

Cinderella and Buttons

By Gavin Miller

Cast of Characters

Buttons	an insolent footman of the Ugly Sisters
Cinderella	a foundling in the house of the Ugly Sisters
Griselda	the older of the two Ugly Sisters
Drusilla	the younger of the two Ugly Sisters
Prince Rudolf	spoilt son of Queen Alexandra
Queen Alexandra	poisonous wife of King Henry
King Henry	reluctant husband of Queen Alexandra
Guard	a palace soldier, loyal to King Henry
Various courtiers	not particularly loyal to anyone

The Prologue

Prince Rudolf as the Narrator:

Some stories are so familiar, and are told so often, that they wear away like old coins. They feel smooth in the palms of our hands, and their very age makes them seem true. But time can play tricks on us. That cherished sovereign, which was handed down from father to son, is nothing more than an old penny, cleverly plated by an artful jeweler. Or that tarnished farthing, thrown aside by the hasty, reveals, with a little rubbing, a heart of gold.

Cinderella is just such a story. We all know about the crystal slippers and the magic coach. Every little girl dreams of going to the ball and meeting a prince. But handsome is, as handsome does, as the saying goes, and all that glitters is not gold. Was the prince really as good as he was handsome? And did he, and Cinderella, live happily ever after?

Act 1

Act 1. Scene 1. The kitchen in the house of the ugly sisters. There is a fireplace, a work table for chopping vegetables and a three-legged stool which Cinderella is sitting on as if it were a throne. Buttons, the footman, is standing reverently before her.

Buttons (mockingly): Now that Your Majesty is a queen at last, how will you reward me, your trusty servant, who stood by you in time of trouble?

Cinderella: Ah yes, Buttons, loyal, dependable and even a little handsome. In sign of our Royal Gratitude, we shall bestow on you half of the Northern Estates, a fine house in the city for you to entertain your friends, and three horses, of your choosing, from the Royal Stables.

Buttons: Your Majesty is most gracious.

Cinderella: Do these gifts please you well?

Buttons: In truth, Your Majesty, I would trade them all for one kiss from your Royal Lips.

Cinderella: Oh Buttons, you're so sweet.

Buttons: Ah not that most terrible of words, Your Majesty. It pierces me to the heart with despair. (He pretends to die at some length.)

Cinderella: Oh do get up, I haven't scrubbed the floor yet.

Griselda enters: Cinderella! Just when are we to get our supper?

Cinderella: Sorry Griselda, I was just coming.

Griselda: Really, and what has happened to that good-for-nothing? He looks half dead.

Buttons: I was struck by Cupid's arrow tipped with a poison of deadly sweetness.

Griselda: Honestly, half the time I have no idea what you're talking about. But I do know this. If that carriage isn't completely repainted by the end of the week, you'll be out on the street without a penny. I have a prince to catch.

Buttons (under his breath): You'd better shoot him in the leg first.

Griselda (furious): What did you say?

Cinderella: Buttons said that he should shake a leg, and fast, if he's going to get it done in time. Didn't you Buttons?

Buttons: Something like that.

Griselda: And you had better do the same or there will be hell to pay. Supper in my room in ten minutes. That should give me time to make myself beautiful. (She exits.)

Buttons: It'll take a lot longer than ten minutes.

Griselda (from off stage): I heard that!

Cinderella: Buttons, you should really be more careful. Griselda could fire you on the spot you know.

Buttons: A good footman is hard to find. Anyway, what do I care? I have my savings. I don't have to bow and scrape to anyone - except to you, of course, Your Majesty.

Cinderella: Oh stop it!

Buttons: All right, but just think of it - a palace ballroom lit with crystal chandeliers. The quiet rustle of silk dresses. The heavenly music with couples dancing. The men all tall and handsome. The women glittering with diamonds, and everyone laughing and drinking champagne. Wouldn't it be wonderful to go to the ball?

Cinderella: You know it would.

Buttons: Then go!

Cinderella: How can I? The dress alone would cost a year's salary, and then there's the shoes and the gloves, and it would all be ruined without a carriage to stop it being splashed with mud.

Buttons: There are always my savings . . .

Cinderella: Don't you dare even think of it! One day you will find the right girl, and then you'll need that money to buy a nice little cottage to be happy together. I would love to go to the ball, more than anything, but not enough to hurt my best friend.

Buttons: Well don't despair. Sometimes miracles do happen. In fact, I know just such a story about a princess and a frog.

Cinderella: I think I might have heard it.

Buttons: Not this one, it's quite original.

Cinderella: Go on then, but don't take too long. Supper is nearly ready.

Buttons: I don't have to tell it, if you're in too much of a hurry.

Cinderella: I'm sorry Buttons. I will listen, now please begin.

Buttons: Well, once upon a time there was a princess.

Cinderella: Was she beautiful?

Buttons: Like an angel. A radiance of goodness shone from her eyes and she had golden hair.

Cinderella: But was she happy?

Buttons: Sadly no. In fact, she was very lonely. She had tutors and bodyguards and gardeners, but no friends her own age to talk to. When she was feeling melancholy, she used to go down to the pond in the garden and talk to the frogs.

Cinderella: Were they handsome frogs?

Buttons: No, they were green and slimy, and had warts all over their skin.

Cinderella: Yuck.

Buttons: But there was one particular frog who had beautiful, sympathetic eyes. He would sit and listen to the princess for hours as she told him about the handsome prince of her dreams. She told the frog how he would be dashing and modest, gentle and brave, generous and rich - all the impossible contradictory things that princesses look for in a lover.

Cinderella: Men do it too!

Buttons: Of course, but, unfortunately for the frog, being green and slimy was not what the princess had in mind.

Cinderella: Poor thing.

Buttons: Well, towards the beginning of autumn, the princess started to feel particularly sad. She had had no visitors for the entire summer and she was feeling that life was passing her by. Suddenly an idea struck her. She had once heard that a princess could sometimes kiss a frog and turn him into a prince.

Cinderella: I've heard the same thing - mostly from lecherous toads.

Buttons: Quite so. Anyway, this idea made her look at the frog with renewed interest. He did have nice eyes, after all, and he listened to her every word, which was more than she could say for the people she knew. She wrinkled up her nose and bent down and kissed the frog on the forehead. She stepped back full of expectation, but nothing happened. The little frog just looked a little sheepish, which was not the transformation the princess had hoped for, so she placed him back on the lily pad and wandered away feeling really rather disappointed.

Cinderella: Is that the end of the story?

Buttons: Not quite. Autumn was nearly at an end, so to forget his sorrows, the little frog curled up into a ball and went to sleep. When he awoke, it was the following Spring. He rushed over to the pond to have a drink, and found to his great surprise that he had been transformed into a human being.

Cinderella: Was he handsome?

Buttons: It didn't matter, he was freezing. He had to find some clothes or he would die. He was shivering with the cold, so he made his way into the herb garden where the servants' clothes were hung up to dry. It took him half an hour to work out how to put on a shirt, but at last he looked respectable so he set out to find the princess. It was one of the bodyguards who arrested him.

Cinderella: Oh no...

Buttons: They brought him before the princess to explain himself. Luckily, the princess knew immediately who he was. Those eyes were unmistakable. As for the rest of him, he was a man, she had to confess, but the transformation had not been miraculous. She couldn't put her finger on it, but somehow he just wasn't her type. The truth was, in fact, that during the winter she had met a man who was very handsome and he had won her heart. They were very polite to the man-frog, and they entertained him for some days, but finally, against his heart felt wishes he had to say goodbye to the princess and set off to find a new love somewhere else.

Cinderella: Buttons, that's horrible. How could you do that to the poor frog?

Buttons: Well there was a version of the story in which the other prince gradually turned into a frog, but the witnesses were unreliable, so I discounted it.

Cinderella: I think it's a rotten story.

Buttons: Why? The princess finds a prince. The frog becomes a man, and who's to say that he didn't find someone else who made him very happy?

Cinderella: But it's a fairy tale. It's not supposed to end like that.

Buttons: Very well - the prince ran away. The princess married the frog. They all lived happily ever after.

