for curtain call, though. And, of course, he must stay in BARONESS costume and makeup. So, go ahead, TERRY, go to the pub and see what happens.). Props and set pieces have been set for the second act.)

(TAYLOR comes in from the DR doorway and goes to the SM's station. She keys the intercom microphone.)

TAYLOR: *(Into the mic.) Ladies and gentlemen, starters for Act Two. Starters for Act Two, please: Ms. Buchanan, Mr. Havers, Mr. Inman, Mr. Lavass – (She breaks off and takes a deep breath before continuing.) – Mr. Britton, Mr. Roe. Places, please. (She opens her prompt book to the second act, adjusts her headset and gets ready. Into headset.) Meg, can you still hear? (After a moment, MEG comes into view and gives a thumbs up.) I don't know what's wrong with it, but I'll get Sandy to look at it before Tuesday. (Another thumbs up from MEG and she goes back into her "curtain" position.)*

(BARRY comes in the DR door, dressed as the CHAMBERLAIN, and sneaks up behind TAYLOR, starts to put his arms around her waist)

Not now, Barry.

BARRY: *(Still behind her.)* How do you know it's me?

TAYLOR: Because if it wasn't, somebody would be rolling on the floor in agony, right now.

BARRY: Are we still going to Skegness for the break?

TAYLOR: Skegness?

BARRY: We talked about it.

TAYLOR: Terry is lying in the green room, dead!

BARRY: Yes. So we may have more than one night.

TAYLOR: We'll have a funeral to attend.

BARRY: Really? But – Skegness!

TAYLOR: I know: "Skegness is *so* bracing!"

BARRY: I've booked a room and all.

TAYLOR: Stuff Skegness! Once you've seen the clock tower and the Jolly Fisherman, what else can you do?

BARRY: I was hoping lots of things. I really had no interest in seeing Skegness.

TAYLOR: Terry's dead and we may not even have jobs on Tuesday.

BARRY: Terrific! Another day in Skegness.

TAYLOR: *(As BARRY tries to kiss her.)* Really, Barry – we're at places! *(She relents and they kiss. RUTH enters through the DR door.)*

RUTH: Really, children, we're at places! Get a room.

BARRY: We've got one – in Skegness.

RUTH: Skegness? Once you've seen the clock tower and the Jolly Fisherman, what else can you do? *(A beat.)* Oh! Never mind me, then. But remember, "it's quicker by rail."

BARRY/TAYLOR: What's quicker by rail?

(She goes to her entrance position; JULIAN comes through the DR door and comes to TAYLOR.)

JULIAN: Are we seriously going to do this? With Terry lying in the green room and a murderer on the loose in the building?

TAYLOR: I have no intention of murdering anyone else, Julian. Do you?

JULIAN: Of course not.

TAYLOR: Then we're perfectly safe. Places, please.

JULIAN: Taylor, I know you're not the murderer.

TAYLOR: Do you? Do you, Julian? Do you? *(JULIAN looks frightened.)* Places, please.

(JULIAN goes to his entrance position.)

(Into mic.) Mr. Roe, places, please. Mr. R...

(BEN comes through the DR door and directly to his position.)

Never mind. *(Into headset.)* Standby, house. Standby, curtain. Standby, LX34. Standby FX 30. Oh, bloody, I forgot to get FOH to clean up the puke!

(VANCE comes through the DR door and goes to his position, near the hidey-hole. DUFF comes through the DR door and crosses to TAYLOR. She whispers to TAYLOR.)

Go back and tell him no. We're not going to.

DUFF: He's very adamant.

TAYLOR: I don't care. Go back and tell him to get up here. We've got a whole audience sitting in the dark, waiting!

DUFF: I've never seen a mixed up case like this.
A love affair could end a job.
A criminal past to cover.
Revenge so sweet for long-past wrongs.
A plot to spite a lover.
A debt to pay, a business plan.
And that leaves only one,
The most harmless, innocent one of all:
Cinderella! Cinderella,
Who's on her way to the ball.

(TAYLOR is staring at her, open-mouthed; VANCE comes from his position, having found TERRY's drinks bottle.)

TAYLOR: Why are you talking like that?

DUFF: I don't know. I don't usually speak in rhyme.

TAYLOR: Well, please stop it at once.

(She begins to key her headset, then stops when VANCE comes up to her.)

What is it, Vance? We're about to go.

VANCE: Terry's bottle.

TAYLOR: Terry's bottle?

VANCE: *(Holding it up.)* Terry's bottle. Where should I put it?

TAYLOR: I don't care. Put it back.

VANCE: It's sort of in the way.

TAYLOR: Then, put it up there. *(Indicates where TERRY put it at the beginning of Act One. He does.)* Now, places, please. *(She keys her headset again.)* All right, here we go. *(She pauses for a second.)* House to half. *(She pauses for a few seconds.)* House out. FX 30, go. LX 34, go.

(RUTH makes her entrance. DUFF exits through the DR door.)

(FX 30: ENTR'ACTE LX CUE 34: OPENING STATE. Enter The FAIRY GODMOTHER.)

TAYLOR: *(Still on headset.)* ... and please let us get through the second act without anyone else being murdered. What? Did I say that over the Clearcom™? Sorry. No! No one. No one! Just kidding.

(She makes sure the headset is off and flips through her book.)

I wish I were kidding. Oh, god, let me be kidding. *(Into mic.)* Mr. Havers, Mr. Roe, to the stage.

(She keys the headset again.)

Oh, when the Baroness comes in, there'll be a change. No, no. Nothing you need to worry about. It'll just be ... different, that's all. ... I have no idea how different. Be prepared for almost anything between a baby and a rhinoceros.

(RUTH comes back from the stage.)

TAYLOR: Yes, that's from *Scrooge*. LX 35, go. FX 31, go.

RUTH: There's still puke in the aisle.

BARRY: Least of our worries.

(BARRY enters to the stage. JULIAN

FAIRY: Parents and children, welcome back.

The show will soon be back on track.

The scene that you've been waiting for is finally at hand.

The Prince's Ball is underway
With every beauty in the land;
*(Our casting budget's limited,
You have to understand.)*

And Cinderella's nearly here,
Her coach is drawing nigh,
I just hope she keeps in mind
The rules of pantomime:

All fairy magic must run out
At the final midnight chime.

Right then, I'm off! Toodles! Cheery-bye!

(The FAIRY GODMOTHER exits.)

(LX 35: CROSSFADE. FX 31: Classical dance music.)

rushes in from the DR door.)

JULIAN: He's coming! Just- no wise-cracks!

(JULIAN enters to the stage.)

DUFF: What, does he think this is a joke?

TAYLOR: Julian? No! It's very serious. Step out there with someone you don't know and see how serious it is.

DUFF: I'm hardly likely to be stepping out there at all. I'm not an actor.

TAYLOR: Have you ever tried?

DUFF: No!

TAYLOR: Then, how do you know? *(Into mic.)* Mr. Roe, to the stage!

DUFF: All I've ever wanted was to be a police woman.

TAYLOR: I suppose your dad was one.

DUFF: No, he was a police-man.

TAYLOR: Sorry.

DUFF: My mum was a police-woman.

(BEN comes through the DR door.)

TAYLOR: Nobody illegitimate in your family.

DUFF: No. Why would you say that?

TAYLOR: Legal, illegal ... it was a joke.

DUFF: Not really. Where were you when the murder took place?

(The CHAMBERLAIN stands surveying the Ball.)

(DANDINI approaches him.)

DANDINI: Quite the party, innit, Julius?

CHAMBERLAIN: *(Icily.)* Did you speak?

DANDINI: The Prince's Ball. All the la-de-dah's la-de-dahncin'. I'm more into hip-hop, meself.

CHAMBERLAIN: Then why not hip-hop on out of here? Have you not got socks to pick up?

DANDINI: I already picked up his socks for the night and he told me to take off.

CHAMBERLAIN: There's a window. Flap your arms and take off. Where is the Prince?

DANDINI: He said he'd show up when his special someone arrived.

(The CHAMBERLAIN looks off and snaps into action.)

CHAMBERLAIN: The Prince is here! Finally! Now the ball can begin!

(The CHAMBERLAIN takes up his position at the door.)

DANDINI: He gets there, sooner or later. Which is not bad, for a Royal.

CHAMBERLAIN: That's very nearly treasonous, Dandini! If I reported that to the Prince ...

TAYLOR: Sitting right here.

DUFF: Any witnesses?

TAYLOR: Did the show go up?

DUFF: What, you mean start? Yes.

TAYLOR: Then I've got witnesses. *(Into headset.)* FX 32, go.

(BEN enters to the stage)

DUFF: I'm not sure how much witnesses mean in this case. You all had opportunity. It's motive and means that will tell the tale.

TAYLOR: This your first big case?

DUFF: As a matter of fact...

TAYLOR: Well, I've stage managed dozens of murder mysteries and I promise you, it's never the one you think it is. Look beyond the obvious.

DUFF: Well, that's obvious. I'll go see what's keeping him.

TAYLOR: Do, please. *(Into headset.)* Standby, FX 33.

VANCE: *(Coming over to TAYLOR.)* Look beyond the obvious, eh? I'd be careful about being too smart.

TAYLOR: How do you mean?

VANCE: Who's the least obvious one of us all? I'm just asking – Taylor.

(VANCE enters to the stage; BARRY comes back from the stage.)

TAYLOR: FX 33, go!

DANDINI: He'd laugh, 'cause he's got something you don't, Julius: a sense of humour!

(The CHAMBERLAIN knocks with his staff.)

CHAMBERLAIN: My Lords, My Ladies, and the rest of you – pray be upstanding for His Royal Highness, The Prince Charming!

(FX 32: Royal Fanfare. The PRINCE enters and crosses to DANDINI.)

PRINCE: Having a ball, Dandini?

DANDINI: 'Avin' a ball, sir. Every young woman in the kingdom is here – and a few that only wish they were young.

PRINCE: So, I see. It's rather daunting. But, I haven't seen my cinder girl anywhere.

DANDINI: There's plenty still to come. Do you know how long horse and carriage takes? Some of them had to leave before they got the invitation!

(The CHAMBERLAIN announces.)

CHAMBERLAIN: Your Highness, My Lords, My Ladies, and I really don't care about anyone else, Baron Henry Hardup, V.C., M.C., I. C., D. V. D.

(Enter BARON HARDUP. The CHAMBERLAIN exits.)

*(FX 33: SEE, THE CONQU'RING
HERO COMES.)*

BARRY: Kind of late with that cue, Lor.

TAYLOR: Shut up!

BARRY: Sorry.

RUTH: Really, Lor, take it easy.

TAYLOR: I think I have a right to be upset

RUTH: Why did Vance say that you were
the least obvious?

*(TUFF come through DR door, in
Baroness costume.)*

TUFF: I want you all to remember:
underneath this be-wigged and be-bosomed
exterior, the heart of a ruthless sleuth remains. I
always get my man.

RUTH: Oh, what you said!

TUFF: Dressed like this, I can say
anything I like. Remember, W.P.C. Duff, I'm
only doing this for the children.

(BARRY enters to the stage.)

DUFF: Yes, sir. For the children. It's
community involvement, then, sir, isn't it?

TUFF:: Exactly. The fact that I enjoy it
is incidental. I am still hard at work solving
"The Panto Murder".

DUFF: The Panto Murder?

(Taylor gives a cue into her headset.)

TUFF: That's what I've decided to call it
in my memoir. But believe me, I'm deadly
serious! *(In an affected falsetto voice)* Henry!
Henry Hardup! *(He puffs his false bosoms and
enters to the stage)*

BARON: *(He comes to the PRINCE.)* Your
Highness.

PRINCE: *(Shaking hands.)* Evening, Baron.
Delighted to see you again. Tell me, how are
things at dear old Hardup Hall?

BARON: Oh, everything's falling down,
falling apart and falling over.

PRINCE: Good heavens! But how is your
health, my dear Baron?

BARON: That's what I was talking about!

(They laugh.)

*(The CHAMBERLAIN, in a state of
panic, enters.)*

CHAMBERLAIN: *(Frightened and stuttering.)*
My lords, my ladies and my gentlemen – *(He
reads from a card.)* – the popular, gorgeous and
vibrant Baroness Imogene Hardup!

BARON: Oh blast, I was hoping they'd get
lost.

*(FX 34: BARONESS THEME. LX CUE
36: LIGHTNING.)*

*(Enter The BARONESS who sweeps into
view. The CHAMBERLAIN exits
hurriedly.)*

DUFF: He's actually doing it!

RUTH: He's a trouper.

DUFF: When word of this gets out at the station house, he'll never live it down.

RUTH: What, putting on lipstick and dressing up in drag?

DUFF: Oh, no. That's perfectly acceptable these days. But being in a play! That's beyond the pale.

RUTH: Of course.

DUFF: Exactly. Now, there he is, prancing about the stage and here we are backstage with a dead man and a mystery.

