

Scene 1 - Stoke Castle

The stage is bare except for a cradle and a chair centre. PRINCESS CINDERELLA is sitting on the chair, nursing her baby. PRINCE CHARLES stomps onto the stage. He snatches the crown off his head, throws it down in front of him, jumps up and down on it, then turns to face CINDERELLA.

CHARLES Do you know what those two damn hell hounds have done now?

CINDERELLA Charles, dear, the baby!

CINDERELLA covers the baby's ears and puts it into the cradle.

CHARLES I'm sorry but it's enough to make anyone swear.

CINDERELLA Besides – they can't be hounds. They're girls.

CHARLES Alright...they're b...

CINDERELLA Charles!

CHARLES Well...they are.

CINDERELLA They really didn't have a chance to grow up decent – not with the mother they had.

CHARLES You're much too charitable, my dear. When I think of how they treated you, making you sit up all night sewing dresses for them while they were out enjoying themselves. And then pretending it was one of them who had danced so beautifully with me that night of the ball.

CINDERELLA Poor Geraldine! She still limps from trying to get that glass slipper to fit.

CHARLES Poor Geraldine, my foot!

CINDERELLA Actually, it was my foot, wasn't it, darling?

CHARLES Such a dear little foot! (*CHARLES kneels in front of CINDERELLA, takes one slipper off and puts it back on again*)
My princess!

CINDERELLA My idiot!

But she is smiling. CHARLES stands up.

CHARLES And now you've charmed me out of my bad temper, as usual.

CINDERELLA I have to admit my dear step-sisters would make anyone bad tempered. What did they do, anyway?

CHARLES They've only given orders in MY castle, that MY dogs should live outside in the kennels.

CINDERELLA No!

CHARLES Yes. Lavinia, if you please, suffers from an allergy to dog hair.

CINDERELLA She never worried about that awful pug my stepmama had.

CHARLES paces up and down.

CHARLES It's no good. They've got to go. I can't stand having them here a day longer.

CINDERELLA But Charles...

CHARLES I know ...you promised your father on his deathbed..

CINDERELLA That I'd look after them and find husbands for them. Goodness knows, I've tried. I even tried bribing that last prince – the one from South Petherton who came to look them over.

CHARLES I didn't know that.

CINDERELLA He said he wouldn't have Lavinia no matter how much we paid him...

CHARLES Can't say I blame him...

CINDERELLA ... and Geraldine laughed at his squint and pushed him into the pond. It really was rather unkind of her.

CHARLES Unkind? She's a monster. They both are, and I can't stand much more of it. I tell you what... What about that Fairy Godmother of yours, couldn't you drag her out of retirement and get her to do something?

CINDERELLA Last I heard from her she was living in a nice little warden assisted flat in Sherborne. I could *try*, I suppose.

CHARLES Make it soon.

CINDERELLA The trouble is, you EXPECT them to behave awfully.

CHARLES They do it without any encouragement from me at all.

CINDERELLA Look...it says in this book (*takes book from cradle*)
"Never say to your child, 'you always behave badly', because they'll take your word for it and do what's expected of them."

CHARLES That's just for children.

CINDERELLA It works for grown ups too. If you expect people to be horrid, nine times out of ten they will be.

Enter LAVINIA and GERALDINE.

LAVINIA Heavens! It's freezing in here. Close that window at once, Geraldine, at once!

CHARLES Oh, I say, no! We're in the middle of a heatwave.

LAVINIA Charles, do you want me to be carried off by pneumonia?

CHARLES (*aside to Cinderella*) I'd be grateful to anything that carried her off.

GERALDINE I BEG your pardon? WHAT did you say?

CINDERELLA Oh Charles! Don't!

CHARLES I'm off to the counting house.

Exit CHARLES right.

GERALDINE I suppose we ought to be grateful he's got some money to count. He hasn't anything else to recommend him.

LAVINIA Very true. A most unsatisfactory young man.

CINDERELLA How can you say that when he's given you both a home?

GERALDINE A home? This draughty old castle! With Brian the Bagpipe waking us up at six o'clock every morning!

CINDERELLA It's tradition. All royal castles have a piper.

GERALDINE You've given us the worst bedchambers in the place - we don't even have a view of the monument. As for the meals - they're inedible. Not what we're used to at all. Poor Lavinia has had awful indigestion ever since we arrived.

LAVINIA Well, I'm not one to complain, as you know, dear, but I'm afraid Geraldine is quite right. My digestion has always been delicate.

GERALDINE The servants pay us no respect at all - and I believe your husband encourages them. No, I agree with Lavinia. A most unsatisfactory young man.

CINDERELLA That's not what you said when you hoped you might get him as a husband.

GERALDINE What! How dare you?

LAVINIA Ungrateful girl! How COULD you speak to your sister like that! Oh Geraldine....after all we've done for her ...

GERALDINE There! Now look what you've done! She's going to have one of her spasms.

LAVINIA Oh, my heart! Oh! Oh! Oh! Geraldine, dear - I think – if you give me your arm – I might just make it to our bedchamber.

LAVINIA totters off stage, supported by GERALDINE. CINDERELLA takes baby out of cradle and rocks it in her arms.

CINDERELLA You know, baby, I don't think any amount of expecting those two to be nice is going to work. This is a job for Fairy Godmother Retired.

There is a loud bang and FAIRY GODMOTHER appears. She is fully dressed but is wearing curlers and a hairnet.

CINDERELLA Blimey! That was quick!

FAIRY G. For goodness sake, Cinders! I'm not fit to be seen!

CINDERELLA Sorry, Fairy Godmother. I had no idea I could call you as easily as that.