Cinderella: Good. Now I can get on with supper.

Act 1. Scene 2: Buttons is off stage or in front of the curtains reading. Alternatively, the letters could arrive at the shops in turn and be read by the owners.

To Messrs Crimpin and Arbuthnot, purveyors of fine silks and dresses to the aristocracy,

Please find enclosed fifty gold pieces for the procurement of your finest ball gown, size six, suitable for the department of a lady of quality. Please also include one pair of your finest crystal slippers, to the value of twenty five gold pieces, this amount to be paid for monthly over the next two years. They should be wrapped discreetly in unmarked boxes.

Yours sincerely,

Albert, "Buttons" Trevelyan.

P.S. It is imperative that these items arrive by this coming Saturday at the latest.

Dear Cedric,

Thank you for your hasty response to my request for the loan of your master's coach on the night of the ball. I understand that the coach cannot be used beyond midnight for fear of discovery and your consequent dismissal. I will devise a suitable explanation for my friend which will leave her none the wiser as to it's true origin. Of course, this gracious act on your part erases all memories of a certain indiscretion in his lordship's carriage on a now unmentionable occasion.

Your sincere friend,

Buttons, "The Nose" Trevelyan.

Dear Sir,

As proprietor of Sedgewick and Smythe, theatrical suppliers by appointment to his Majesty the King, etc. etc., I wish for you to provide me with one ballerina costume, extra large, a blond wig, large, and a magic wand made of silver. I also wish to acquire two tubes of glittering dust to be used to effect the appearance and disappearance of mythical, magical and other such imaginary personages.

Your devoted servant,

Buttons, "The Stage" Trevelyan.

Act 1. Scene 3: The Kitchen. Cinderella stands on stage talking to a mop.

Cinderella: But Your Highness, you are too kind. Why I would love to dance. I must warn you, though, that I am a little out of practice. Why Your Highness dances like an angel - or should I say a river sweeping me off my feet towards the horizon.

(She stops dancing.) No don't say that it sounds stupid.

(She curtseys to the mop.) Your Highness is too kind. Balls can be so frightfully tedious without amusing company - in my father's palace, of course, we have Hungarian gypsies to liven up the dull moments with conjuring tricks and sword fights. One gets so bored the rest of the time. (She stops again.) No, not like that Cinderella, he'll hate you.

What do princes like? Smile a lot. Don't say too much. Swoon slightly at the end of the dance. He'll sweep you up into his arms and kiss you. Oh Your Highness, we shouldn't. We have only just met. It isn't proper. (In a deeper voice) I am the prince. I define what is proper. No one would dare speak against the woman I would have as my wife.

(In normal voice again) Oh Your Highness, I have dreamt of such a moment as this. Kiss me again.

(She kisses the mop.)

(Enter Griselda and Drusilla wearing ball gowns. Griselda's in particular is very low cut to catch the attention of the prince.)

Griselda: What on earth are you doing?

Cinderella: I thought I saw something in the mop. I was wrong. Sorry.

Drusilla: Where is that good-for-nothing Buttons? We need him to help with the coach.

Cinderella: He was taken ill with the paint fumes. Lead poisoning he said. He can't move a muscle.

Griselda: Oh he can't, can't he. Wait until I get my hands on him. He'll wish he'd never been born.

Cinderella: But Frederick is here to drive the coach.

Drusilla: The disgrace of it! No footman to open the door.

Cinderella: But the prince must have footmen at the gate to welcome people.

Griselda: That's no excuse. I want Buttons out on the street first thing Monday morning.

Cinderella: But have pity Griselda, by that time you could even be living in the palace. Any hint of scandal might spoil your chances.

Drusilla: You are quite right my dear. Now tell us, what do you think of our dresses? Aren't they simply ravishing? (Drusilla and Griselda do a twirl.)

Cinderella: I've never seen anything quite like them.

Griselda: Aren't they divine?

(About herself)

"She walks as beautiful as the night,
with cloudless charms and starry eyes,
and all that's best of rich and bright,
look to her bosom and her sighs. . ." (She sighs.)

Cinderella: It is a bit low cut.

Griselda: Never mind about that. I want you to have the whole house spic and span by the time we get back. Princes can be most particular, you know.

Cinderella: Yes, Griselda.

Drusilla: Well, we must be off. Do have a good evening. Cleaning can be quite therapeutic or so I'm led to believe.

Cinderella: Thank you, Drusilla.

Drusilla: Now don't go feeling sorry for yourself. If you came along to the ball with us, you would only get ideas above your station. We're just trying to save you from a lifetime of wishful thinking.

Cinderella: I see.

Griselda to Drusilla: Come on, we should go. Such a sweet girl, but plain as a dish cloth.

Drusilla: Well, what do you expect from a foundling?

Griselda: Why our father took her in is a mystery to me. Anyway, no time for that now. The prince will be needing someone to dance with.

Drusilla: To the palace!

Griselda: To the stars!
(Griselda and Drusilla exit laughing.)

Cinderella to the mop: I must go home now, Your Highness. My family misses me so much when I'm away. I don't know what they would do without me.

(Suddenly there is a flash and Buttons appears in a cloud of glitter, dressed as a ballerina in a blond wig.)

Buttons: Behold, I am your fairy god-mother, come to make your dreams come true.

Cinderella: But I don't have a fairy godmother. In fact I don't have a mother at all, just two stepsisters and a nice friend who . . .

Buttons: Well you do now, so be quiet and listen.

Cinderella: If you insist.

Buttons: I do. Now because of the kind nature of your heart, the powers that be have seen fit to grant you a miracle.

Cinderella (suspiciously): What kind of miracle?

Buttons: The best kind. You will remember it for ever.

Cinderella: I can hardly wait.

Buttons: Behold! Those boxes which once contained tawdry household goods now glisten with the aura of Royal Majesty.

Cinderella: They look just the same to me.

Buttons: Well open them dear, open them! The big one first.

(Cinderella opens the box and finds a beautiful dress.)

Cinderella: Oh fairy godmother, it's wonderful. Does this mean I can go to the ball?

Buttons: Patience dear, patience. Open the small one.

Cinderella: Crystal slippers! How did you know? I was saying to Buttons the other day that these are my absolute favorites.

Buttons: What a coincidence! Well don't just stand there. Go to the ball!

Cinderella: How can I? It's miles to the palace and even if I walked there my clothes would be ruined.

Buttons: As if I wouldn't think of that. Look out of the window Cinderella.

Cinderella: Oh, a carriage. How beautiful it is. Thank you fairy godmother. Now I must rush or I'll miss the prince.

Buttons: Just two things before you go.

Cinderella: Yes fairy godmother.

Buttons: The first is that for reasons which are beyond your understanding, my magical powers wane at midnight. If you are not home by then, the carriage will turn into a pumpkin and you will be stranded. But if you are home, all will be well and you get to keep the dress.

The second thing is more serious. Are you listening?

Cinderella: Yes, fairy godmother.

Buttons: The prince is very handsome.

Cinderella: Oh, so I've heard.

Buttons: And he's very rich.

Cinderella: Well that can't do any harm.

Buttons: And, what's more, he's a man. And as we fairy godmothers say, men mean trouble.

Cinderella: But surely not the prince, fairy godmother.

Buttons: Especially the prince. Fall in love with him if you must, but don't marry him until you know him as a friend. Do you promise me?

Cinderella: Yes fairy godmother.

Buttons: Very well, you may go.

Cinderella: Thank you fairy godmother. (She grabs the dress and the slippers.) I'll change in the coach. (She rushes out.)

Buttons to himself: Well I won't need that second tube of glitter after all.

Act 1. Scene 4: The Palace Ball Room. (This scene is done in mime to music.)