RUTH: Actually, *we* just have the dead man. *You* have the mystery.

DUFF: Do you not wish to know who killed him? In view of the fact that it was probably one of your cast-members. I would be very interested in finding out who may be thinking of killing me.

RUTH: Believe me, your cast mates can do far worse than that.

(HUGH and DENNIS come through the DR door.)

DUFF: What's worse than killing you?

RUTH: Ever been upstaged, night after night? Ever had somebody step on your punch-lines every show?

DUFF: I don't think so.

RUTH: It's enough to drive you mad.

PRINCE: *(As she approaches)* That the new wife, Hardup?

BARON: I wouldn't call her new, sir.

PRINCE: I'm sorry.

BARON: You're sorry?

BARONESS: Henry! You were supposed to wait! We told you we'd only be another 14 hours.

BARON: Well, Gristle and Moanie – I mean, Griselda and Ammonia – said they weren't leaving until they were beautiful. I couldn't wait six days. I mean – er – I couldn't wait ... to present you to His Royal Highness. Your Highness, may I present my wife, the Baroness Imogene Hardup?

BARONESS: *(Curtseys)* Your Grace. I've never met a prince before.

PRINCE: *(Bows)* I promise you, a prince still puts on his trousers one leg at a time.

BARONESS: I'd like to see that.

BARON: Imogene!

BARONESS: I mean, I like to see that you're so down to earth, your Grace. You know, not at all stuck up. *(She takes his arm.)* You must meet my daughters.

PRINCE: Surely, you can't have grown daughters of your own, Baroness?

BARONESS: Oh, aren't you a flatterer? *(She hits him with her fan.)* I have two.

BARON: But, dear, you've forgotten –

BARONESS: Two, Henry! You saw them at the Royal Hunt, your Highness.

Terry was great at it – and then he'd look at you as if it were your fault. He made me want to kill

him, sometimes.

DUFF: Really? *(She makes a note.)*

RUTH: *(Smiles.)* But, I didn't. Write that down. Someone beat me to it.

DUFF: Perhaps. *(She whirls on BARRY, who has been listening.)* And, what's your story?

BARRY: Cinderella.

DUFF: What?

BARRY: That's the story we're playing right now. Eight a week, Equity minimum and a ten-week contract. I have to go on stage, now.

(BARRY enters to the stage.)

DUFF: That's a very convenient excuse. You people always seem to have an entrance to make at exactly the right moment. *(To HUGH and DENNIS.)* What about you two?

(Taylor gives a cue into her headset. HUGH and DENNIS enter to the stage.)

Unbelievable!

TAYLOR: Don't worry. He'll be back in ten ... nine ... eight ...

DUFF: *(As TAYLOR counts down.)* What do you mean, he'll be back? Who? Who'll be back?

TAYLOR: ... seven ... six five ... four ... three ... two ...

(BARRY comes back from the stage.)

PRINCE: Quarry? I mean, really?

BARONESS: My two darlings: Ammonia and Griselda Hardup. Do you remember them, now?

(Behind her, DANDINI mimes a pickle puss and a fat slob.)

PRINCE: Oh! Those two horrib – ly handsome girls are yours?

BARONESS: Every delicious bit of them. They so enjoyed the Hunt, didn't they, Henry?

BARON: They are excellent at sport, sir – sumo wrestling, rugby, bare-knuckles boxing ...

(The CHAMBERLAIN enters.)

CHAMBERLAIN: Your Highness, My Lords, My Ladies, assorted sundries – Misses Ammonia and Griselda Hardup!

(FX 35: STEPSISTERS THEME. Enter AMMONIA and GRISELDA. The music ends with a loud tuba 'fart': They look at each other.)

AMMONIA: It wasn't me!

GRISELDA: Well, it wasn't me! *(They look at the CHAMBERLAIN.)*

CHAMBERLAIN: May I have your tickets?

SISTERS: Ticket? My face is my ticket!

CHAMBERLAIN: Very well. I have instructions to punch all tickets. *(The SISTERS hand over their invitations. To Audience:)* You're on your own. *(The CHAMBERLAIN exits. The SISTERS walk down with false poise, mistaking astonished stares for admiring gazes.)*

RUTH: Miss us?

BARRY: Desperately. *(To DUFF.)* As I was saying, I was getting poked in the eye at the time.

DUFF: Who poked you in the eye?

BARRY: Hugh did. Mr. Willet.

DUFF: Why did he poke you in the eye?

BARRY: Terry told him to.

DUFF: How could Terry tell him to poke you in the eye if he was dead! Ah-ha! Your story doesn't hold water!

BARRY: Lor, page twenty-three.

(TAYLOR flips back in her prompt book to page twenty-three.)

Read that, please.

DUFF: "AMMONIA: Remember that beauty sleep comment? BUTTONS: Yes. *(AMMONIA pokes him in the eye.)* OW! That was wicked of you!"

BARRY: It's all written down beforehand, you know. We don't just make it up as we go along. Well, some of us don't.

RUTH: Barry, don't speak ill of the dead.

BARRY: You don't have any scenes with him! *Didn't* have any scenes with him. Some nights, I never heard a cue from curtain to curtain. Most selfish actor I've ever worked with.

DUFF: And, that made you angry, did it?

BARRY: Yes.

BARONESS: Aren't they delightful?

PRINCE: Astonishing!

DANDINI: Oh, you can do better than that, your Highness.

PRINCE: *(Smiling.)* Dandini, go walk into the moat. *(DANDINI turns to leave.)* Stop! I have a better idea.

BARONESS: They've been panting to meet you, your Highness.

PRINCE: And wagging their tails? Ha-ha! Dandini! Amuse the ladies ... *(DANDINI's mouth drops open.)*

BARONESS: Oh, but ... the girls wanted –

PRINCE: ...while we browse the smorgasbord, Baroness. Baron?

(The PRINCE offers her his arm: she cannot refuse him.)

BARONESS: That will be lovely, thank you

BARON: Borgas-shmord? When I was in Denmark, they had the loveliest borgashmords.

(The PRINCE leads them away. The SISTERS survey the ballroom.)

AMMONIA: Griz, look! *(Pointing out.)* There he is!

GRISELDA: There who is?

AMMONIA: The butch one I was telling you about.

GRISELDA: Oh him – no chance with him, girl!

AMMONIA: Yeah? The whole of the interval,

DUFF: *(Whirling on him.)* Angry enough to kill!

BARRY: *(Beat.)* No. It's just a play.

DUFF: I don't understand you people. You talk about this as if it's most serious thing in the world, but, in the end, you can say "it's just a play."

RUTH/BARRY/TAYLOR: Civilians!

DUFF: What?

RUTH: Officer, what is it you do in your job?

DUFF: Law enforcement.

RUTH: Meaning that you affect people's lives every day, for good or ill, with your every action.

DUFF: Well, I suppose.

RUTH: And, what is it we do for a living?

DUFF: Play acting.

RUTH: Meaning that we dress up, put on funny hats, fall down in front of people and pretend to be something we aren't.

DUFF: I suppose.

RUTH: It's really a pretty silly thing for a grown-up to be doing.

DUFF: Well – you said it.

RUTH: But, every once in a while –

TAYLOR: – every once in a while –

BARRY: – we reach beyond –

he was pounding on my dressing room door.

GRISELDA: And how did that end?

AMMONIA: He finally got out.

GRISELDA: Where's the Prince? I'm determined to engage him in witty conversation.

AMMONIA: That'd be a one-sided conversation. You haven't got the brains of a hedgehog.

GRISELDA: No, but my sister has the face of one.

AMMONIA: Oh, look, look! Here he comes!

GRISELDA: Right! Watch me sweep him off his feet.

AMMONIA: *(Looking at GRISELDA's behind.)* Well, you've got a big enough dust pan.

(DANDINI kisses their hands.)

Oooh! I'll never wash that hand again.

GRISELDA: As if she ever washed it before.

DANDINI: Ladies, you look very ... healthy tonight. *(To GRISELDA.)* And, what a charming dress you're wearing.

GRISELDA: Thank you, Your Nibble-ship. I'm wearing my Wild West bra.

AMMONIA: It rounds them up and heads them out.

DANDINI: Ahem. *(To AMMONIA.)* And those are lovely ear-rings you're wearing.

AMMONIA: Oh, I just saw them in the window.

TAYLOR: – like Shakespeare said –

RUTH: – “to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to Nature.”

BARRY: And when that happens –

TAYLOR: – when *that* happens!

RUTH: We bring down kings and build them up!

TAYLOR: Empires shake.

BARRY: We change people’s *souls*!

TAYLOR: And *that* is why it’s the most important thing in the world.

(An impressed pause. DUFF is moved.)

Not this show, of course.

BARRY: Oh, god, no!

RUTH: It’s just a bit of fluff.

BARRY: Ten week contract and off to something else. *(To RUTH.)* I’ve got an audition Monday week for some Noel Coward at the Pantages.

RUTH: Good for you! Kenneth’s doing it, isn’t he?

BARRY: Yes! I’ve never worked with him.

RUTH: It’s a treat, dear. “How was China?”

BARRY: “Very big.”

RUTH: “And, Japan?”

BARRY: “Very small.”

GRISELDA: Yeah. On the curtains.

AMMONIA: I’ve turned the heads of royalty before now.

GRISELDA: And the stomachs of everybody else.

AMMONIA: *(Pushes GRISELDA.)* Get your hams off him, glue-fingers!

(The SISTERS begin a cat-fight.)

DANDINI: Ladies! I’m delighted to inform you: I’m not the Prince.

AMMONIA: ’Ow d’ja mean? Not the Prince?

DANDINI: I’m actually the Prince’s valet.

GRISELDA: *(Shouts across the Ballroom)* Daddy! What’s a valet?

BARON: It’s a geological depression between two ridges usually formed by erosion or glaciation.

GRISELDA: *(Beat.)* Not a valley! A Prince’s Valet!

BARON: Oh! A servant who picks up dirty socks.

SISTERS: Eeuuw!!!

AMMONIA: This sock-picker said he was the Prince!

DANDINI: Oh, no, I didn’t!

GRISELDA: Oh, yes, you did!

DANDINI: Oh, no, I didn’t!

AMMONIA: Oh, yes, you did!

(They laugh.)

DUFF: There's a body stretched out in the lounge!

RUTH: Yes, dear, we know.

TAYLOR: That's why they're doing it.

DUFF: I don't see how one of you could be a killer. You're all either too serious or too – light-weight.

BARRY: Ta very much, I think.

DUFF: All right. Let me think. *(To BARRY.)* You were onstage at the time of the murder.

BARRY: Page twenty-three.

DUFF: *(To TAYLOR.)* You were right here.

TAYLOR: Page twenty-three.

DUFF: *(To RUTH.)* And, you were –

(JENNI comes through the DR door.)

RUTH: Standing right here, gossiping about her! *(Indicates JENNI.)*

JENNI: About me?

RUTH: Indeedy.

JENNI: What would you have to gossip about?

RUTH: Are you joking? You and Terry. You and your boobs. You and Terry's long-lost family.

JENNI: Taylor! You told her about that?

TAYLOR: I told her about that – but I didn't tell her about your boobs! *(Accidentally into*

BARON: I highly doubt that he did. *(Indicates Prince.)* This is His Royal Highness.

SISTERS: Yippee!

(The SISTERS run over to him and kneel.)

AMMONIA: Your High'n'Mighty-ness!

GRISELDA: Your Royal Scrumptiousness!

BARONESS: No, girls, you say "Your Grace".

SISTERS: For who we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.

PRINCE: *(Bows)* Ladies!

BARON: Well, there's debate ...

BARONESS: Your Grace, may I present my daughters?

AMMONIA: I'm Ammonia. Those who know why call me – Moanie!

GRISELDA: I'm Griselda. Just call me!

BARONESS: As witty as they are beautiful! Aren't they amazing?

PRINCE: I'm at a loss for words.

BARON: May I suggest a few?

headset:) Oh, wait! I didn't know about your boobs. FX 36, standby. What? No, not *your* boobs! None of your business whose boobs! (*Releases headset.*) Boys!

DUFF: Whose boobs?

TAYLOR: Her boobs.

DUFF: Your boobs?

JENNI: My boobs.

DUFF: And your long-lost family, too?

JENNI: Of course, not. Terry had a family, years ago that he's been out of touch with for years.

DUFF: (*Writing.*) Now, that's interesting.

TAYLOR: (*Into headset.*) FX 36, go.
(*BARRY enters to the stage.*)

DUFF: And where is this family, now?

JENNY: I haven't the faintest idea. He mentioned it at three in the morning, once, that's all. Excuse me. (*JENNI enters to the stage.*)

DUFF: Wait a minute! Where was she at the time of the murder?

TAYLOR: She was on stage.

DUFF/TAYLOR: Page twenty-three.