FAIRY G. Well, you shouldn't be able to – with me being retired – but I've been getting distress signals from Stoke Castle for some time now. What's up?

CINDERELLA It's my stepsisters. They're driving us mad.

FAIRY G. I did think it was a mistake of yours to take them in but you were always a kind girl.

CINDERELLA If I hadn't promised father...

FAIRY G. You really said you would find husbands for them?

CINDERELLA Oh – can't you do something? Some sort of beautifying spell so that they're more attractive to the local princes? We've just GOT to get rid of them.

FAIRY G. Hang on a minute. Let's have a look at your account. *(Takes notebook out of pocket)* Let's see.. rags to ball gown pumpkins into carriage, transforming mice, rats, lizards.. one pair of glass slippers...hmm!

CINDERELLA Oh, don't say I haven't got any wishes left!

FAIRY G. No..no, I think we can squeeze one more out. But that's it, mind! No coming crying to me when baby Edward needs a couple of 'A' levels later on.

CINDERELLA Oh, Edward won't need any help with that. He's a terrifically intelligent child.

FAIRY G. Obviously takes after mother rather than father.

CINDERELLA He gets his looks from his father, little love. *(Kisses top of baby's head)*

FAIRY G. Poor child! *(puts notebook in pocket)* Right, well, I'll do it now, then shall I?

CINDERELLA Now would be lovely. Thank you.

FAIRY G. It's been a while. I'll have to work myself up to it.

CINDERELLA Anything I can do?

FAIRY G. No. Not really. *(Closes her eyes and starts humming on one low note. Gets higher and higher. Suddenly stops. CINDERELLA looks at her expectantly)* No good. Let's try something else. *(Starts turning round and round on the spot with her eyes closed. Slowly raises one leg and hugs it to her chest. Stops. Lowers leg)* That's it. Here we go.

Lavinia and Geraldine
From now on they will be seen
Beautiful as summer roses
Lovely eyes and lips and noses.
Even more than this beside
They'll be beautiful inside.

That should do it.

CINDERELLA Oh, thank you, Fairy Godmother! Will they be beautiful now?

FAIRY G. Actually, when I said "from now on" it was poetic licence, really. What you have to do is to go and tell them that they've been beautified and then it'll gradually happen.

CINDERELLA Oh, how strange!

FAIRY G. That's magic for you. Make sure you tell them they're beautiful outside AND INSIDE now, though, won't you?

CINDERELLA I will.

FAIRY G. I'll be off now then, dear. The hairdresser will be wondering where I've got to.

CINDERELLA Thank you again. You've saved our lives. Not to mention our marriage. Charles will be thrilled when I tell him.

FAIRY G. Give him my regards.

Bang! Fairy Godmother disappears. CINDERELLA puts baby back into cradle and picks it up.

CINDERELLA We won't be needing YOU in the next scene.

Exits with cradle.

Scene 2 – The Castle Kitchen

Tom the Kitchen Boy backs onto the stage holding up an open cookery book.

MAX *(From off stage)* No...further...back...back...further...go on..
(eventually follows Tom onto stage, stirring something in a bowl and trying to read what Tom is holding up)

TOM Don't you think it's time you got yourself some glasses, Chef?

MAX Nonsense! My eyesight is perfect. It's just the print in these cookery books. Now then, run out and get me some more eggs.

TOM But you've already got three in there – the recipe can't say more than three eggs. *(Turns book round and reads)* "Take 2 eggs."

MAX Two? Not four?

TOM Two.

MAX Ah! Well, the more eggs the better, I always say.

TOM I don't think we'd better mention it to Lady Lavinia. She's on an egg-free diet.

MAX That woman will drive me into an early grave. With my extraordinary culinary skills, I prepare for her my delicate masterpieces and she sends them all back untasted. And with rude notes attached.

TOM It wasn't really surprising she sent those meringues back.

MAX Those meringues were amazing ...big...white...fluffy...

TOM And full of salt instead of sugar.

MAX So she SAID! I don't believe a word of it. As if I would put in salt instead of sugar! Now then, hold that book steady, will you? Erm erm erm eggs two der der der half a pound of badger. Badger?

TOM Butter?

MAX Oh yes. So it is. Butter. *(Wanders vaguely off stage right)*

Enter PETUNIA, the Kitchen Maid

PETUNIA Where's Chef?

TOM He's out there. Preparing a badger cake.

PETUNIA A what?

TOM Well, it could be anything by the time he's finished.

PETUNIA Something's got to be done about him. He's going to end up poisoning everyone in the castle.

TOM He just won't accept the fact he needs glasses. Keeps saying nobody under the age of forty needs reading glasses. Under the age of forty! That's a laugh!

PETUNIA I could always try a truth spell.

TOM You? What do you know about magic?

PETUNIA I'm learning. From my grandmother.

TOM That weird woman who lives on Ham Hill?

PETUNIA She's not weird.

TOM I think you could call it slightly eccentric when someone turns herself into a large pink pterodactyl and sits on the roof of the Prince of Wales for three days with a “do not feed the pterodactyl” notice in her beak.

PETUNIA It was an experiment. Anyway, I’m sure she could help me with a truth spell which would make Chef realise he needs glasses.

TOM It sounds a bit drastic. Are you sure it would be safe?

PETUNIA ‘Course. And it would wear off after a day or two, anyway. It’d last just long enough for him to go to the opticians’ and get himself sorted.

Re-enter MAX with his foot stuck in the bowl, trying to shake it off.

PETUNIA No time to be lost, I think.

TOM Perhaps you’re right.

TOM and PETUNIA go over to MAX and help him off the stage.