There are courtiers dancing, but there is one man extra. Griselda and Drusilla stand by the food, and one of the courtiers comes over and asks Griselda to dance. Since he isn't a prince she snubs him. The King, Queen and courtiers are all dancing. Finally it is the prince who is without a partner and he reluctantly approaches Griselda. During his delay in asking her to dance, Cinderella arrives and timidly waves at Griselda. King Henry comments on Cinderella to the Queen. Queen Alexandra then comes over and discreetly points out Cinderella to Prince Rudolf. The prince leaps at the chance to ask Cinderella to dance, and she accepts. Griselda is fuming whilst the prince and Cinderella seem like the perfect happy couple. The music stops and then they dance again. The courtiers join in and everything seems perfect until the clock strikes midnight and Cinderella has to leave, with great sadness in her eyes. All the courtiers gossip. The prince picks up the crystal slipper left behind by Cinderella and looks thoughtful.

Act 1. Scene 5: The Kitchen the next day.

Griselda and Drusilla enter.

Griselda: Wait until I find the little witch, I'll have her guts for garters.

Drusilla: What I want to know is where she got those shoes. Crystal slippers cost a fortune.

Griselda: There I was, finally talking to the prince. I'd been waiting by the caviar all night. I knew it was his favorite dish and that he'd have to come to me. There he was at last, just summoning up the courage to ask me to dance when in walks the little hussy, practically falling out of her dress.

Drusilla: Feet glittering like a Christmas tree.

Griselda: And she had the nerve to come up and stand right next to me, her own step sister. I've never heard of such a thing.

Drusilla: And he asked her to dance.

Griselda: Exactly. And, as if that wasn't enough, she took on the shiest most innocent look you've ever seen.

Drusilla pretending to be Cinderella: "Oh Your Highness, I'm not sure that I can dance in these shoes."

Griselda: Never had a dance lesson in her life and she dances like an angel.

Drusilla: "Another dance, Your Highness, surely you do me too much honor."

Griselda: Then, just as he's getting really interested, she says she's awfully tired and has to go home. A prince! She stopped dancing with a prince to go home to bed.

(Drusilla does a mock yawn, then a curtsy, and finally leaves with exaggerated gestures of regret.)

Griselda: Well of course, it drove him wild with desire. And as she left, those undress-me eyes of hers even had tears in them. When most people cry they look all puffy and horrible. But when she cries, she melts, and her clothes practically slide off her.

Drusilla (returning): I know Griselda I was there. But what are we going to do?

Griselda: Roast the little cow on a slow spit. I'll do the basting.

Drusilla: I have a better idea. She must have got the money from somewhere. I think you'll find the law will punish her quite sufficiently.

Griselda: A few weeks in the stocks should take the smile off her face.

Drusilla and Griselda together: Cinderella!

Cinderella from off stage: Coming! (She enters dressed in everyday clothes.)

Griselda: Well, young lady, would you like to explain exactly what you thought you were doing at the ball last night?

Cinderella: Oh that.

Drusilla: Yes that!

Cinderella: Well, I understood that everyone was invited. I found this nice dress and I thought it would be a shame to miss it.

Drusilla: You did, did you? Someone left the latest fashions just laying around so that any old scullery maid could go off to the ball.

Cinderella: Not exactly. A fairy godmother appeared in a dream and gave it to me.

(Buttons enters unnoticed.)

Drusilla: A priceless dress and crystal slippers just appeared out of nowhere.

Cinderella: That's right. It was like a miracle.

Drusilla: Well Miss Twinkle-Toes, you don't have to convince us. You can tell it to the judge.

Buttons: You can tell it to the prince if you like. He just arrived.

Griselda: The prince here? Now? This is terrible! My make-up! My bodice! Drusilla, how do I look?

Drusilla: The same as you always do.

Griselda: Not that bad surely? This is a disaster!

(Prince Rudolf enters.)

(Drusilla, Griselda and Cinderella all curtsy.)

Griselda: Your Majesty.

Prince Rudolf: I came looking for the girl in the crystal slippers. She left this behind. There was only one pair sold in the last six months and they said to try here.

Griselda: It was me, Your Majesty. I may look different in this light, but I am the woman you love.

Prince Rudolf: I hardly think so, but you can try it on if you like.

Griselda (trying on the slipper): It doesn't fit. Damn the little minx. She even has smaller feet than I do.

Prince Rudolf: Madam control yourself.

Cinderella: I wore the slippers to the ball, Your Highness. It was most gracious of you to return it to me.

Prince Rudolf: Why is an angel of beauty like you forced to do menial work in these ugly surroundings?

Cinderella: It is to help my step sisters, Your Highness. They are much older than I am, and they don't have time to do such lowly work. If I had known you were coming I would have dusted the living room and changed out of these rags. This kitchen is no place to receive a prince.

Prince Rudolf: Any room which you are in becomes a palace in my eyes.

Cinderella: Your Highness is too kind.

Prince Rudolf: But I will not allow this injustice to continue. Beauty like yours was meant for finer things. Come and live with me in the palace, where you can blossom into the rose which is clearly within you.

Cinderella: Your Highness is teasing me, I think.

Prince Rudolf: I am in deadly earnest.

Cinderella: Do you mean marriage, Your Highness?

Prince Rudolf: If you can find it in your heart to love me.

Cinderella: How could I do anything else?

Prince Rudolf: I will wait in the carriage for you. I am sure you will wish to say goodbye to your family. Ladies. (He exits.)

Cinderella: Goodbye Griselda and Drusilla. Try to be happy for me.

Griselda: Drop dead.

Drusilla: I give it six months. The prince will tire of you and you'll be begging for us to take you back.

Cinderella: Thank you for your concern Drusilla, I will miss you too. Goodbye Buttons. You were my favorite friend.

Buttons: Be careful Cinderella. The palace is a dangerous place.

Cinderella: I know, but I can't help myself.

Buttons: Write to me then.

Cinderella: Of course I will. Goodbye.

Buttons: Goodbye.

(Cinderella exits.)

Act 2

Act 2. Scene 1. The Palace study. There is a desk with a locked drawer and a couch or sofa. Cinderella is sitting alone, reading. She occasionally glances at the desk, resisting the temptation to break into the drawer. Eventually she goes over to the desk and uses a hair pin to pick the lock.

Cinderella: There we are. Good old Buttons. Not many princesses have such an excellent education in how to pick locks. Of course, Rudolf if you spent more time with me and less time drinking with your friends I wouldn't have to do this. What is so secret about a few dusty old books?

(She reads the titles)

"Revolutions and how to suppress them." That can't be why he creeps in here late at night. What about this one "How to win at cards without exactly cheating." Useful, but hardly a great secret. Ah, this must be it.

"The Witty Prince by Raymond Nasarovich, advisor on etiquette to the Emperor of Austria. What every prince should say under any circumstances. Seductions and denials a speciality." Rudolf, how could you? You must have bought it as a joke. Now let's see.

(Reading from the list of contents)

"Anecdotes for formal occasions." Much too stuffy.

"How to avoid dancing with ugly women." I'm sure he knows all about that.

"How to start a war when you really want one." Maybe later.

"How to seduce servant girls in humble surroundings." This should be interesting.

(Reading at length from the book)

When seducing women of the lower classes, a prince has a number of natural advantages. Wealth and prestige usually dazzle the ambitious girls, whilst the more conventional ones dream of marriage, a palace and royal children. The greedy girls part with their virtue for a few trinkets, a bracelet of diamonds will usually do the trick. On the other hand, the more home-loving women will present more of a challenge.

(To herself) What a strange book.

"You were meant for better things" is always a solid approach. Hint at your great wealth and suggest that she can be free of her ugly surroundings by simply casting off her inhibitions. Remember, you are a prince. The everyday to you is magical to her.

"Any room that you are in becomes a palace to me," should help to melt her resolve. Follow it up quickly with an enveloping kiss to sweep her off her feet. Knock her slightly off balance so that

she has to trust you both physically and emotionally. Stare into her eyes to maintain the giddy effect, and then kiss her again, with a touching mixture of fervor and tenderness.

(Cinderella stops reading.)

Well, he certainly knows how to do that anyway. Oh Rudolf, how could you be such a monster?

(Cinderella goes back to reading silently.)

(Prince Rudolf enters, exuberant with self satisfaction.)

Rudolf: Darling!

Cinderella: Go away.