DUFF: (*Looks around.*) And, now, all the rest of the suspects are on stage. (*To RUTH.*) When do you go back on?

RUTH: Not for ages. After the Ball is over.

TAYLOR: (*Sings.*) After the break of morn

PRINCE: Excuse me, ladies. Dandini, with me. (*He crosses and DANDINI follows.*)

DANDINI: Oh, thank you, sir!

PRINCE: Dandini, all these women here tonight but none are my beautiful cinder girl.

DANDINI: Your highness, look around. There are lots of lovely young women here.

PRINCE: But none like her.

DANDINI: And, thank goodness, only two like them.

(*FX 36: A fanfare of trumpets followed by The Blue Danube.*)

(*The CHAMBERLAIN comes in.*)

CHAMBERLAIN: My Lords, My Ladies, Ladies and Gentlemen – the Princess Cendrillon!

(*CINDERELLA enters in her gown etc.*)

DANDINI: Oh, what about that one, your Highness? I've never heard of her but ...

PRINCE: Dandini! That's her! That's my cinder girl!

(*The Prince runs over to Cinderella.*)

DANDINI: Oh, well, problem solved, then! From that look, I'd say 'is 'ighness is 'ooked.

(*He starts toward the SISTERS, then goes the other way.*)

PRINCE: Excuse me.

RUTH: *(Sings.)* After the dancers'
leaving;

(CINDERELLA turns and sees him.)

BOTH: *(Sing.)* After the stars are gone –

CINDERELLA: Oh! Dandini!

DUFF: All right, all right! That's
enough of that!

PRINCE: *(After a beat.)* Yes! It's I. You
came!

RUTH: And, then I go get lost in the
woods.

CINDERELLA: I – yes, I came.

DUFF: *(To TAYLOR.)* And you?

PRINCE: And the herald said you are – the
Princess Cendrillon?

TAYLOR: Will be sitting right here.

CINDERELLA: Well, he's a herald. He ought
to know. Why do you keep staring at me like
that?

DUFF: All right, walk me through what
happened before the murder.

PRINCE: I don't know of any other way to
stare at you. How did you get here?

TAYLOR: Well, we were talking and ...

DUFF: *(Making notes.)* Who was
talking?

CINDERELLA: My pet mice brought me –
but they're not mice right now. They're horses.
But they'll be mice again at midnight. I'm
sorry, that doesn't make much sense.

TAYLOR: Oh, there was Vance – Mr.
Britton – and me and Ruth –

RUTH: Barry was there.

PRINCE: I'm delighted to speak with you
whether it makes sense or not. May we dance?

TAYLOR: Mr. Inman. And we were talking
– and Terry had said that Ruth was a lousy lay
and that got her very angry ...

CINDERELLA: We may.

(They dance.)

DUFF: Really?

GRISELDA: Mommy! Why is the Prince
dancing with that ugly girl?

RUTH: Best *he* ever had! And he was
going to fire poor Vance ... and Barry, too!

AMMONIA: Yeah, he was supposed to dance
with *that* ugly girl! *(Meaning GRISELDA.)*

TAYLOR: And Vance said that he'd like to
lay Ruth himself. *(Into headset.)* FX 37,
standby.

GRISELDA: Who's ugly?

RUTH: I don't think that's pertinent, Lor.

AMMONIA: I'd say look in a mirror, but it'd
break!

TAYLOR: Might be. And, then we noticed
that it was quiet on stage and Terry hadn't made
his entrance.

*(They fight as the PRINCE and
CINDERELLA dance past.)*

RUTH: And I went to the dressing room – and Vance went to the bar.

TAYLOR: And then Jenni told us about her boobs.

RUTH: No, that was later.

TAYLOR: Right. And, then I opened the hidey-hole and Terry fell out.

DUFF: And, he was dead at that time?

TAYLOR: Yes.

RUTH: No! He was only partly dead. He whispered in your ear, remember.

DUFF: Whispered in your ear?

TAYLOR: That's right. He had time to say two sentences, actually.

DUFF: And what were those?

TAYLOR: He said – *(Into headset.)* FX 37, go.

DUFF: *(Writing it down.)* “FX 37, go.” And what did that mean to you?

TAYLOR: What? No! He didn't say that. I said that.

DUFF: You did? And what did he say when you said that?

(JENNI comes back from the stage.)

TAYLOR: He didn't say anything about that. He was dead.

(BEN comes back from the stage. JENNI is changing into her ragged dress.)

BARONESS: *(Bowing.)* Forgive us, Your Highness!

(CINDERELLA reacts to this.)

CINDERELLA: Why did she say “Your Highness”?

PRINCE: That's what people usually call me.

CINDERELLA: Aren't you Dandini, the Prince's valet?

PRINCE: Actually, I'm... Charming. *(And he says it charmingly.)*

CINDERELLA: Charming? *(She stops dancing.)* You're the Prince? Prince Charming!

PRINCE: Guilty, as charged.

CINDERELLA: *(Curtsies.)* Your highness – *(Rising.)* Wait a minute! Why did you lie to me?

(The clock begins to strike twelve.)

PRINCE: No! I pretended to be Dandini to get out among the people, to find someone who might love me for myself, not for my palace. And, when we met in the woods, I knew right away that – but, Princess, why were you there, dressed in rags?

CINDERELLA: What's that? Oh, no! Midnight, already! I must go. I'm sorry.

PRINCE: **Wait! Cendrillon!**

CINDERELLA: I'm not Cendri ... ! I must go! I'm sorry! *(The PRINCE catches her and kisses her. She breaks away and runs off.)* Goodbye!

PRINCE: Cendrillon! Wait! Dandini! Stop her! *(He runs out after her.)*

DANDINI: *(To CHAMBERLAIN.)* Julius,

DUFF: You just said that he said –

TAYLOR: He didn't say "FX 37, go." I just said it, *now*. We had only just done FX 12 by then. Terry fell out of the hidey-hole and he said –

RUTH: (*Remembering.*) Oh, yes!

TAYLOR: Right. And then he whispered to me: "No refunds."

DUFF: I see. And you, Mr. Roe, where...

(*BEN enters to the stage.*)

RUTH: You'll have to be faster than that.

TAYLOR: And, earlier, Vance had brought Terry's drinks bottle over – (*BEN comes back from the stage.*) – that one, there. LX 36 FX 38, standby. Terry and I argued about it – a bit.

DUFF: I see. Mr. Roe, where were you when Mr. Lasseur was murdered?

BEN: Terry was murdered? Oh, my god!

(*He bursts into tears and run off through the DR door.*)

DUFF: I know. I'll have to be faster. Let me see that bottle. (*She opens it.*)

RUTH: Ben's very sensitive, you know.

DUFF: I can tell. Of course, just as I thought. What does that smell like to you? (*She holds the bottle out.*)

RUTH: (*Sniffs.*) Oh, my god! (*Sniffs again.*) It's water! I was sure it would be gin.

DUFF: Water – and something else.

catch that girl before she gets away!

CHAMBERLAIN: What?

DANDINI: Julius, seize 'er!

ALL: (*To audience.*) **It's an oldie, but a goodie!**

CHAMBERLAIN: My lords and ladies! It would appear that the ball is over!

ALL: **Awww!**

CHAMBERLAIN: Please proceed in an orderly manner to the nearest exit.

(*The PRINCE re-appears.*)

PRINCE: Ten thousand gold pieces to whoever finds the Princess Cendrillon!

(*He runs out again.*)

DANDINI: What's she like?

CHAMBERLAIN: Well, her bio says she likes long walks on the beach, horse-back riding, quiet evenings by the fire ...

DANDINI: What does she *look* like?

CHAMBERLAIN: Oh! Well, she's wearing a beautiful shimmering ball gown by Dior, a Valenti diamond tiara – oh!, and glass slippers!

AMMONIA: Mommy, you said we could have a prince!

BARONESS: Shut up, you stupid girl! We're going to get ten thousand gold pieces!

GRISELDA: But, I wanted a prince!

BARON: I'll get you a dog and you can call him whatever you want.

TAYLOR: LX 36, FX 38, go. LX 37, standby.

(JULIAN, HUGH, DENNIS, VANCE, BARRY, TUFF come back from the stage. Ben returns through DR door.)

LX 37, go.

DUFF: D. I. Tuff! Detective Inspector! I've got it! I've found the murder weapon! It was ...

(JENNI enters to the stage.)

TUFF: The drinks bottle. Poisoned.

DUFF: ... the drinks bot- ... How did you know?

TUFF: I applied my little grey cells.

JULIAN: Try that with a Belgian accent.

TUFF: Why on earth would I do that?

JULIAN: No, it's ... never mind.

DUFF: But, you were out there on stage performing! How could you deduce the presence of both the drinks bottle and the poison in it?

TUFF: I was merely acting, W.P.C. Duff. That doesn't take up any large portion of my cranial capacity. After all, I had performed the role several times a mere two years ago. It remains fresh.

BEN: Cendrillon! Cendrillon!

TUFF: I simply placed the thespian portion of my mind on automatic and applied most of my powers toward cogitating on the necessary elements of The Panto Murder.

(JENNI comes off the stage; BEN enters to the stage.)

Of course, the obvious conclusions were but a few moments' work. It

DANDINI: As long as you call him and not me.

SISTERS: Call you! **Eeeuuww!**

(ALL EXIT. LX 36: DOWN. FX38: CHANGE.)

(LX37: UP ; SC 9: IN THE ROYAL FOREST. There is a signpost with three arms: "This way to Hardup Hall"; "This Way To The Castle"; and "Don't Go This Way!")

(CINDERELLA enters, in her rags but still with tiara and slippers.)

CINDERELLA: Oh, dear! My horses have turned back into mice; my coachman has turned back into a rat; and my coach is a pumpkin! My beautiful ball gown has turned back to rags. Soon, Princess Cendrillon will disappear and I'll be ragged Cinderella – and the Prince will hate me! I must get back to Hardup Hall, but which way is it? *(She stops in front of the signpost.)* Which way should I go? Should I go this way *(NO!)* Should I go this way? *(NO!)* Should I go this way? *(YES!)* What, this way? *(NO!)* *(Etc. After much confusion and shouting, she decides and points in the right direction.)* I'll go this way, then. *(And sets off the wrong way.)* What? Not that way? This way? Well, I wish you'd make up your minds.

PRINCE: *(OFF.)* **Cendrillon! Cendrillon!**

CINDERELLA: Oh, my goodness! It's Charming! He mustn't see me in my rags! But, I can't run in these glass dancing slippers! *(She takes them off and puts them in her pockets)* Now, to run home as fast as I can!

(She exits, just before the PRINCE enters opposite.)

must have been hard waiting a whole scene to tell me your news.

DUFF: A whole scene? Yes, I made the deduction almost as soon as you made your entrance.

TUFF: Naturally. The question is who –
(*JULIAN enters to the stage.*)

– who placed the poison in the Panto Dame’s bottle, and what was their motive for murder?

DUFF: Well, sir, I’ve been taking some notes ...

TUFF: W. P. C. Duff, I must go on again in...? (*He points to TAYLOR.*)

TAYLOR: Ten lines.

TUFF: ... but question every cast-member as to their whereabouts prior to the death of the victim.

DUFF: Yes, sir. I’ve started that, sir. Miss Ellis was, in her words, “right here.” Miss ...

TUFF: No time for that now. The bottle was on the desk at the Stage Manager’s station. It was clearly moved there after the SM had done her pre-show check as it was on top of the checklist. Who had access to it both before and after that time – and where was it before then?

DUFF: Where was it before the pre-show check – yes, sir.

TUFF: And then, think back to the dark days of your training and try to remember everything you can about glycoside amygdalin. We enter – NOW!

(*BEN and JULIAN come off the stage; TUFF, HUGH, DENNIS enter to the stage.*)

JENNI: This is too much! Me for a drink

PRINCE: Cendrillon! Cendrillon! Where has she gone? (*He stops to catch his breath.*) She is the only woman in the world for me! (*To audience.*) You know she’s the only woman in the world for me, don’t you? (*If answer is YES*) Oh, you’ve heard this story before? (*If answer is NO*) What, you’ve never heard this story before?

(*DANDINI enters, also out of breath.*)

DANDINI: Your Highness! Will you wait, please?

PRINCE: Dandini, have you found her?

DANDINI: All I’ve done is lose meself. Where are we?

PRINCE: In the Royal Wood, not far from Hardup Hall.

DANDINI: Hardup? Not those two ’orrible sisters and their mother?

PRINCE: Oh, they’re not bad. Perhaps one of my subjects will find my cinder girl. I’ve heard them all around, looking.

DANDINI: Ten thousand gold pieces is a lot of incentive.

PRINCE: This way, my friend! There’s no time to lose!

DANDINI: Right! This way!

(*They exit; the BARONESS and the SISTERS enter opposite.*)

and a hot shower after the show.

VANCE: Do you need someone to scrub your back?