Rudolf: No darling, that's not quite right. I say "Darling". You say "Yes darling.". We kiss. We have dinner. We flirt a little over dessert. I besiege your honor. You resist me. I besiege a bit more. You crumble. And we all live happily ever after.

Cinderella: I know. I read the book.

Rudolf: Which book?

Cinderella: This book!

Rudolf: Oh, that book. I do hope you didn't read it cover to cover. It's more the sort of book you dip into when you have a speech to write.

Cinderella: Or a girl from the lower classes to seduce.

Rudolf: Ah, you read that bit.

Cinderella: Every room you are in becomes a palace to me.

Rudolf: Did it say that?

Cinderella: You know it did.

Rudolf: What a shame. I knew that it wasn't original, but I couldn't quite remember where it came from.

Cinderella: Well if you think I'm going to marry a prince who can't even write his own love letters, you are very much mistaken.

Rudolf: But darling, I must marry you.

Cinderella: Why? I'm not that beautiful you know.

Rudolf: When I look into your eyes I'm swept away by a wave of emotion which breaks over me and . . . and . . .

Cinderella: That's in the same chapter Rudolf.

Rudolf: Damn, so it is. But I love you. Why else would I want to marry you?

Cinderella: I really can't imagine. It's not for my money. I haven't got any.

Rudolf: Darling, don't talk like that. It's so squalid to talk about money. Look, I'm sorry I wooed you with other men's words. It was wrong of me. Perhaps I have been surrounded by flatterers for so long that I've forgotten how to be sincere. But I love you. I know it's been said a million times before, but that doesn't mean that it isn't true.

My heart does melt when I look at you - and you are the woman I want to be the mother of my children.

Cinderella: Really?

Rudolf: Really. I would marry you tomorrow if you would have me.

Cinderella: I can't. I made a promise.

Rudolf: To your fairy godmother. I know. I am what you want aren't I? I love you. I will look after you. I have a nice house and a good job. What more can I do to convince you?

Cinderella: You could kiss me without trying to sweep me off my feet, as a friend would.

Rudolf: As a friend, but more than a friend.

Cinderella: Yes.

Rudolf: Oh darling.
(They embrace. He carries her to the sofa. They kiss. He looks up at audience.)

Rudolf:
Being a prince I'm so charming,
The girls find my smile quite disarming.
They melt at my kiss,
And that leads to this.
My success rate is almost alarming.

Being a prince I'm so rich.
I love diamonds and rubies and glitz.

The crowds are all grumbling.
The palace is crumbling.
So I dine with my friends at the Ritz.

Being a prince is the thing,
With maidens galore in the Spring.
I eat ambrosia and honey,
Bought with other men's money,
And then when it's over, I'm king!

Cinderella: Darling, what are you thinking about?

Rudolf: Just a poem darling, but I shouldn't tell it to you. You'd say I was being too romantic.

Cinderella: I'm sorry Rudolf. Sometimes I don't know what's good for me.

Rudolf: Can I sweep you off your feet just a little then?

Cinderella: You already have.

(They kiss.)

Act 2. Scene 2. The Palace study. Cinderella sits at the desk writing a letter.

Dear Buttons,
Sorry that I haven't written to you for so long. It's just that I'm so unhappy and I don't know why. I really love Rudolf. He is handsome and witty and he claims that he loves me too. He keeps telling me that he wants to marry me, but then he goes off drinking with his friends for hours and hours. Why would he say that if it wasn't true? I'm so confused.
Write to me soon and tell me all your news.
Your devoted friend
Cinderella.

(Queen Alexandra enters.)

Queen Alexandra: Ah there you are. Keeping in touch with your old servant friends I imagine. How sweet.

Cinderella (curtseying) Your Majesty.

Queen Alexandra: Yes, yes, enough of all that. Now do get up and sit over here. I want a word with you.

Cinderella: Is it something that I've done, Your Majesty?

Queen Alexandra: More a matter of something you haven't done.

Cinderella: What do you mean?

Queen Alexandra: Rudolf tells me that you still refuse to marry him.

Cinderella: I don't refuse, Your Majesty. I merely asked him to wait until we know each other a little better. You see, I promised . . .

Queen Alexandra: Your fairy godmother. I know. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Stories like that may go down well with the chamber maid, but please don't insult my intelligence. Maybe the palace isn't to your liking?

Cinderella: No, no, it's very, er, nice.

Queen Alexandra: Can't stand the place myself. Too many paintings of dead people. Most of them ugly. All of them relatives. But the king got terribly upset when I tried throwing them away.

Cinderella: It is not the palace, Your Majesty.

Queen Alexandra: Fair enough. Just asking. Maybe it's another man. (She picks up the letter.) This Buttons sounds rather intriguing. Handsome brute is he?

Cinderella (snatching the letter): Buttons is just a friend. How dare you try to ruin my reputation with the prince?

Queen Alexandra: Don't misunderstand me. After you are married, you can have as many affairs as you like. But do get on with it. Rudolf is getting impatient.

Cinderella: I am not, and never have had an affair with anyone. How dare you suggest such a thing?

Queen Alexandra: Then why not marry him?

Cinderella: Because he doesn't love me!

Queen Alexandra: Is that all? You really are an old-fashioned girl. Don't worry about Rudolf. He loves you well enough. He just isn't very good at showing it.

Cinderella: Are you sure?

Queen Alexandra: Yes, yes. He talks about you all the time. How beautiful and sweet you are. How you never want any presents - just to spend time with him. He even named his favorite horse after you.

Cinderella: And that's a good sign?

Queen Alexandra: It certainly is. He spends more money on horses than he does on women.

Cinderella: What do you mean?

Queen Alexandra: Never mind. Anyway, he loves you and you love him, so you can get married next Sunday. And afterwards, you can both live happily ever after.

Cinderella: Are you sure?

Queen Alexandra: Take my word for it. After all, he is what you want isn't he?

Cinderella: I suppose so.

Queen Alexandra: Good. I'll make the arrangements. Remember, next Sunday, from two 'til six. Don't forget now. (She exits.)

Cinderella: As if I would. (To the letter.) Oh Buttons, am I doing the right thing?

Act 2. Scene 3. The study. Cinderella sneaks in. It is the wedding day. She takes out a letter from the folds of her dress.

Cinderella (reading the letter):

Dear Cinderella,

By the time you read this, it will be your wedding day. I can't pretend that I didn't once hope that you would be my wife. I couldn't have made you a princess, but I would have treated you like one. Thank you for sending me an invitation, but please understand why it is that I won't be able to attend. I really can't afford the expensive clothes that you will be used to by now in the palace. I would stand out horribly from your new friends.

(Aside) Oh Buttons, I wouldn't have minded.

And I don't want to hold you back from your new life. Be happy Cinderella.

Your devoted friend
Buttons.

(Cinderella kisses the letter. There is a knock at the door. Cinderella quickly hides the letter. Buttons enters disguised as an old nurse.)

Buttons: You don't know me, Your Highness, but I am Esmerelda, Prince Rudolf's nanny when he was young.

Cinderella: Please come in.

Buttons: I hear that you have a few concerns about marrying him.

Cinderella: I was just being silly, but that's over now. I'm getting married today, but you must know that.

Buttons: Yes indeed. That's why I came - to tell you a few things that will help you to understand your new husband.

Cinderella: Go on.

Buttons: If I might have a seat. These old joints of mine aren't as supple as they used to be.

Cinderella: Oh, I'm terribly sorry. Please sit down. Can I get you a cushion?

Buttons: No, this is quite satisfactory. Now where was I?

Cinderella: Telling me about Rudolf.

Buttons: Ah yes, such a lively little boy. Always breaking things and drawing on the walls. Quite a little bundle of energy he was. He loved horses you know.

Cinderella: Apparently he still does.

Buttons: Yes, he's a bit rough with them, but they respect him for it.

Cinderella (with heavy irony): I'm glad to hear it.

Buttons: Of course, you know about the tragedy.

Cinderella: No, what tragedy?

Buttons: If it hadn't been for the tragedy, you wouldn't be sitting here today.