JENNI: I have a loofa.

VANCE: All the better.

RUTH: Vance, you're married!

VANCE: No, I'm not!

(They stare at him. He hangs his head)

Adrienne left me six months ago. She's taken the kids and she's living in the Netherlands.

RUTH: I'm so sorry.

VANCE: So am I.

JENNI: Why didn't you say anything?

VANCE: I thought maybe she'd come back. Divorce papers came Friday. So, you know, all 'round, it's been a pretty crappy week.

JENNI: That's why the sports car?

VANCE: What the hell, you're only young once, but with an MG, you can pretend you still are.

TAYLOR: Jenni, your dusting cap!

(JENNI reaches up and realizes she's still wearing her tiara. She trades it for a dusting cap.)

RUTH: A crappy week all 'round.

VANCE: Pretty much.

JENNI: *(Kissing VANCE's cheek as she passes.)* You can't scrub my back tonight, but I'll take a ride in your MG tomorrow. Now, which way do I go? Stage right!

BARONESS: Come along, girls! The Princess can't have gone far. Keep searching!

AMMONIA: But, my feet hurt!

GRISELDA: My girdle's killing me!

SISTERS: I'm hungry!

BARONESS: Shutup! When we get the ten thousand gold pieces, as God is my witness, you'll never be hungry again – AND we can dump that stupid old Baron and head for the hot spots: Paris!

AMMONIA: Rome!

GRISELDA: Skegness! *(Or substitute a local small town.)*

BARONESS: I despair sometimes, I really do.

(AMMONIA pulls off a shoe. A fist-sized rock falls out of it.)

AMMONIA: I told you my feet hurt.

GRISELDA: My girdle still hurts.

AMMONIA: Don't show us what's in that!

BARONESS: Stop it, now. We must find that princess. And, your step-father. That little wimp is around here, somewhere. Oh, Princess! *(Her voice is rough and nasty, so she coughs and tries again. Sweetly.)* Princess! Oh, Cendrillon!

AMMONIA: Come out, come out, wherever you are!

(TUFF, HUGH and DENNIS come off the stage; JENNI enters to the stage.)

VANCE: Yeah, which way do I go?

JULIAN: You Gloomy Gus! Tomorrow, you're going to have *that* in your sports car!

(JULIAN silently fist-bumps VANCE. JENNI comes off the stage)

VANCE: *(Enters to the stage.)* Princess! Baroness!

TUFF: Well! A sea change in his life—goodbye, wife— a new car— a new girl-friend. He bears watching. Duff, keep an eye on him. *(Shouting.)* Henry! Where are you?

DUFF: Yes, sir. Keep an eye on him. Do I follow him onto the stage, sir?

TUFF: Hardly. He's coming off. I go on.

DUFF: Yes, sir. Off-on.

(VANCE comes off the stage; TUFF enters to the stage. DUFF follows VANCE closely as he crosses to the other side of the stage.)

VANCE: Can I help you?

DUFF: No. *(She takes notes as she stands.)*

VANCE: *(Looking at her notes.)* "Defensive" only has one "f".

DUFF: Thank you. *(She corrects it.)*

VANCE: When I come off next time, I'm planning to use the washroom in my dressing room. Care to join me?

(TUFF comes off the stage; VANCE enters to the stage.)

GRISELDA: Come here, my little money-bags!

(They all exit, calling. After a moment, CINDERELLA comes back on. Her tiara is now gone, replaced by her dusting cap)

CINDERELLA: Oh, dear! I'm so lost. I'll never find my way home. Which way should I go? ... I'll try this way. *(She exits but as she does, one slipper falls out of her pocket.)*

BARON: ***(Entering.)*** Princess! Baroness! Step-daughters! Well, anyway, Princess! I'm not as young as I used to be. Even when I was as young as I used to be, I wasn't as young as I used to be.

BARONESS: *(OFF.)* Henry! Where are you?

BARON: *(Starting to reply.)* I'm over ... *(He changes voice.)* There's nobody here by that name! *(He starts to exit, then stops.)* Don't tell her I was here!

(He runs off.)

BARONESS: *(Entering.)* Henry! *(She turns to the audience.)* Was my husband here? *(NO)* Are you sure? *(YES)* A little amoeba with beady eyes and no spine? If I could find the Princess and get the ten thousand gold pieces, I could dump him and his little brat of a daughter. *(She sees the glass slipper.)* What's that? *(She picks it up.)* A slipper? How do you lose one slipper in the middle of the woods and not notice? Stupid person. *(She drops it again.)* And where did those girls of mine go? I've a mind to dump them too and go off and enjoy myself alone! *(She exits.)* Princess! Princess Cendrillon! Where are you, dear?

DUFF: *(To TUFF.)* Sir, he's been acting very suspiciously. I was following him, as you instructed, and he became extremely defensive – with one “f”. Then, he invited me to accompany him into a washroom. For what purpose, I'm not sure, but I can imagine.

TUFF: Wait a moment. You were following him?

(VANCE comes off the stage and exits DR; HUGH and DENNIS enter to the stage.)

DUFF: Yes, sir. *(Points to VANCE, who goes out the DR door.)* Him. As you said to.

TUFF: I said keep an eye on him, not follow him.

DUFF: I thought that was the best way to keep an eye on him. I used my initiative, sir. That's what they taught us in training, sir.

TUFF: Did they? I shall have to inquire as to who is in charge of training these days.

DUFF: I got 87 per cent in shadowing and subliminal surveillance, sir. Shall I recap our list of suspects, sir?

TUFF: Not suspects, W.P.C. Duff. Persons of interest.

DUFF: Very well, sir, our list of poys.

TUFF: I'm not sure that's better, but go ahead.

DUFF: Mr. Britton, in debt to the victim, with a lavish new lifestyle. His wife left him some time back for an undisclosed reason –

TUFF: When did you find this out?

DUFF: While you were on stage, sir.

BARON: *(Entering.)* Thanks for not telling her I was here! What a mistake marrying her was. Since she's moved in, it's been nothing but trouble. Perhaps, if I can find the princess and get the reward money, we can be happy. What's that? *(He picks up the slipper.)* A dancing slipper? It's fallen off someone's foot. Someone in a hurry. If it was the princess, she must be close by. Perhaps I can find her. *(He drops the slipper and goes off.)* Princess! Princess Cendrillon!

(The SISTERS enter opposite.)

SISTERS: Mummy! Princess! Princey-wincey!

GRISELDA: Oh, phooey! Where did everybody go?

AMMONIA: *(Flopping down at the foot of the sign-post)* My shoes are killing me! *(She takes off her other shoe and another rock drops out of it.)* How do they get in there?

GRISELDA: Moan.

AMMONIA: *(Moans.)*

GRISELDA: No! Moan! As in, hey, idiot!

AMMONIA: What?

GRISELDA: Have you ever been in the woods after dark before?

AMMONIA: No.

(They look around, spooked by the darkness.)

GRISELDA: I think we should go home.

TUFF: Well done. Continue.

AMMONIA: But . . .

DUFF: He acts very defensively when observed. Ms. Wale, Cinderella, also with debts and a recent physical, although we can't say romantic, relationship with the victim. Appears to have some knowledge of the victim's past.

SISTERS: Which way's home? *(A long frightened pause as they slowly turn to look at the sign-post. They read it.)* Oh, that way! Good!

TUFF: Possible motive?

(They start off and AMMONIA spies the slipper.)

DUFF: Lover's revenge?

AMMONIA: *(Picking it up.)* Look, Gristle. A slipper!

TUFF: Seems unlikely. Next.

DUFF: Ms. Buchanan, the Fairy Godmother, a former lover, jilted perhaps. A long-time acquaintance with many dark mysteries. Mr. Havers, Dandini, a notorious rake, if I may use the term.

GRISELDA: *(Grabbing it.)* A glass slipper!

JULIAN: I'm standing right here!

(HUGH and DENNIS come off the stage. JULIAN enters to the stage. BEN enters to the stage a moment later.)

BOTH: *(Both holding it.)* Like a princess might wear to a ball! *(A moment, then.)*

Wha'ev'! *(They drop the slipper and exit.)*

Mommy! Princess! Princey! **Come to Moanie! (Gristle!)**

DUFF: Mr. Roe, the Prince, I've not gathered much information on, but he seems to have some past relationship with the victim.

(DANDINI enters cautiously.)

TUFF: A lot of that going around, backstage.

DANDINI: I think they're gone!

DUFF: Mr. Coltman and Mr. Willett, business partners who stood to gain financially from the victim's demise. Mr. Inman, Buttons, whose relationship with Ms. Ellis, the stage manager, could have serious repercussions on their employment, if discovered by the victim.

PRINCE: *(Entering.)* They're not going to harm us, silly.

TUFF: I doubt that a heterosexual relationship between two single young adults is grounds for dismissal in this day and age. This is the theatre, though.

DANDINI: No, they're not going to harm you. Me, they'd eat alive! *(He looks across and sees the slipper.)* Hello, what's that?

DUFF: And that's the list, sir.

PRINCE: What's what?

DANDINI: Over there! Something shining. *(He crosses and picks up the slipper.)* A glass

TUFF: Very good. Where did you get that list of suspec– of Persons Of Interest, by the way?

DUFF: I compiled it from the show's programme.

TUFF: As good a place to start as any. There's something in that list that we're not seeing. One must look beyond the obvious, W.P.C. Duff. One must peel down the layers of the onion.

DUFF: Yes, sir. Peel down, sir. Shall I start peeling?

THE ACTORS: Oh, what you said!

TUFF: One of us must – and I have a costume change to make.

DUFF: I must say, that's a very attractive frock you're wearing, sir.

TUFF: Thank you, W.P.C. Duff. You don't think it makes me look fat, do you?

DUFF: Not at all, sir. It brings out your eyes.

TUFF: Very kind of you. I'm not fond of heavy rouge, but it works with the false eyelashes.

DUFF: I might suggest a less vibrant lip colour.

TUFF: Well, I had to use what was at hand. I must change.

TAYLOR: LX 38, go. FX 39, go. Scene change. Stand by, LX 39.

(JULIAN and BEN come off the stage. TUFF exits through DR door.)

LX 39, go.

(BARRY enters to the stage. JENNI comes through DR door.)

slipper! Now, that's an odd thing to find in the woods.

PRINCE: A glass slipper? Her glass slipper!

DANDINI: What makes you say that?

PRINCE: Who else but a princess would wear slippers of glass?

DANDINI: Someone with really tough feet?

PRINCE: Don't you see, this is a clue! We'll try this slipper on every young woman in the kingdom and she whom this slipper fits must be my Princess Cendrillon!

DANDINI: Wait a minute. That doesn't make sense. That's a size seven. Half the women in the kingdom must be size seven.

PRINCE: No! Only my Princess will fit into this shoe. Come, Dandini, if we find her, I'll make you Valet in Chief!

DANDINI: I'd rather have the ten thousand gold pieces.

PRINCE: No time for funning now, my friend! Onward!

DANDINI: Right you are, sir! Onward, it is! Wait a minute! I'm already Valet In Chief!

(They exit. Lights down; scene change music. Lights up on HARDUP HALL.)

DUFF: Ms. Wale, a word, please.

(BUTTONS enters, late at night.)

JENNI: I'm on again in 30 seconds.

DUFF: I'll make it fast. Mr. Lavasseur was your "sugar daddy", wasn't he? He gave you roles, he gave you favours, he gave you cosmetic surgery that you could never have paid for yourself. All for a few "favours" of your own. Then, he threw you over for someone else. Is that why you killed him?

BUTTONS: **Hi, kids!** ... Well, it's sure late at night, but I wonder if Cinderella got to dance with the Prince. What do you think? I sure hope so. Of course, I'd rather it was me dancing with Cinderella, but that's not going to happen. I sure worry about Cinders. Is it just me or are her step-sisters treating her badly? I think they are. When Cinders' mother was still alive, this was a happy home, but with that nasty old Baroness here, it's nothing but fighting and meanness.

(JENNI bursts into tears and enters to the stage.)

(CINDERELLA suddenly enters, crying and out of breath.)

Well, I think I struck a nerve there.

TAYLOR: No, you didn't. It says right here: "CINDERELLA suddenly enters, crying and out of breath." This is the theatre, W.P.C. Duff. Nothing is what it seems.

Cinders! What's wrong?

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons! *(She clings to him, weeping.)*

DUFF: Except ...

BUTTONS: What's happened? Did you get to the ball?

TAYLOR: ... except the fact that Terry is lying dead on the sofa in the green room. Yes, that's a little bit real.

CINDERELLA: Mm-hm!

DUFF: Real enough that I can get some straight answers from people?

BUTTONS: Was there wonderful music?

CINDERELLA: Mm-hm!

TAYLOR: I have a page and a half.

BUTTONS: And, lots of bright lights?

DUFF: Very well, I'll get straight to it. Mr. Inman and you are having a love affair.