Cinderella: What do you mean?

Buttons: Well, once upon a time, this country was ruled over by two ancient families. They had been feuding for generations until finally, the people became sick of the bloodshed and demanded that the two principalities be joined together into one kingdom. Luckily, one family had an only son and the other had an only daughter. It seemed like a match made in heaven. Rudolf and Anne-Marie were betrothed on Rudolf's second birthday. A contract was signed joining the two families for ever. But then, tragedy struck. Anne-Marie's father died suddenly, and the little girl disappeared. Wicked rumors circulated that Queen Alexandra had had something to do with it, but whatever the truth of the matter, Anne-Marie's mother withdrew from public life.

Cinderella: How terrible. What became of the little girl?

Buttons: The king sent out his men to search far and wide - but they didn't have much to go on. A pretty baby girl, just two years old with a birth mark on her left shoulder.

Cinderella: Well, marks like that are very common. Even I have one of those.

Buttons: Quite so. Common as a dish cloth. But the remarkable thing is, my dear, that you do bear a striking resemblance to Anne-Marie's mother. In fact, on the night of the big dance here, I overheard the king saying as much to Queen Alexandra. She told him he was a sentimental old fool and stormed off in a rage to pester her son.

Cinderella: You don't think I could be, do you?

Buttons: Well honestly, what does it matter? Anyway, soon after that the prince noticed you himself and the rest, as they say, is history - or it soon will be.

Cinderella: So that's why he wants to marry me. To safeguard his inheritance!

Buttons: Oh, I do hope I haven't said anything out of turn.

Cinderella: No, don't worry Esmerelda, it was most enlightening. Now tell me, how exactly did the other king die?

Buttons: With a sudden pain at dinner. Some people thought it was due to poisoned wine, but a very reliable doctor assured King Henry that

(King Henry enters.)

King Henry: Oh, I do hope that I'm not interrupting Cinderella, but aren't you supposed to be getting married today? The Queen is turning the place upside down looking for you.

Cinderella: Well, Your Majesty, it seems that my name isn't Cinderella after all.

King Henry: Who are you then?

Cinderella: Princess Anne-Marie.

King Henry: Ah. I rather thought you might be.

Cinderella: Then why didn't you say something?

King Henry: Well, you looked happy enough, and Rudolf seemed to be doing the decent thing, even if it was for the wrong reasons.

Cinderella: But he lied to me.

King Henry: You have me there.

Cinderella: And his mother probably killed my father!

King Henry: Yes, I suppose it's time I did something about that. Such a lovely woman when I married her - but people change. That was why I had to squirrel you out of harm's way, and then we lost your address. All most unfortunate.

Cinderella: You!

King Henry: Yes, people blamed the Queen. It was rather funny really, one of the few crimes she didn't commit. But she would have tried to kill you eventually.

Cinderella: So why didn't you punish her?

King Henry: The country was just coming out of the civil war. The prospect of another one was too terrifying, but now seems like an opportune moment to strike. You are sure you don't want to marry Rudolf?

Cinderella: Quite sure.

King Henry: Well, so much for that.

Cinderella: What are you going to do?

King Henry: Banish the Queen on a charge of murder.

Cinderella: After all these years?

King Henry: Why not? Do you know, she even tried throwing away all my lovely paintings.

Buttons: And what about Rudolf?

King Henry: Ah madam, I don't think we've had the pleasure. (He bows to Buttons.)

Cinderella: King Henry, Nurse Esmeralda.

King Henry: Charmed I'm sure.

Cinderella: So what will happen to Rudolf?

King Henry: He takes far too much interest in his appearance for my taste. He can muck out the stables for a year. That should knock the polish off him.

Cinderella: Well, he does love horses.

King Henry: Exactly. Now if you will excuse me, I have a lot to do. Oh, by the way, you get half the kingdom back. It's in the contract. Fair's fair after all.

Cinderella: Thank you very much.

King Henry: Don't mention it. (He exits.)

Cinderella: Esmeralda.

Buttons: Yes, my dear.

Cinderella: Don't you think it was odd that the king didn't recognize you?

Buttons: Not really. He has a lot on his mind.

Cinderella: But to not recognize a woman who brought up his son for twenty years?

Buttons: Perhaps it is a little strange.

Cinderella: Come on Buttons, it's you isn't it?

Buttons: All right, I confess. It's me. (He takes off his wig.)

Cinderella: Why didn't you say so?

Buttons: Oh, I don't know. Maybe I thought that the bad news coming from someone else would seem more convincing.

Cinderella: But I trust you.

Buttons: I know, but I thought you might think I was being petty and jealous.

Cinderella: Well were you?

Buttons: What?

Cinderella: Jealous, I mean.

Buttons: A little.

Cinderella: So you do love me then?

Buttons: I used to.

Cinderella: And now?

Buttons: Well I've been trying not to love you for so long that I

Cinderella: You've given up!

Buttons: I don't mean that, but you don't love me anyway. You love Rudolf.

Cinderella: But who, other than you, would dress up as a fairy so that I could go to the ball with someone else?

Buttons: Ah, that. Well I didn't think you'd take my presents unless I made them magical.

Cinderella: And in your letter you said that you hoped that I would be your wife.

Buttons: Don't be like this Cinderella. You can't ask me to be just your friend for two years and then suddenly say that you want to marry me.

Cinderella: Why not?

Buttons: Well it's not fair, and we haven't ever kissed each other.

Cinderella: Well that's easily fixed. (She kisses him.)
It doesn't hurt so much does it?

Buttons: I could get used to it, I suppose.

Cinderella: And you still love me?

Buttons: Of course I do.

Cinderella: And you want to marry me?

Buttons: I always have.

Cinderella: Well, there's a rather nice wedding planned for today, but they seem to be short of a bridegroom.

Buttons: We couldn't do that.

Cinderella: Why not? You are forgetting, I am queen of half the kingdom.

Buttons: But the scandal would be terrible.

Cinderella: So what? We deserve it. After all it seems a shame to let all that cheering go to waste.

Buttons: You're a mad woman Anne-Marie.

Cinderella: Can you keep a secret?

Buttons: Anything.

Cinderella: You know that mark on my shoulder?

Buttons: Yes, of course.

Cinderella: I got it from a hot stove when I was three.

Buttons: So you're not Anne-Marie.

Cinderella: That's right - but the king is sure that I am, and I so hated to disappoint him. So Lord Buttons, will you accompany me to the prince's chamber where you can dress for the wedding.

Buttons: Can't I get married dressed like this?

Cinderella: Then the scandal would be appalling.

Buttons: Tell me Cinderella, will we live happily ever after?

Cinderella: Of course. I command it to be so.

Buttons: Well in that case, Your Majesty, I had better get changed. (They exit.)

Act 2. Scene 4. Prince Rudolf enters dressed as a stable boy.
Rudolf (to the audience):

Now that I work in a stable,
To find a girl I'm unable,
My friends have all vanished,
My mother is banished,
I can't even dine at the table.

The palms of my hands will be hardened,
But in a year I'll be pardoned,
I'll fill up the palace,
With vengeance and malice,
Cinderella will be all unbuttoned.

When the king dies, the crown comes to me.
I'll take on my new role with glee.
The queen will return,
And Cinders will squirm.
It all happens next, in Act 3.

Act 3

Act 3. Scene 1. The kitchen of Griselda's house. The kitchen is filthy and cluttered. The time is a year after the wedding. There is no-one on stage and there is a knocking at the door.

Griselda (enters carrying a candle): All right, all right. I'm coming. No need to break the door down.

(She opens the door and a cloaked figure stands outlined against the night.)

Griselda: Who are you and what do you want?

(The figure lowers the cloak to reveal the face of Queen Alexandra.)

Queen Alexandra: It is I!

Griselda: I had no idea, Your Majesty. Please forgive my rudeness.

Queen Alexandra: You are excused. Now get out of the way and let me in.

Griselda: The footman would usually answer the door, but he sleeps so soundly. He is not a young man you see, but he's the best we could find. Frederick! Frederick!