CINDERELLA: Mm-hm!

TAYLOR: Is that a question?

BUTTONS: And, lots of beautiful dresses?

CINDERELLA: Mm-hm!

DUFF: Isn't it?

TAYLOR: I don't know if you'd call it a love affair – yet.

BUTTONS: And, did you meet the prince?

CINDERELLA: Mm-hm!

DUFF: And why has it been kept secret?

BUTTONS: And, did he ask you to dance with him?

TAYLOR: Apparently, it hasn't. Not very

well, at least.

DUFF: Nevertheless ...

TAYLOR: Do you make your love life public knowledge? Assuming you have one, of course.

DUFF: Mine is not in question, at the moment.

TAYLOR: Oh, you do have one?

DUFF: I do. Now answer my question.

TAYLOR: Barry and I have just begun to get to know each other and frankly don't want anyone else prying around us.

DUFF: And, your employer might also dismiss one or both of you if he found you were "carrying on" together?

TAYLOR: Have you never been in even one play in your life?

DUFF: I never have.

TAYLOR: A virgin! (*JULIAN and BEN are suddenly interested.*) Well, Miss V, there are two reasons why that doesn't hold water. One, we have a union, a very good one, and you don't cross Equity. What we do outside of this building is no one's business but ours.

DUFF: And the second reason?

TAYLOR: This is theatre! It's an industry full of sensitive, emotional, excitable people who wear their hearts on their sleeves. Add in some exhaustion and a few drinks after a show, and ...

DUFF: ... and ...

TAYLOR: ... and things happen. Regularly. In as many ways and combinations as the human imagination can conceive. Nobody cares, W.P.C. Duff. Nobody cares.

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons! (*She weeps aloud again.*)

BUTTONS: I knew we'd get to the bottom of it sooner or later.

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons! He's kind and handsome and noble and I love him so much!

BUTTONS: Well, then, why are you blubbing all over me buttons?

CINDERELLA: But then...

BUTTONS: But then?

CINDERELLA: But, then we danced and it was magic!

BUTTONS: Still as clear as mud. But then?

CINDERELLA: But THEN! The clock struck midnight and I remembered that the magic ends at midnight and that I'm not a princess – I'm just little Cinderella from Hardup Hall – and that the Prince will never love me! (*She cries again.*)

BUTTONS: If he doesn't, I'll poke him in the nose, I will!

CINDERELLA: Oh, Buttons, don't! Don't make me laugh!

BUTTONS: You think I wouldn't? Now, you go to bed. You need your sleep.

CINDERELLA: My beauty sleep?

BUTTONS: Never! You're as beautiful as possible, now.

CINDERELLA: Thank you, Buttons. I don't know what I'd do without you. (*She kisses his cheek and suddenly yawns.*) Oh, dear. I am

DUFF: You people have an unusual occupation.

*(JENNI comes back from the stage.
VANCE comes through the DR door.)*

All right, you're back. Now, I need to speak with you.

VANCE: I thought we did that already.

DUFF: Your wife left you six months ago. What did that have to do with Terrance Lavasseur?

VANCE: Why don't you ask them? Oh, you can't. He's dead and she made an early Brexit. Excuse me. Buttons! Buttons! *(To DUFF.)* Stand there and you'll get run over.

(BEN comes through DR door at a run, sees DL door blocked by DUFF, runs on stage; TUFF enters DR door, chasing him. BARRY comes back, then re-enters. BEN runs on and off stage, interfering.)

TUFF: Stop him!

(VANCE enters to the stage. RUTH comes through DR door in GHOST costume.)

DUFF: Stop who?

TUFF: Where is he? You! Have you seen him? *(BEN comes back from stage.)*

OTHERS: He's behind you! *(BEN exits again.)*

TUFF: *(Spinning.)* He's what? *(BEN comes back from stage.)*

OTHERS: He's behind you! *(BEN exits again.)*

TUFF: *(Spinning.)* He's where? *(BEN comes out.)*

OTHERS: He's behind you! *(BEN exits*

tired! I'd better go to bed. 'Night, Buttons. Thank you.

(CINDERELLA goes off.)

BUTTONS: She just needs to have confidence in herself, doesn't she? But her father doesn't even have the courage to stand up for her. So, I'll have to find a way to give him some courage, too. It sure is dark and spooky in old Hardup Hall, late at night. The way the wind howls through the chimneys, you'd think it was haunted. Do you think there might be – ghosts in Hardup Hall? You do? So do I!

BARON: *(OFF.)* Buttons! Buttons!

BUTTONS: And, now I know just what to do! If I put on a bedsheet and walk into the Baron's room with a candle when he's sound asleep, maybe he'll think I'm a ghost and I can scare him into standing up for himself – and for poor Cinders. Isn't that a great idea? I need a candle and an old sheet! *(He runs off, then returns.)* And, don't tell the Baron I was here! Okay? Oh, goodness, here he comes. I'd better hide!

(He hides behind furniture. The BARON enters.)

BARON: Buttons! Buttons! Have you seen Buttons?

(BUTTONS shushes them.)

(The children shout: He's behind you!)

He's what?

(He's behind you!)

He's where?

(He's behind you!)

again.)

TUFF: *(Spinning.)* Where? *(BEN comes back from the stage.)*

Where?

OTHERS: Behind you!

(Behind you! BUTTONS sneaks out.)

(BARRY comes back from stage. He blunders into BEN, knocking him down. TUFF and DUFF grab BEN and handcuff him.)

I can't find him. He must have gone to bed. Ella must be sleeping, too. *(He looks around him.)* Hardup Hall is so cold and lonely, these days. Oh, it wasn't like that when my first wife was alive. There was fun and laughter all the time, here. If only she could be here, now. Then maybe Ella could be happy again.

BARRY: What the hell is going on?

TUFF: Police work. Now, stand back. *(He pulls BEN to his feet.)* Now, young man, perhaps you'd be good enough to explain the meaning behind all this?

BEN: Why should I? *(Moans loudly.)*

(From off, we hear a moaning)

TUFF: Because it might stop me laying charges of assaulting a police officer against you. All I did was ask you a simple question. What was your relationship with the deceased?

BARON: Who's that? Imogene, is that you? Please, don't start in at this time of night.

(TAYLOR give a cue. RUTH enters to the stage.)

(The GHOST of Baron Hardup's first wife appears, seen through mist, with a candle.)

RUTH: *(Moaning.)* Henry! Henry Hardup!

GHOST: *(Ghostly.)* **Henry! Henry Hardup!**

TUFF: Again, what was your relationship with the deceased?

(He turns and sees the GHOST.)

JENNI: He doesn't have to say anything until he has a lawyer.

BARON: Anna! Anna, is that you!

TUFF: He's not under arrest. He's assisting police with their investigations.

GHOST: Henry Hardup! What have you done?

VANCE: Then why is he in handcuffs?

BARON: I've not done anything, dear.

TUFF: To better facilitate his assistance.

VANCE: Looks like arrest to me.

GHOST: Our dear, beautiful daughter is so unhappy! What have you done?

DUFF: And you have experience with arrest?

VANCE: Uhm – no.

BARON: I've... I've made a mistake,

TUFF: Then, do be quiet. *(To BEN.)*

Now then, once again, what was your relationship with the deceased?

BEN: *(After a moment.)* He was my father.

VANCE/TAYLOR/JENNI: *(A beat.)* Blimey!

DUFF: So you're the legendary offspring of this legendary family of his that no one's ever met?

BEN: No. I know about them – they're a different family.

JENNI: Old Terry did get around, didn't he?

BEN: He didn't know about me until last year. I contacted him then. He's been helping me out since.

(RUTH comes back from stage.)

RUTH: What's going on?

TAYLOR/JENNI: Tell you later.

TUFF: So, if he has been helping you out for over a year, why the sudden change of heart? Why did you kill – *(In character)* Henry! Henry Hardup!

BEN: I didn't!

TUFF: W. P. C. Duff, take him to his dressing room and lock him in. We'll decide later about charges – and we'll talk to him in more detail. Meanwhile, duty calls.

(TUFF enters to the stage.)

DUFF: Very well, sir. This way, please. *(She starts to lead him to the DR door.)*

BEN: I'm not going down there. I've got a performance to finish. The show must ...

DUFF: Come on! You should have thought of that before you assaulted an officer.

Anna.

GHOST: You have. And, now, you must take steps, Henry.

BARON: What steps?

GHOST: You'll know what steps, Henry. You'll know.

BARON: Anna, is it really you?

GHOST: Make her happy, Henry. Make our beautiful Ella happy again.

(There is a mist and darkness. The GHOST is gone.)

BARON: Anna! Anna, where are you? *(He turns to the audience.)* Did you see her? You did? Was it her? Was it Ella's mother? I think so, too. But how can I see to it that Ella's happy again? I'll have to take steps, but what steps?

BARONESS: *(OFF.)* **Henry! Henry Hardup!**

BARON: Well, I know *that's* not my Anna. I think the step I need to take right now is – HIDE! *(He hides, then sticks his head out.)* And don't tell HER that you've seen me, all right?

(He hides again, just as the BARONESS appears.)

BARONESS: Henry Hardup! *(She stops and looks for him. To the audience.)* Have you seen him? Well, have you? *(BARON comes out to shush them. "He's behind you!")* He's what? *(“He's behind you!”)* He's where? *(“He's behind you!”)* Where? *(“Behind you!”)* I'll bet. **Buttons! BUTTONS!**

(VANCE comes back from stage; BARRY enters to the stage.)

TAYLOR: You've only got the D.I.'s word for that.

BEN: I'm not going.

DUFF: Do you want to be arrested for resisting arrest?

TAYLOR: How can he be resisting arrest when he hasn't been arrested?

(HUGH and DENNIS come through the DR door.)

DUFF: *(Stops to think that through.)*
Never mind. Come along. *(She starts to pull BEN again.)*

HUGH: What's happened?

TAYLOR: Ben's not been arrested for not assaulting the D.I.

DENNIS: That makes no sense whatsoever.

TAYLOR: Precisely. *(DUFF reaches the DR door with BEN.)* Wait! He's got two more scenes to do! You can't leave us prince-less! We'd be ... prince-less!

DUFF: Take it up with the D.I. I've a job to do and you'd better not interfere. He's to be locked in his dressing-room.

TAYLOR: And, who finishes the play? We need him! You can't have a happy ending without Prince Charming!

HUGH/DENNIS: Oh, what you said!

DUFF: What do you want me to do, put on his costume and play the role myself?

(The actors all slowly begin to smile.)

THE ACTORS: Oh, what you said!

DUFF: Oh, no! I'm a police officer! I'm on duty! I don't know the lines! I've never acted

(The BARON sneaks out; BUTTONS enters with bed sheet and a candle-stick.)

BARONESS: You, there, Bottoms! You're still up?

BUTTONS: Right here, your horror. I mean, your honour.

BARONESS: Have you seen the Baron?

BUTTONS: He hasn't laid eyes on me all night, Gruesome-ness. I mean, Baroness.

BARONESS: What are you doing with one of my sheets?

BUTTONS: I was just making up your stall – your bed.

BARONESS: Very well, then I'm off to bed.

BUTTONS: To get your beauty sleep?

BARONESS: I've no need of that, Bottoms.

BUTTONS: No, it couldn't improve you, your shady-ship. Your ladyship.

BARONESS: If I didn't know better, Bottoms, I'd think that you were smart-mouthing me.

BUTTONS: I'm sure you don't.

BARONESS: Of course, I don't. Because if I did, I'd squash you like a bug, insect!

before in my life!

TAYLOR: Vance, take Ben down and lock him in his dressing room. Ruth, take W.P.C. Duff down and get some tights on her. Terry gets his wish after all – a girl who’s a Boy. A Boy who’s a girl? Whatever. A Prince Charming with a long set of gams.

(TUFF returns. RUTH and VANCE push DUFF and BEN toward the DR door.)

DUFF: Here! I’m not doing it! I’m not!

TUFF: What’s all this then?

DUFF: Get your hands off my ... !

HUGH & DENNIS: Buttons! Buttons!

TAYLOR: You’ve arrested Ben. We need ...

HUGH & DENNIS: Buttons! Buttons!

TAYLOR: Not buttons! A Principal Boy!

TUFF: Good lord! I hadn’t thought of that. W.P.C. Duff, for the sake of the show, strip down!

DUFF: What! Sir!

TUFF: Not here! In the dressing room. Ms. Buchanan, kindly do what is needed. W.P.C. Duff, you’re on in – *(Snaps fingers to TAYLOR.)*

(BARRY comes back from stage.)

TAYLOR: LX 40, FX 40, go! Seven and a half. LX 41, go!

TUFF: Seven and a half pages. Now, move!

(JENNI enters to stage. RUTH pushes DUFF out; VANCE takes BEN.)

Well, this is a performance we’ll all long remember. Where is that water bottle?