Queen Alexandra: Be quiet! It may have escaped your notice, but I was banished on pain of death. I hardly think waking the servants is such a good idea.

Griselda: But I thought, with Rudolf finishing his punishment, that you would be free to return.

Queen Alexandra: Oh no! The king was quite adamant about that. Banished for life.

Griselda: Then surely it is dangerous for you to be here.

Queen Alexandra: How perceptive of you.

Griselda: Then why did you come?

Queen Alexandra: Being in exile was driving me mad. Just imagine, an entire year spent with my relatives! They used to talk about me in hushed whispers. "Yes that's the one. Always was too big for her boots if you ask me." Well I'll show them!

Griselda: I'm sorry, Your Majesty, but I don't quite understand.

Queen Alexandra: My banishment was for life, by proclamation of the king. Well life cuts both ways - either my life, or his. Once my son is on the throne, I shall return in triumph. Then people can laugh at me if they dare.

Griselda: But I don't quite see what you mean. The king is in excellent health.

Queen Alexandra: Well we may have to do something about that.

Griselda: Your Majesty, that would be treason!

Queen Alexandra: I've done worse in my time. A little poison here, a little dagger there. It all helps the ship of state to glide more smoothly in a sea of troubles.

Griselda: But Your Majesty, to kill your own husband would be horrible.

Queen Alexandra: Don't talk nonsense!

Griselda: And you would never get near him without being arrested.

Queen Alexandra: That is where you come in.

Griselda: Me Your Majesty. What have I got to do with it?

Queen Alexandra: You are going to poison my husband for me.

Griselda: Why should I? I have no grievance against the king.

Queen Alexandra: Well, for one thing, he gave half of the kingdom to that spoiled brat of a sister of yours.

Griselda: Hardly a reason for murder, surely.

Queen Alexandra: Also, it would make me very happy. And if I'm happy, my son might be very grateful.

Griselda: Go on.

Queen Alexandra: I promise that if you help me to kill the king, my son will marry you as a reward. Hail Queen Griselda. How does that sound?

Griselda: What makes you think he would marry me?

Queen Alexandra: He is my son after all. He knows better than to cross me.

Griselda: This is a lot to think about.

Queen Alexandra: You must decide now. Here is the poison. Slipped into red wine it is quite undetectable. There is no danger to you, and my son and I will be in your debt.

Griselda: What about Cinderella?

Queen Alexandra: Poison her too? No, I've thought of that. She and that damned Buttons are too popular. A nasty revelation followed by a public trial should do the trick. She isn't Princess Anne-Marie. Any fool can see that. The senile ravings of a demented king shortly before his death. Once she has been exposed as a fraud, we can have a nice little execution. Decapitation is my preference, but I leave the final choice up to you.

Griselda: You've thought of everything.

Queen Alexandra: So will you do it?

Griselda: I don't see how I could do anything else. Your Majesty's displeasure so often proves fatal.

Queen Alexandra: Excellent, we understand each other. Now I must go before I am discovered. (She exits.)

Griselda: What am I going to do? Drusilla!

Act 3. Scene 2. The Palace Breakfast room. Buttons and Cinderella sit having breakfast.

Cinderella: I don't see why you have to go to work today. It is our anniversary.

Buttons: I know darling, but it's also harvest time. You know what scoundrels the prince appointed to collect the taxes. If I don't go now, you'll be cheated out of half your income.

Cinderella: I don't care. I'm rich enough already. I just want to spend time with you.

Buttons: But we need the money to make the roads we promised. Splitting the kingdom in two again will be very expensive.

Cinderella: But what about me? I only ever see you when you're worn out. What happened to the stories you used to tell me?

Buttons: I still do, sometimes.

Cinderella: All right then, what was the last one about?

Buttons: It was er . . . I know. It was the one about the giant who choked to death on a dwarf.

Cinderella: That was months ago.

Buttons: Yes, you're right. What about the other week. I told you about the miner who put a boy at the bottom of a well to pull on a plumb line. He made the people think he'd dug a deeper well than he had. The miner over-charged the villagers two gold pieces.

Cinderella: Don't you see? The old Buttons would have thought it the most boring story he'd ever heard. No romance. No intrigue. All this talk of money. It's so dull.

Buttons: But it is exciting. For the first time I feel that I can actually help people rather than just making fun of their misfortune.

Cinderella: Well I do good things too.

Buttons: Of course you do.

Cinderella: And my reward is a palace full of people I don't trust, and a husband who is never home.

Buttons: I will be home I promise. Now I must rush. The farmers have been up for hours already. (He pecks Cinderella on the cheek and exits. Cinderella sighs with boredom and then starts to hunt for an interesting book. Finally she finds "The Witty Prince" from Act 2.)

Cinderella: Ah there it is. (She starts to read.) "How to Start a War When You Really Want One."

(Enter Prince Rudolf. He is dressed in splendid attire, in fitting with his return from exile.)

Prince Rudolf: I do hope that I'm not disturbing you.

Cinderella: Oh, it's you. What are you doing in the palace. Shouldn't you be

Prince Rudolf: In the stable? Well, yes and no. It's a year since my disgrace, so my father has now relented. I am once again a prince.

Cinderella: So why aren't you out on the town celebrating with your friends?

Prince Rudolf: They didn't prove to be such good friends when I was in trouble.

Cinderella: Maybe you have learnt something after all.

Prince Rudolf: I hope so. I did have a lot of time to think. Sitting for nights on end with nothing to do made me realize what a fool I've been. I had happiness in the palm of my hand and then I threw it all away.

Cinderella: Well you're a prince again now, so you can make the most of it.

Prince Rudolf: That isn't what I mean. True happiness is only found in the arms of someone who loves you.

Cinderella: Well judging from your reputation, you should be the happiest man in the world.

Prince Rudolf: Cinderella, this year seems to have hardened you.

Cinderella: Perhaps.

Prince Rudolf: What is it like being married?

Cinderella: Why do you ask?

Prince Rudolf: Oh, I was just wondering - just in case I ever tie the knot one day.

Cinderella: Marriage is very nice. Buttons, I mean Prince Albert, is a wonderful person. He cares about the poor and the farmers. He tries to help the old people and the sick. In fact he loves everybody.

Prince Rudolf: Which doesn't leave much time for you.

Cinderella: I wouldn't say that. It's just that that first magic can't last for ever.

Prince Rudolf: I thought about you every day.

Cinderella: What?

Prince Rudolf: Every night, before I went to sleep, I would dream about the times we spent together - exquisite times, erotic times.

Cinderella: Please, I am a married woman!

Prince Rudolf: Don't you think I know that? When you loved me, I was a fool. I had the confidence of an idiot. Why wouldn't everyone love me. I was a prince. But now I know that you were the only one who really cared. Anyone else would have married me straight away, but you only wanted my title if you could also have my heart.

Cinderella: I've grown up a lot since then.

Prince Rudolf: But don't you still feel some of those same feelings? A fire like that can never completely die.

Cinderella: It was a long time ago.

Prince Rudolf: But tell me you still feel something. Say my year of suffering wasn't completely wasted.

Cinderella: Something, yes of course. But it is too late Rudolf. I married Buttons and he loves me . . . and I love him.

Prince Rudolf: One kiss is all I ask.

Cinderella: No!

Prince Rudolf: One kiss - not as a lover, but as an admirer. You see I still love you, even after you've forgotten me.

Cinderella: I had no idea.

Prince Rudolf: So you forgive me then?

Cinderella: For what?

Prince Rudolf: For this. (He kisses her. She hardly resists. The kiss is lingering.)

(Buttons enters with flowers in one hand and a toy frog in the other.)

Buttons: You were right darling. We should spend the day together. Oh . .

(Rudolf and Cinderella look at Buttons.)

Buttons: I hope you'll be very happy. (He exits.)

Cinderella: What have you done?

Prince Rudolf: I just wanted to see if the old charm still works. You always were a soft touch.

Cinderella: How could I have just stood there and let you kiss me?

Prince Rudolf: I'd run after him if I were you. These ex-footmen can be quite old-fashioned about adultery.