BUTTONS: Thank you, your slime-ness. I mean, your highness.

BARONESS: Humph! *(She starts off but stops to look at the audience.)* And, don’t think I’ve forgotten about you, either! *(She exits.)*

BUTTONS: Well, that’s her stabled for the night. See what I’ve got? A candle and a bed-sheet! Now, I’ll pretend that I’m a ghost and scare the Baron! Do you think he’d be scared if he saw a ghost?

SISTERS: *(OFF.)* Buttons! Buttons!

BUTTONS: Oh, no! I’ll tell you who I’m scared of!

SISTERS: *(OFF.)* Buttons! Buttons!

BUTTONS: Well, looks like no haunting for me, tonight. No ghosts in Hardup Hall today. The Baron will have to find his own courage for today!

(He runs off.)

(Lights to black; end of scene.)

(Lights up: THE KITCHEN AT HARDUP HALL)

(It is the morning after the ball. CINDERELLA arrives, clad in her rags. She seems chipper and goes about her morning chores. She stacks wood, lights a fire and sweeps up. After a few

(BARRY enters to stage.)

TAYLOR: Here. *(She hands it to him.)*

TUFF: Did you notice anything unusual about it?

TAYLOR: No.

TUFF: And neither did I, yet I'm sure there is something about this that has to do with the water bottle. What is the connection?

HUGH: *(Carrying ball dress.)* Cinderella!

DENNIS: *(Carrying ball dress.)* Cinderella!

TUFF: I doubt it.

(HUGH and DENNIS enter to stage. DUFF returns through DR door, with tunic unbuttoned. RUTH follows her.)

DUFF: Sir, I must protest! This is hardly conduct becoming.

TUFF: Think of it as community involvement, W.P.C. Duff.

DUFF: But, sir, what if I get out there and find I have stage fright?

TUFF: Nonsense. Just image that you are in front of a magistrate, testifying about these happenings.

DUFF: Which I'm sure we will be – or at least a disciplinary hearing.

TUFF: W.P.C. Duff, it's for the children! Or don't you care about children?

DUFF: Not really, sir.

TUFF: Ms. Buchanan, calm her nerves and get her ready. Six pages, now.

RUTH: Yes, sir! I mean ... right. Come

moments, BUTTONS joins her.)

CINDERELLA: Good morning, Buttons!

BUTTONS: 'Morning, Cinders. How are you this morning? Feeling better?

CINDERELLA: Well, it's a new day, Buttons. The sun is shining and the sky is blue! What could go wrong, today?

BUTTONS: Something can go wrong.

CINDERELLA: Like what?

GRISELDA: *(OFF.)* **Cinderella!**

AMMONIA: *(OFF.)* **Cinderella!**

BUTTONS: That!

(The SISTERS come in, in their nightgowns, carrying their ball dresses. They throw them at CINDERELLA.)

GRISELDA: Cinderella, clean my ball gown and press it at once.

AMMONIA: No! Clean *my* ball gown and press it at once.

GRISELDA: Mine, first.

AMMONIA: No, mine!

GRISELDA: I'm oldest!

AMMONIA: I'm dirtiest!

GRISELDA: No argument here! Cinders, go ahead. Do her's first.

CINDERELLA: I'll do them as soon as I can, sisters, but I have to make breakfast for your

on, then. What's your first name, love? I can't call you W.P.C. all the time.

DUFF: *(Being pushed off.)* It's Lorraine.

RUTH: Now, don't worry, Lorraine. You won't feel a thing! Now, first, let's get you down to your knickers ...

(She has DUFF at DR door.)

TUFF: W.P.C. Duff!

DUFF: Sir?

TUFF: I asked you to recall everything you could about glycoside amygdalin.

DUFF: Prussic acid, sir. Naturally present in many fruits and vegetables. A natural pesticide.

TUFF: Exactly. Now, go get peeled down.

DUFF: Yes, sir.

RUTH: Come on, dear. Let's peel you.

(DUFF and RUTH leave through DR door.)

TAYLOR: What do you want to know about glyco-acid magdalene for?

TUFF: Glycoside amygdalin. It's part of a theory I am pursuing.

JULIAN: Oh, you have a theory?

TUFF: A very pithy theory, Dandini. You might say I'm getting down to the meat of the matter.

JULIAN: You might. I wouldn't. I have a much better turn of phrase.

TUFF: *(Sizing up JULIAN.)* I've not had much chance to question you, yet, have I?

JULIAN: No need. I'm just the side-kick in this show. Purely secondary to the plot.

mother, first.

AMMONIA: I want my breakfast first!

GRISELDA: No, mine!

CINDERELLA: I'll happily make both your breakfasts first. All you have to do is tell your mother she can wait.

SISTERS: *(A beat.)* Make Mummy's first.

AMMONIA: *(To BUTTONS.)* What are you staring at, plug-ugly?

BUTTONS: I was just marvelling that you can both be every bit as lovely this morning, in your nightgowns and curlers, as you were last night in your ball gowns and combat boots.

GRISELDA: Aw! Isn't that sweet, sis?

AMMONIA: Yeah. *(She smacks him.)* Eyes to yourself, button-boy!

CINDERELLA: Don't you dare hit him!

AMMONIA: You know, Gristle, maybe we should go easy on her today. After all, we went to the ball last night and she didn't!

BUTTONS: Was there wonderful music?

SISTERS: Mm-hm!

BUTTONS: And, lots of bright lights?

SISTERS: Mm-hm!

TUFF: In my years of experience, I have found that everyone stars in a plot of their own, for good or ill. And, this is certainly a plot. Who's to say that it isn't yours?

JULIAN: You can't be serious!

TUFF: Oh, yes, I can!

JULIAN: Oh ... ! yes, you can.

TUFF: We've not yet determined your whereabouts at the time of the murder.

JULIAN: What time was that?

TUFF: What do you mean? About twenty minutes after the beginning of the show.

JULIAN: Was it? Because, actually, that's only when the murder was found out.

TUFF: Keep talking.

JULIAN: When did the actual event that caused his death take place?

TUFF: Quite right, of course. Hmmm.

JULIAN: Could have been two hours before. Could have been yesterday – or last week.

TUFF: Or a combination of all three.

JULIAN: Exactly. What?

TUFF: That actually is what my theory has been all along. What interests me is how you managed to come up with the same theory.

JULIAN: I watch *Sherlock*? (Ed.: Or current.)

TUFF: Don't we all? I like a good laugh, now and again.

TAYLOR: FX 41, go.

RUTH: (OFF.) Stop her!

BUTTONS: And, lots of wonderful costumes?

SISTERS: Mm-hm!

BUTTONS: And did you meet the prince?

SISTERS: Mm-hm!

BUTTONS: And, did he ask you to dance with him?

SISTERS: Uh... No.

BUTTONS: I know someone who had a better time at the ball than you did.

(CINDERELLA and BUTTONS share a secret smile.)

AMMONIA: Who?

BUTTONS: Oh, someone who got to dance with the Prince last night.

AMMONIA: There's only one girl who got to dance with the Prince last night and the Prince is out looking for her, now. AND, he's offered ten thousand gold pieces to find her. AND we're going out right after breakfast to look for her.

GRISELDA: So get cracking on those eggs, O cinder-one. Gristle wants ten thousand big ones!

(There is the sound of a trumpet outside.)

(DUFF enters at DR door, in underwear, chased by RUTH with shorts.)

TUFF: Good god! *(JULIAN tries to intercept DUFF and she flips him onto his back quite expertly.)* W.P.C. Duff!

DUFF: *(Coming to attention.)* Sir!

(TAYLOR knocks with hammer.)

TUFF: You're out of uniform!

DUFF: Sir.

TUFF: This is a side of you I've never seen before.

DUFF: Sir, look what she wants me to wear! *(RUTH holds up the shorts.)* I am not appearing in public in those!

RUTH: They were all the rage in 1780.

(JENNI comes back from the stage. JULIAN is still flat on his back.)

DUFF: Sir, this is quite outside of regulations.

JULIAN: *(Stands woozily and enters.)* I am the Prince's messenger. Stand aside!

TUFF: I realize that, W.P.C. Duff. I shall put you in for a commendation for service above and beyond.

DUFF: Really, sir? Thank you very much, sir. In that case, sir, I'm glad to help. *(To RUTH.)* Shall we?

(She goes out the DR door. RUTH follows.)

RUTH: *(To TUFF.)* You're good – sir.

TUFF: Now, where were we?

TAYLOR: You were questioning Julian about his whereabouts.

CINDERELLA: What could that be?

SISTERS: It's a trumpet, moron! Boy, people say we're dumb!

CINDERELLA: I mean, what could it signify?

(There is a loud knock on the door.)

BUTTONS: Perhaps we could answer the door and find out.

AMMONIA: Well, one of us is paid to answer doors, so maybe that person should do it.

BUTTONS: Good idea. *(He looks around.)*

GRISELDA: ANSWER THE DOOR!
Cinderella, get to work on the breakfast.

(CINDERELLA steps into the pantry, out of sight, as BUTTONS opens the door. DANDINI stands outside.)

BUTTONS: Yes?

DANDINI: *(Pushes in past BUTTONS.)* **I am the Prince's messenger! Stand aside!**

BUTTONS: *(Moving aside.)* Rat on!

DANDINI: *(Looking around.)* This is, I believe, Hardup Hall?

AMMONIA: Yes, I'm Moanie.

GRISELDA: And, I'm Gristle.

DANDINI: I'm sure you are.

SISTERS: Oh, it's sock-boy. Phooey!

GRISELDA: So, what do you want, sock-

TUFF: Right! *(He looks around.)*
Whereabouts is he?

TAYLOR: He's on stage.

TUFF: Very convenient for him. You, Cinderella. When do you go back on?

TAYLOR: Page and a half.

JENNI: I don't want to interrupt my concentration. I'm in the flow.

TUFF: Oh, for god's sake, it's panto, girl! You can do it in your sleep.

JENNI: I'm glad you think so.

TUFF: Cinderella. Who has gotten the obvious enhancement she wanted from the victim and needs to cover up the awful truth *(He chuckles.)* – OR a woman who was spurned and rejected by a lover. *(He chuckles.)* – OR a woman who feels she must right an ancient wrong. *(He chuckles.)* OR –

TAYLOR: Didn't you give that speech in the first act?

TUFF: It bears repeating. Now, Ms. Jenni Wale, if that *is* your real name –

JENNI: It is, actually.

TUFF: Where were you when the murder was discovered? Where were you two hours prior to that? Where were you last week at this time? And, let me smell your fingers!

JENNI: Dirty old man!

TUFF: Fingers! Hold them out, please. *(JENNI does and TUFF sniffs them.)* As I thought: nothing but a faint smell of creme stick makeup. Do you use Kryolan™ or Ben Nye™?

JENNI: Ben Nye™.

TUFF: Good choice. You may wonder what the smell of your fingers has to do with this case?

picker?

DANDINI: I am to inform all young maidens of this village that the Prince will visit each of their homes in turn. They are to be prepared to try on a special slipper which was worn last night at the ball by the Princess Cendrillon.

SISTERS: A slipper?

DANDINI: Yes, a glass slipper which was found in the woods.

SISTERS: Oh, that was mine! I lost it while I was running in the woods.

DANDINI: And, why were you running in the woods?

AMMONIA: Uhm, to... get away from the Prince?

GRISELDA: Right! He's very hands-y, you know.

DANDINI: Well, the proof, as they say, is in the fitting. The Prince commands that every young maiden shall try on the slipper. She whom the slipper fits shall be his wife.

GRISELDA: Say, that's not a bad gig, Moanie.

AMMONIA: Suits me, Gristle. We'll have you to the palace every Christmas. Bring presents.

GRISELDA: Bring 'em yourself. We princesses have other things to do.

DANDINI: Only she whom the slipper fits

TAYLOR: I must say, *I* do.

TUFF: Possibly everything. The person who poisoned the victim must have gotten some trace of the poison on themselves in mixing it in with Mr. Lavasseur's drink. I detect nothing on your fingers, which is very incriminating, indeed.

JENNI: Detecting nothing is incriminating?

(JULIAN comes back from the stage.)

TUFF: Not directly so, but it begins to add up, along with other details.

(JENNI suddenly picks up a tray with prop food, turns and enters to the stage.)

I'm beginning to take this personally.

TAYLOR: How can nothing be a clue?

TUFF: The substance I have in mind has an odour that can only be detected by some 40% of the population. I am one of the majority – and I can smell *nothing!*

JULIAN: What substance is that?

TUFF: Come now, basic chemistry. What chemical compound is found in many plants as a natural defense against predatory insects, is odourless to a good portion of the population and the creation of which, glycoside amygdalin is a by-product?

JULIAN: Oh, that was on *Whiz Kids* last week!

TUFF: I'll give you a further clue. There was another odour I detected on the clothing of Ms. Wale and which I further detected from the stage.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes! One of those little monsters puked in the aisle before the show and

shall become the Princess Royal.

AMMONIA: Ooh, don't 'e talk all posh-like?

GRISELDA: You know – for a sock-picker!

DANDINI: The Prince will be here this morning. Be prepared.

(DANDINI exits. The SISTERS hold hands and dance in a circle.)

SISTERS: *(Singing.)* I'm going to be a princess! I get to live in a palace!

(CINDERELLA returns with food.)

CINDERELLA: What are you talking about, step-sisters?

SISTERS: *(Stopping their dance.)* Nothing. Nothing at all. Not a thing.

BUTTONS: Oh, yes, you were!

SISTERS: Oh, no, we weren't!

BUTTONS: Oh, yes, you were!

AMMONIA: You want a smack on the ear-hole?

BUTTONS: The messenger said every young maiden, so Cinders deserves a chance, too.

GRISELDA: You know something, Shiny Two Rows? You're absolutely right. *(She puts her arm around him.)*

AMMONIA: Yes, sis. He's right. *(She puts her arm around CINDERELLA.)* She should get

Jenni got some on her dress when she was running down the aisle after her first scene. What's the connection?

(JENNI and BARRY come back from the stage.)

TUFF: Indeed! What's the connection? *(He is hit by the dresses thrown by the SISTERS. After SISTERS BOLD lines:)* Can you tell me, Ms. Wale?

JENNI: Tell you what? *(She begins to tear up.)*

TUFF: The connection between the lack of odour in the drink bottle and the distinct odour on your dress. And, don't think that feminine tears will affect me. I am the long arm of the law. I have no sympathies to be played upon.

(HUGH and DENNIS return and strip off their nightgowns. BARRY pounds on the door; JENNI boo-hoos behind him.)

BARRY: Let us out of here! You can't do this! Let us out! I'll huff and I'll puff and I ... no, that's the wrong story. Let us out!

TAYLOR: LX 41, FX 42, go.

(BARRY stops pounding; JENNI stops crying. They walk away. HUGH and DENNIS enter to the stage.)

BARRY: It's very hard to concentrate with all of this investigating going on.

TUFF: It would be a good deal harder to concentrate with dead bodies lying about the backstage. You're helping no one with your noise. I suggest you keep your comments to yourself and allow a professional to work. *(He sniffs and hikes up his false bosom.)* The eye of the professional misses nothing – and the mind of the professional is constantly at work. Now, when's my next entrance?

everything she deserves.

SISTERS: She absolutely should. *(They shove BUTTONS and CINDERELLA into the pantry and pull the door shut, locking it.)* But she won't!

(They laugh then unlock the door and throw their dresses at CINDERELLA.)

AMMONIA: **And clean our ball gowns while you're in there!**

GRISELDA: **Extra starch on hers!**

SISTERS: Mommy! Guess who's coming for a shoe fitting!

(They exit, laughing. BUTTONS pounds on the door and shouts, as CINDERELLA can be heard crying.)

BUTTONS: **Let us out of here! You can't do this! Let us out! I'll huff and I'll puff and I ... no, that's the wrong story. Let us out!**

(Lights down; end of scene.)

SC 12: THE LIBRARY AT HARDUP HALL

(The SISTERS enter.)

GRISELDA: The Prince has been all over the town, trying on a shoe he found in the woods and it doesn't fit anybody.

AMMONIA: It'll only fit someone who's beautiful and perfect – and that's me!

GRISELDA: Oh, no, it isn't!

AMMONIA: Oh, yes, it is!

TAYLOR: Right now. *(Into mic.)* Prince!
We need you now! Prince to the stage,
immediately!

*(RUTH enters through the DR door.
TUFF and VANCE enter to the stage.)*

RUTH: Coming! Coming! Lorraine!

*(DUFF enters through the DR door, in
BEN's Prince costume, but with tights
and shorts rather than pants. It's sexy!)*

TAYLOR/JULIAN: Wow!

(TAYLOR knocks with the hammer.)

DUFF: I can't be seen in public like this!

RUTH: Not bad, eh?

(JULIAN enters to the stage.)

TAYLOR: Might make me change sides.

RUTH: *(Pushing her to her place.)* Duty
calls, W.P.C. Duff! Julian has your lines.

TAYLOR: FX 43, go! That's you, Prince!

(RUTH pushes DUFF onstage.)

BARRY: What if she can't read?

RUTH: Too late.

TAYLOR: What connection can there be
between no smell in Terry's drink bottle and the
puke in the aisle?

RUTH: At least say "sick", Taylor,
please.

TAYLOR: Then, what connection between
Terry's drink and someone being sick in the
aisle?

JENNI: That's not what he asked.

TAYLOR: It isn't?

GRISELDA: Oh, no, it isn't!

AMMONIA: Oh, yes, it is!

(The BARONESS and BARON enter.)

BARONESS: Oh, do shut up, girls! The Prince
will be here any minute. One of you is sure to fit
the shoe, so be ready. Maybe you'd better put
on another layer of lacquer – I mean makeup –
before he comes.

BARON: Here's a trowel.

(There is a knock from off stage.)

BARONESS: No time! They are here. Prepare
yourselves, girls.

(Enter DANDINI.)

DANDINI: *(Looks around then speaks into
his wrist.)* Falcon can move.

*(FX 43: The Royal Fanfare. Enter The
PRINCE. DANDINI holds up a scroll.)*

PRINCE: Good afternoon, Baron, ladies. You
have probably heard that I am trying this shoe
on every girl in the kingdom and she whom this
shoe fits shall be my wife.

DANDINI: Perhaps! We're not making any
promises, here.

GRISELDA: Me, first! Me, first! *(She hikes up
her dress, revealing multi-coloured stockings.
She sings:)* I get to be a princess! I get to live in
a palace!

PRINCE: Dandini. Try it on her.

(DANDINI bends to fit the shoe.)

JENNI: He asked about the connection between the drink and the odour on my dress.

TAYLOR: Same thing.

RUTH: Is it?

JENNI: So what is glycerine amicide?

TAYLOR: Glyco-acid amazene.

RUTH: Gluco-cellulose magazine.

(They laugh. TAYLOR pulls out her cell-phone and looks it up.)

Oh, right. You can do that.

TAYLOR: Glycocide amygdalin. Prussic acid. Also known as ... hydrogen cyanide.

JENNI: That doesn't sound good.

TAYLOR: A natural pesticide found in small quantities in many plants, including almonds, peaches, apples and tapioca.

RUTH: Tapioca! I knew my mother was trying to kill me!

TAYLOR: You can extract enough from the pits of a basket of peaches to kill someone. Just soak the pits in water.

JENNI: Oh, that's not good!

TAYLOR: It smells like bitter almonds.

JENNI: What do bitter almonds smell like?

RUTH: Tapioca!

TAYLOR: And 60% of people can't smell it at all!

GRISELDA: *(Singing.)* I get to be a princess! I get to live in a palace! *(She pushes harder.)* I get to be a ... prin- ... cess! I get to ... live in a ... pal- ... ace!

DANDINI: It doesn't fit, your highness.

PRINCE: Well, that's ... disappointing.

GRISELDA: No! It'll go! It's just the toe, that's all. A bit swollen from all the dancing at the ball, last night. Mummy! Make my toe fit!

DANDINI: I really don't think ...

GRISELDA: No, but you should, sock-picker! Mummy!

(The BARONESS sighs and picks up a knife from the desk.)

BARONESS: This is going to hurt you more than it hurts me – but just close your eyes and think of the palace.

(She starts to cut off GRISELDA's big toe.)

GRISELDA: **Mummy!**

PRINCE: Stop that! *(The BARONESS stops and shrugs.)* I declare that the shoe doesn't fit.

GRISELDA: *(Turning on her mother.)* You were going to cut off my big toe!

BARONESS: You want to be a princess or not?

AMMONIA: All right! She's had her chance. My turn! My turn!

GRISELDA: It won't fit. You've got feet like a hippo.

AMMONIA: You've got hips like a hippo. All

JENNI: Like D.I. Tuff ...

TAYLOR: ... and me

RUTH: ... and Terry. Somebody spiked his water bottle; he drank it and never knew it.

JENNI: Who would do that?

RUTH: That's the whole question, isn't it – who?

JENNI: It can't be one of us!

TAYLOR: Us?

JENNI: The cast! The crew! The company!

RUTH: Yes, we're all such a happy lot.

JENNI: Well, Taylor, I know you didn't do it.

TAYLOR: Naturally. And, of course, Ruth didn't.

JENNI: Of course not. So, that's us off the hook. Wait a minute. What about me?

RUTH: *(Beat)* I'm reasonably certain you didn't.

JENNI: Vance is just a sweetie. He wouldn't.

TAYLOR: Hugh and Dennis?

JENNI: I ... don't know.

RUTH: No! I don't ... know, either.

TAYLOR: Julian?

JENNI: Could be. I mean, what do we know about Julian? *(They think.)*

RUTH: Not much. But, it can't be Ben.

right, sock-picker – *(She lifts her skirt and puts her foot out.)* – slide it on! *(DANDINI starts to put the shoe on her – it stops at the heel.)* Come on, push, Valley! I had a stone in my shoe last night – foot's swollen. Now push! *(She pushes so hard that DANDINI goes flying backward.)* Not my fault! It's the sock-picker! He's a wimp. I need a real man to push around. How about you, Princey?

BARONESS: How close to fitting was it?

AMMONIA: *(Holds up her fingers an inch apart.)* Missed it by that much!

BARONESS: How much?

AMMONIA: *(Adjusts her fingers to four inches.)* Well, that much.

BARONESS: Right. Foot up. *(She lifts the knife.)*

AMMONIA: AAAH! *(She screams and runs behind GRISELDA.)* She would have, you know!

BARONESS: Neither one of you? All right. My turn! *(She hikes up her skirts.)*

BARON: Imogene!

PRINCE: Madam, you are already married.

BARONESS: Oh, that doesn't count! I crossed my fingers during the "I do"s.

BARON: Imogene!

BARONESS: Shut up, Henry.

PRINCE: We've searched every house in the Kingdom. Madam, are there any other young women living in this house?

BARONESS: Nope. Nobody. Not a one!

JENNI: No! Ben just doesn't have it in him.

TAYLOR: Ben doesn't have much in him.

RUTH: He has a good heart. And, he's Terry's son!

JENNI: And, Terry was helping him – so Ben said. Trying to make amends.

RUTH: He was! So, Ben said.

JENNI: So Ben said ...

RUTH: So *Ben* said ...!

TAYLOR: Ben said there was another family that he knew about – more children!

RUTH: So where are they, now? I'd never heard of them until Taylor mentioned it.

TAYLOR: And, I'd never heard of it until Jenni mentioned it.

JENNI: Well, I'd never heard of it until Terry told me, himself. And, he never said anything about Ben being his son!

RUTH: But, Ben knew about this other family.

JENNI: And, he's trying to protect whoever it is.

TAYLOR: Ben's no murderer! He's a hero!

(TUFF comes back from the stage.)

TUFF: I was standing on the stage, looking at Cinderella's shoe, when it hit me.

RUTH: Were you hurt?

TUFF: Not the shoe! The solution to this mystery. It's the Purloined Letter solution.

JENNI: Purloined? Where are you from, the 18th century?

(BARRY enters to the stage.)

BARON: Now, that's not true, Imogene.

BARONESS: I told you to be quiet, Henry.

BARON: There's my own daughter, sir...

BARONESS: Quiet!

BARON: IMOGENE! SIT DOWN!

BARONESS: How dare you raise your...

BARON: SIT! DOWN! AT! ONCE!

(He glares at her. She sits. Audience cheers.)

BARON: Forgive me, your Highness. Domestic difficulties, but I'm sure we can work those out equitably. *(To BARONESS.)* Later! What my wife was saying is that there is, indeed, another young woman in the house. My daughter, Ella.

BARONESS: But, it wouldn't fit her. She's a great gross girl.

BARON: Imogene, no one asked for your editorial comment.

BARONESS: Henry! Girls, are you going to let him treat me like this?

SISTERS: You tried to cut my toe (heel) off!

BARONESS: I shall leave the room! *(She exits. The audience cheers.)*

BARON: Shall I call Ella in, your Highness?

PRINCE: Her name is ... Ella? My princess's name is Cendrillon. They are obviously not the same woman. Dandini, my heart is weary. Let us depart.

(The PRINCE and DANDIN head for the exit. BUTTONS runs in from where he has been listening.)

TUFF: Mock if you will –

RUTH: All right, we will.

TUFF: – but the simplest solutions are usually the correct ones – and the oldest mysteries sometimes hold the grain of truth we need to unlock the truth of the new.

TAYLOR: We've only got a page and a half before the walkdown, so you might want to make it march. I'm just saying.

TUFF: *Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.* Seneca said it first, of course, but I'm sure we all recognize the aptness of the phrase.