Cinderella (runs to the door): I'll get you for this later!

Prince Rudolf: Not if my mother has anything to do with it.

Act 3. Scene 3. The same a few moments later.

Prince Rudolf: Seems like time for another limerick. Now let me see.

Once I'm the king of the castle,
All the girls' dresses will rustle.

The maids won't refuse me.

Their beaux will excuse me. . .

(Thinking)

And then something ending in tussle. . . or muscle.

I don't know. I'll have to work on this one.

Queen Alexandra (entering): You'll do no such thing.

Prince Rudolf: Mother! I trust I find you in good health.

Queen Alexandra: Excellent, thank you. Your father, on the other hand, has been taken ill. Griselda invited him to dinner last night, and he seems to have eaten something which disagreed with him.

Prince Rudolf: Nothing temporary I hope.

Queen Alexandra: The royal physician assures me that he will not outlast the day.

Prince Rudolf: Is he sure?

Queen Alexandra: He has always proved most reliable in the past. This physician is a man who takes great pains never to be wrong in a diagnosis, especially a pessimistic one of such national importance. His zeal is most commendable.

Prince Rudolf: And his fee, now doubt, will cost me half the kingdom.

Queen Alexandra: Stop whining Rudolf. It's time you were a man and took what belongs to you with both hands.

Prince Rudolf: Right!

Queen Alexandra: Well get on with it then.

Prince Rudolf: What do you want me to do?

Queen Alexandra: Arrest Cinderella of course.

Prince Rudolf: Don't you think we should take our time. She is queen of half the kingdom.

Queen Alexandra: By an amazing coincidence, our half of the kingdom has all the weapons. I'd like to see them try something. Then the blood would flow! Just announce that new evidence has come to light that Cinderella is an imposter. Two years ago she murdered Princess Anne-Marie and took her place.

Prince Rudolf: I didn't know that.

Queen Alexandra: I have an idiot for a son!

Prince Rudolf: Sorry mother. I wasn't thinking.

Queen Alexandra: Anything else?

Prince Rudolf: Well there was one thing. I know you promised Griselda that I would marry her if she was, er, helpful. But she is awfully dull, so do I have to? Can't we just pay her off or something.

Queen Alexandra: Of course not. After the trial we must kill both her and Cinderella.

Prince Rudolf: You really are the best mother a prince ever had.

Queen Alexandra: I don't know why I bother. One careless night with the footman and I have a lifetime of mopping up after you.

Prince Rudolf: What do you mean?

Queen Alexandra: Never mind! Now get on with carving out your destiny.

Act 3. Scene 4. A dungeon in the palace. Cinderella is on stage with the Guard.

Cinderella: I want to speak to the king.

Guard: I'm sorry Miss. I am under strict orders not to let you see anyone.

Cinderella: I am queen of half the kingdom. Who has the authority to arrest me?

Guard: Well Miss, I mean Your Majesty, seeing as it's you, I can let you in on a few little secrets. But don't tell anyone or I'm done for.

Cinderella: That's very kind. Thank you.

Guard: Well, the way I see it is this. King Henry is on his death bed and Prince Rudolf and his mum are all for taking over now - before the body's cold as it were. Now it seems as though you've been telling fibs about being Anne-Marie. It's a shame, 'cause we all liked you. But royalty is royalty, and it's not to be messed with. Once the queen proves her case against you, there'll be an execution and that's that.

Cinderella: What about Buttons?

Guard: Prince Albert you mean. Yeah, a bit of a shame about him. Conspiracy or something. I didn't quite understand all that legal stuff, but he's for the chop too, sure as falling off a log.

Cinderella: When was he captured?

Guard: Well that's the rum thing. He stormed off this morning, said he was going to drown a frog. No-one knew what he was talking about. Hasn't been seen since.

Cinderella: Poor Buttons. I hope he did run away. He'll be better off without me.

Guard: Chin up Miss. My wife thinks you're great. Not stuck up like the others. And you told that Prince Rudolf where to go when he wanted to marry you.

Cinderella: Did I ever meet her? Your wife I mean.

Guard: Not really Miss. She only does the washing. Big woman she is.

Cinderella: Freckles and red hair?

Guard: That's right. Carrot-top Mary they call her.

Cinderella: I wish we'd been friends. She always seemed so cheerful.

Guard: Bit late now I'm afraid Miss.

Cinderella: Oh well. How many days will it be before I'm put on trial?

Guard: One or two I should think. They'll probably wait for the king to snuff it first.

Cinderella: Death seems so ordinary when you talk about it like that.

Guard: Don't mind me miss. I was in the civil war you see. Too much killing hardens a man. I can't say that I like what's going on in the palace, but it isn't worth fighting another war over.

Cinderella: So I have to die.

Guard: Afraid so.

Cinderella: Let's change the subject. How did you meet your wife?

Guard: You don't want to hear about that.

Cinderella: No, I do really.

Guard: Well Miss, I was coming back from the war. My leg was all bandaged up and I needed some baggy trousers to go over the . . .

(There is a loud knock at the door.)

Guard: Who's there?

(Enter Buttons disguised as an executioner. He has a black hood over his face and a portable executioners block under one arm.)

Buttons: I'm here to give the prisoner her execution rehearsal.

Cinderella: But I haven't even had a trial yet.

Buttons: Don't worry about a little thing like that Miss. Concentrate on the main event. That's what I say. There's a lot for you to think about. What to wear. How to stick out your neck. All very complicated you see, and it's not as if we can mess it up and then ask to have another go, now can we?

(To Guard) So if you wouldn't mind leaving, we can get on with it.

Guard: This isn't regulations. What makes you think you can come in here and throw your weight around?

Buttons: My orders are straight from the queen. "Talk to the little witch," she tells me. "Explain that death can be quick or lingering. Show 'er how, if she makes a fuss at the trial, things can get really nasty." Can't say I like that bit. A professional axman such as myself takes great pride in his work. Been in my family for generations. "We cuts it, and we cuts it clean." That's our motto.

Guard: I don't care who you are. I'm not going to let you hurt the prisoner.

Buttons: Any objections can be taken straight to the queen.

Guard: I think I'll do that right now!

Buttons: Buzz off then.

Guard: Excuse me Miss. If he does anything to you, I'll get 'im for it, 'onest I will.

Cinderella: Don't worry. They wouldn't cheat themselves out of the satisfaction of killing me in public.

Guard: If you're sure Miss. I'll leave, but under protest. (He exits.)

Buttons: Good riddance. Now, to get all the formalities out of the way, what should I call you?

Cinderella (imperiously): Your Majesty should suffice.

Buttons: Well, Your Majesty, there's a lot to an execution.

Cinderella: We've been through all that. Just tell me what I have to do.

Buttons: What are you going to wear?

Cinderella: I don't know. This I suppose.

Buttons: Oh dearie me no. Neck line's much too high. You want something low at the back and low at the front. Otherwise it gets really messy.

Cinderella: This bit does come off.

Buttons: So it does. Most ingenious. These tailors think of everything.

Cinderella: Not executions, surely?

Buttons: Now what about your hair?

Cinderella: Up in a bun. Like this I think.

Buttons: That's the spirit. Hmm. A slender neck but sinewy. Could cause a bit of a problem.

Cinderella: Well, if it's going to be too much trouble, let's cancel the whole thing.

Executioner: Sorry. The queen was most particular. Now, an important part of any severance as we like to call it, is the angle of the neck to the block. If you wouldn't mind just kneeling down.

Cinderella: Do I have to?

Buttons: It will make our jobs just that little bit easier.

Cinderella: Very well. Like this?

Buttons: That's right. Now arch the neck just a little bit higher. Perfect. Then you give the signal, the axe blade comes down and it's all over in a jiffy. (Buttons lowers his hand onto Cinderella's neck and holds it there.)

Cinderella: Does it have to be an axe? They're so heavy and blunt.