RUTH: Couldn't have said it better myself. I'm very familiar with the Senator's quote, of course, but for those who aren't ...?

TUFF: Nothing is more obstructive to wisdom than too much cleverness.

JENNI: Oh! Well! I couldn't agree more. That's cleared the whole thing up. Let's go home, shall we?

TUFF: It all hinges on two things.

RUTH: There are two hinges, in fact.

TUFF: Which is convenient when you want to keep a lid on something. The first should have been obvious to me from the first few minutes that I was here.

(BARRY comes back from stage.)

The fact that it wasn't I put down to an eagerness I felt to be backstage once again – to tread the boards; to feel the greasepaint; to smell the crowd.

JENNI: I've got four lines before I go on.

BUTTONS: Wait! *(The PRINCE and DANDINI stop.)* Now, you listen to me, bub! What kind of a prince are you? You said you were going to try that shoe on the foot of every young woman in the kingdom. We broke out of the pantry where those two locked us and Cinderella is sitting downstairs, right now, crying her eyes out. And, now you're going to walk away and not give Ella the chance. How is that fair? You know what you are? You're a promise breaker, that's what! I've a good mind to bop you one on the nose! So, how do you like them apples?

PRINCE: *(He approaches BUTTONS and looks him over.)* Do you know who I am?

BUTTONS: N-n-n-no idea whatsoever, your Royal Highness, sire.

PRINCE: No man has ever dared to call me a promise-breaker. Until you. And, do you know what I'm going to do about that?

BUTTONS: N-n-n-n-no, your lordly majesty, sir.

PRINCE: I'm going to ... keep my promise! Because you're quite right, my friend. What's your name?

BUTTONS: Bu-bu-bu-bu-buttons, sir.

PRINCE: Well, Bu-bu-bu-bu-buttons, please go and ask Miss ... Ella? ... to come here.

BUTTONS: Yes, sir! Thank you, sir! *(He starts to run out.)* You're a prince, sir! **Ella! Cinderella!** *(He is gone.)*

(There is an awkward pause.)

PRINCE: So, Baron Hardup! Been married long?

BARON: About three months, sir.

PRINCE: I see. These aren't your girls,

I'm going to miss this, aren't I?

TAYLOR: Two lines.

TUFF: Well, I'll make it quick. The murderer could only be – but, first, I should point out ...

JENNI: Bloody hell! *(She grabs BARRY and the two enter to the stage.)*

TUFF: ... point out that what you, Ms. Ellis, told me the deceased had whispered in your ear as he died was not the truth.

TAYLOR: Yes, it was! "No refunds."

TUFF: Nonsense! Why would he say that when the theatre's policy is already no refunds once the performance starts? What he actually said to you was something that points us directly to the murderer – wasn't it?

TAYLOR: No!

TUFF: Yes! A murderer who has been hiding in plain sight all this time – just like the Purloined Letter!

TAYLOR: Well, who was it?

TUFF: It was – oh, bother! I have a line.
(TUFF enters to the stage.)

RUTH: He did that on purpose! *(A beat.)* Lor, why did you lie about what Terry said?

TAYLOR: I didn't lie! That's what he said!

RUTH: Are you protecting someone?

(TUFF returns from the stage.)

TUFF: As I was saying: we are looking for someone always overlooked, whose life led them to attempt a painful suicide just this morning and, when that failed, it led to murder. *(To TAYLOR.)* No, Miss Ellis, I don't think Mr. Lavasseur mentioned refunds. Did he, Miss?

then?

BARON: No, sir, they're the Baroness's girls.

PRINCE: Ah, yes. *(Pause.)* I see the resemblance.

(CINDERELLA enters, unsure of herself, followed by BUTTONS.)

BARON: Your Highness, may I present my daughter, Ella?

CINDERELLA: *(Curtseying)* Your Highness.

PRINCE: Oh, we've met before. Dandini, the shoe. *(DANDINI begins to kneel to try the shoe on CINDERELLA.)* No, I shall do it. *(He takes the shoe and kneels in front of CINDERELLA.)* May I?

(She lifts her foot, supported by the BARON. The PRINCE hands her ragged shoe to DANDINI. He slides the glass slipper onto her foot.)

Cendrillon.

CINDERELLA: *(Shaking her head.)* Ella.

BARONESS: *(Entering, sneering.)* **Cinder-ella.**

BARON: Imogene, my dear, I suggest you be a lot nicer to Ella from now on. Things have changed. In fact, go to your room and think about it! *(The BARONESS leaves.)* My dear Ella.

PRINCE: No. Not Ella.

CINDERELLA: No?

PRINCE: Princess Ella. *(He kisses her hand and looks at the glass slipper.)* It's a shame to put your ragged shoe back on this

Did he?

TAYLOR: No.

TUFF: No, he said something of more moment than that. Something to ring down his career with finality. Yes?

TAYLOR: Yes. He said “It’s curtains for me.”

RUTH: What an exit line!

TUFF: More than that. It’s the final clue I needed to put this mystery to rest. Am I right, Miss?

TAYLOR: Yes.

(TUFF goes around the set and returns leading MEG, firmly, but gently.)

TUFF: Curtains for him. And curtains for a very confused young curtain girl, as well!

TAYLOR: Meg! LX 42, FX 44, go. Scene change.

(All come back from the stage. JENNI runs to do a fast change.)

TAYLOR: *(Into headset.)* LX 43, go. Meg! I was afraid it might be!

(VANCE enters to the stage.)

DUFF: Is that it? Back to the station house for paperwork?

RUTH: No, no! The walkdown! The walkdown!

DUFF: The walkdown?

TUFF: It’s like an identification lineup, but with more lights. *(To MEG.)* Stay put, young woman. There’s nowhere to run. I’ll be back.

dainty foot.

CINDERELLA: Your Highness, no need –

PRINCE: Uh, uh! Not your Highness.

CINDERELLA: *(Smiles.)* Charming – no need. I have this. The magic didn’t end for these.

(She produces the other shoe and the PRINCE puts it on her, then stands.)

PRINCE: Ladies and gentlemen, please greet my intended wife, the Princess Ella.

(CINDERELLA whispers in his ear.) Really?

Very well. Princess Cinderella.

(All bow, the SISTERS only after being poked by the BARON.)

And I’m sure we shall live happily ever after.

(Lights down. End of scene.)

SC 13: WALKDOWN (PALACE SET)

(The BARON enters)

BARON: Well, it’s lovely to be playing the Palace, again. Just a little joke, but isn’t it a nice palace? Hard to believe a full year’s gone by since my Ella and the Prince were married. They seem very happy. Speaking of which, my wife’s around here somewhere – probably appraising the silverware. Imogene!

(TUFF enters to the stage.)

TAYLOR: Meg, why did you do it?

MEG: If you could have seen my mum in her last days – and all because of him!

TAYLOR: But don't you see what you've done? All because you thought this would make things better.

MEG: Not better. Even.

HUGH: *(Holding up his prop wineglass.)*
Here's to your mum, Meg.

(HUGH enters to the stage.)

RUTH: Meg, you made that cyanide to kill yourself, and, when it didn't work, you mixed it in Terry's drink? Is that what happened?

MEG: I took some, but it just made me sick – in the aisle down front. So, I poured the rest in Terry's bottle. I wanted to make him sick, too.

RUTH: Just make him sick?

MEG: I guess. I don't know. I was all alone.

DENNIS: *(Picking up the end of a rope.)*
Ben knew about you, dear. He wanted to help. It's too big a load for one person.

(DENNIS enters to the stage, pulling a rope, the other end held by TAYLOR.)

BARRY: *(To TAYLOR)* Ben's in the green room crying his heart out.

TAYLOR: For who – Terry or Meg?

BARRY: I couldn't tell you. I don't feel much like going out there and being funny.

TAYLOR: Five more minutes. Then Skegness.

(The BARONESS enters)

What have you been doing, dear?

BARONESS: Admiring the artwork.

BARON: Admiring?

BARONESS: Certainly. How much of it do we get?

BARON: Imogene!

(They cross down right. GRISELDA enters.)

GRISELDA: Mummy! They've got some lovely crystal, see?

(She holds up an expensive-looking piece of crystal.)

BARON: Gristle, put that back!

GRISELDA: But, Daddy!

BARON: Back!

GRISELDA: You're going to hate what Moanie's got, then.

(AMMONIA enters partway, struggling with a rope to pull something we don't see.)

AMMONIA: Gristle! Give me a hand here. I've got one of them, but you'd be surprised how heavy a statue is!

GRISELDA: Moanie! Ix-nay on the a-chew-stay.

BARON: Ammonia! What have you there?

BARRY: Skegness? *(The loose rope end comes back onto him.)* Oh! No! We're not.

TAYLOR: Oh, yes, we are! *(She kisses him.)*
Go!

(BARRY enters to the stage.)

JULIAN: You read about things like this, but you never think you'll see it. What a show this has been!

RUTH: You've got one more scene, so don't relax yet.

JULIAN: Or Terry will haunt me?

TAYLOR: No, I will. *(To DUFF.)* Prince, here's your declaration. *(A prop scroll.)*

JULIAN: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!" *(Enters to the stage.)*

RUTH: "Or close the wall up with ..."
Poor Terry.

(JENNI rushes in, in walk-down costume, still fastening it.)

TAYLOR: Eight lines, Jenni.

JENNI: *(To DUFF.)* Give me a baby!

DUFF: What?

JENNI: Give me a baby!

DUFF: I really can't, you know. I'm not built that way.

TAYLOR: FX 45, go. Ruth, baby!

RUTH: Jenni! *(Throws a prop baby to JENNI.)* That's you, Prince. Get on!

TAYLOR: Your lines are on the declaration.

(DUFF looks at it and enters to the stage.)

AMMONIA: It's just something I was— putting back. *(She throws the rope end offstage.)*

BARON: Ammonia! Griselda! Heel!

SISTERS: **Aw, Daddy!**

(They stump over to him. BUTTONS comes running on.)

BUTTONS: **Hi, kids!** ... What do you think of my nice, new coat? Great, isn't it? I'm the new 2nd Valet for the Prince and Cinders – I mean, Princess Cinderella. Wow! Who'd have thought it? Say, have you seen the Baron? *(The BARON is behind him. "He's behind you!")* He's where? *("He's behind you!")* No, he isn't. *("Yes, he is!"; BUTTONS turns.)* Oh, he is!

BARON: Hello, Buttons, old chum. How's life, working for the Prince?

BUTTONS: Absolutely charming!

(DANDINI enters.)

Oh, I'd better look busy. That's the Valet In Chief!

DANDINI: Look lively, now, Buttons. Good day, Baron.

BARON: Good day, Mr. Dandini. Are my daughter and son-in-law keeping you busy?

DANDINI: Run off my feet, Baron. I love it!

(A trumpet fanfare.)

'Way! 'Way! 'Way for Prince Charming!

(The PRINCE enters with a scroll.)

PRINCE: Good day, all. Father-in-law;

RUTH: What a show! If you put this on a stage, nobody'd believe it.

TAYLOR: I'm not sure I believe it, myself.

RUTH: Craziest performance ever.

JENNI: Welcome to the theatre, girls. It's a curious beast, filled with fantasy and glory and misery – and, of course – *(Adjusting them.)* – boobs.

TAYLOR: FX 46, go.

(JENNI enters to the stage.)

RUTH: You did a good job, today, Lor.

TAYLOR: I'm sitting here shaking. Wait! The Prince has to kiss Cinderella right here! Will she do it? FX 47, go.

RUTH: *(Looking.)* Seems to be enjoying it. Here I go. *(RUTH enters to the stage.)*

TAYLOR: Meg? Are you all right?

MEG: Happiest day of my life.

TAYLOR: Don't say things like that. Standby LX 45, FX 48, curtain. Four lines to go. *(Crossing her fingers.)* Please don't let anything else go wrong! Two lines ... One line ... FX 48, go. LX 45 go. Curtain, go. Curtain! *(She looks at MEG in panic.)* Oh, my god!

(She leaves her spot and runs to MEG's curtain station. Black.)

END OF PLAY

mother-in-law. *(He shudders.)* Sisters-in-law.

BARON/BARONESS/SISTERS: Good day, your Highness.

PRINCE: I am so pleased to be able to present to you all the newest member of the Royal Family. Pray silence for the Princess Cinderella –

(Fanfare as CINDERELLA enters with a baby in her arms.)

– and the infant Princess Anna! Our first daughter.

(He kisses CINDERELLA tenderly while the others applaud.)

(Music and a puff of smoke and the FAIRY GODMOTHER appears.)

CINDERELLA: Fairy godmother! I didn't know if I'd ever see you again.

FAIRY GODMOTHER: Of course, my dear. And, if not, I'll always be watching over you And over the little princess, too. And over all you girls and boys, For that's what fairy godmothers do.

(LIGHTS DOWN; END OF SCENE)

END OF PLAY