Buttons: I'll have you know that my axe is honed to perfection. But it's true. They can be a bit unwieldy. It's traditional, that's all. The French prefer to use a sword. It takes more skill, but gives a cleaner cut. In the court of the Sultan of Tangier, the executioner applies a sucking action to the nape of the neck. It causes a slight tingling sensation but otherwise it's quite painless. I'm not very good at it myself, but this should give you the idea.

(He bends down and starts to kiss her neck.)

Cinderella: Let me go! I'm a married woman.

Buttons: I heard your husband left you. Found you in bed with the man you love.

Cinderella (struggling to escape): We weren't in bed - and I don't love him. Now let me go! If Buttons was here he'd kill you.

Buttons: Come off it. If he loved you that much he wouldn't have run away. (He starts to kiss her again.)

Cinderella: Stop it. It tickles. Go on, stop it Buttons. I'm getting dizzy.

Buttons (Taking off his mask): Damn. How long have you known it was me?

Cinderella: Well you do talk a lot for an executioner. Usually they just grunt a bit and then chop people's heads off. Anyway there isn't a Sultan of Tangier, and even if there was, he wouldn't kiss people to death.

Buttons: Stopped you being bored though.

Cinderella: It is good to see you. (They kiss.) We should hurry. The guard will be back any minute.

Buttons: I shouldn't worry about that.

Cinderella: Why not?

Buttons: Trust me. (They kiss again.)

(Enter Queen Alexandra, Prince Rudolf, Guard)

Queen Alexandra: Ah-hah. Just as I thought. The fool couldn't keep away. Guard, seize him!

Buttons (to Cinderella): I'm sorry. You were right.

(The guard ties Buttons' hands behind his back.)

Queen Alexandra: Now that I have you both, no-one will dare to rebel.

Cinderella: What will you do to him?

Prince Rudolf: Something slow and horrible, if I have anything to do with it.

Buttons: And what about Cinderella?

Queen Alexandra: Well, given that a rebellion is out of the question, a trial seems hardly necessary. Guard, run her through with your sword.

Guard: I'm afraid I can't do that, Your Majesty. No executions without a trial. That's the law.

Prince Rudolf: I am the law now!

Guard: With respect, Your Highness, the king is still breathing. He is the law, and he says no death without a trial.

Queen Alexandra: I trust you have no objections if my son does it.

Guard: It's murder if he does, and it's treason if I try to stop him.

Prince Rudolf: I told you we shouldn't educate these people mother. Teach them to read and they stop doing what you tell them.

Queen Alexandra: Just hurry up. I haven't got all day.

Prince Rudolf: So Cinderella, do you have any last requests?

Cinderella: Since my life is nearly at an end, I would like to kiss the only man I ever loved.

Prince Rudolf: Good of you to be so sporting about it.

Cinderella: Come here Rudolf. Oh Rudolf
(Cinderella knees Prince Rudolf in the groin.)

Prince Rudolf (in sudden pain): Ugh

Cinderella: Now I can die a happy woman!

Queen Alexandra (to Guard): Guard! Arrest her!

Guard: On what charge?

Queen Alexandra: Assaulting a royal personage.

Guard: In my opinion, Your Majesty, he was rather asking for it.

Prince Rudolf: I'll have you flogged for this, you insolent rogue.

(Enter King Henry, and Griselda)

King Henry: What is going on here?

Prince Rudolf: Father, you're alive! I thought

King Henry: You thought your mother's poison would finish me off. In fact, I did have a little indigestion from Griselda's cooking, but nothing fatal I assure you. Guard, arrest Prince Rudolf and Queen Alexandra on a charge of high treason.

Guard: A pleasure Your Majesty.

Queen Alexandra: On what evidence?

Griselda: On my evidence. You gave me this poison to put in the king's wine. You promised me that I could marry the prince if I went along with it.

Cinderella: So why didn't you?

Griselda: I may be a bad sister, Cinderella, but I'm a loyal and I might even say devoted subject. Also, a woman who would poison her husband is somewhat apt to forget her promises.

Prince Rudolf: But what about the doctor?

Queen Alexandra: Shut up you fool!

King Henry: Ah yes . When I explained to our good physician that my death would be immediately followed by his own, he suddenly became much more optimistic about my condition.

Cinderella: Why did you leave it this long before coming in?

King Henry: It's not often that a king gets a chance to see how his son will behave after his death.

Prince Rudolf: So what did you think papa?

King Henry: You are the most spoilt child I have ever known. You are lazy and arrogant, and you spend money as if there's no tomorrow. You have precious little regard for the law, and you seem to have an insatiable appetite for cruelty and revenge.

Prince Rudolf: It's only my first day.

King Henry: Enough! When you were born, I did your mother the kindness of overlooking the fact that I was away at the war when you were conceived.

Prince Rudolf: I don't understand.

King Henry: Cedric was his name I think. Very handsome I understand, but he found cleaning out the stables a bit too much of an intellectual challenge.

Prince Rudolf: You don't mean Mother, how could you? With a stable boy!

Queen Alexandra: I hardly think you should lecture me about sleeping with the servants!

King Henry: I tried to be a good father to you. I thought that the right education might make any man fit to be a king. Your conduct today has finally shown me the error of my ways. I now

disown you as my successor and I appoint Prince Albert Buttons Trevelyan as legal heir to both halves of the kingdom. At least he will take the job seriously.

Queen Alexandra: And what fate do you have in store for me?

King Henry: You will stand trial for attempted murder and for defying an order of banishment. If you are found guilty, I will let Cinderella decide whether to commute your sentence to life imprisonment. As for our marriage, as Head of the Church, I now declare it null and void. Consider it a divorce. Guard, take them away.

Guard (to Rudolf): Come on you!

Prince Rudolf: Mother, tell him not to talk to me like that. It isn't right.

Queen Alexandra: Stop whimpering!

(Exit Queen Alexandra and Prince Rudolf followed by the Guard.)

Cinderella (to Buttons): Did you know this was going on?

Buttons: I did have some idea.

Cinderella: So why didn't you tell me?

Buttons: There wasn't time. Anyway, don't you have a few apologies to make?

Cinderella: Yes. (To King Henry.) Your Majesty, I am sorry that I lied to you about being Princess Anne-Marie. I was angry with Rudolf at the time, but it wasn't right of me to take it out on you. (To Griselda.) Also, I'm sorry that I misjudged you, Griselda. I know that you could never harm anyone, especially a member of the royal family.

Griselda: That's all right. The king and I seem to be getting along frightfully well at the moment. There may even be wedding bells in the air.

King Henry (as he exits): Come along Griselda.

Griselda: Such a commanding voice! Anyway, I must dash. See you later.

Buttons: It's great being heir to the throne and everything, but I wish someone would untie me.

Cinderella: I rather like you the way you are.

Buttons: Come on Cinders, don't be a tyrant.

Cinderella: I think a little practice execution is in order.

Buttons: No, anything but that.

Cinderella: I hear that in the court of the Emperor of China, they use a poisoned feather dragged slowly across the skin. Apparently, the victim can last for days.

Buttons: You wouldn't.

Cinderella: Why not?

Buttons: Because then I couldn't tell you the story about the mermaid who fell in love with a dragon.

Cinderella: Hmm, well in that case, I postpone the execution. (She unties him.) The story had better be good.

Buttons: Oh it is. Once upon a time, there was a bright purple dragon who lived in a cave by the ocean.

Cinderella: No, not here. (She kisses him.) You can tell it to me in bed.

Buttons (about the audience): But what about them?

Cinderella: They've heard enough stories for one day. Come on!

Buttons: I'll be up in a minute.

Cinderella: Well don't be long.

Buttons: I won't.

The Epilogue

Buttons (To the audience):

It is said that a bad king may use treachery and cunning to stay in power and outlive his enemies. A bad play, on the other hand, dies at the hands of the people within a few hours. Our story was conjured up for your pleasure, and it is your wishes which will decide its fate. As the lights fade, the ravens of criticism will descend to pick through the bones of recollection. Perhaps you will watch them in silence. But if we have charmed your heart a little and shown you the perils of love and handsome princes, just clap your hands together. The noise you make may frighten off those ravens and leave Cinderella and Buttons to live happily ever after.

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