

Happily Ever After Hours

by Ruth Buchanan

A Full Length Comedy

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By Ruth Buchanan

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ISBN: 978-1-60003-840-2

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PUBLISHED BY BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS

1-888-473-8521

HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS

A Full Length Comedy

By Ruth Buchanan

SYNOPSIS: Every night, your favorite fairy tale characters clock out of their stories to enjoy some well-earned rest. But they won't be resting tonight, because tonight, due to an anonymous tip to the Better Business Bureau, all employees of the Happily Ever After Group must begin court-mandated therapy. Despite the professionalism of their psychologist, the first group session goes badly awry. Plunged into an unexpected quest that requires venturing back into the story after hours, members of the Happily Ever After Group find themselves sneaking through The Wood, battling a rhyming curse, and trying to keep from being blown up—all while facing their fears and learning each other's secrets. In this sideways retelling of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, you'll find more comedy, more pop psychology, and way more cheese (both literal and figurative) than you ever bargained for.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 female, 5 male)

EVERY (f).....	Dr. Ainsworth, a licensed Clinical Psychologist. <i>(112 lines)</i>
VAL (m)	A valiant full-time tailor, part-time con artist. <i>(102 lines)</i>
GIANT (m)	Val's lovable, dimwitted sidekick. Somewhat short for a giant. <i>(42 lines)</i>
SNOW WHITE (f).....	Sly, double-crossing princess with control issues. Married to a bear. Sister to Rose Red. <i>(129 lines)</i>
ROSE RED (f)	Living unhappily ever after. Sarcastic. Sister to Snow White. <i>(94 lines)</i>

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- DWARF MINION (m)..... In begrudging service of Snow White and Rose Red. Tall for a dwarf. Sensitive about his height. *(39 lines)*
- HANSEL (m)..... Militant Feminist. Twin to Gretel. *(90 lines)*
- GRETEL (f)..... Militant Feminist. Insufferably efficient. Twin to Hansel. *(69 lines)*
- CLEVER HANS (m) A good-hearted soul, but slow-thinking and pedantic. Formerly betrothed to Gretel. *(133 lines)*
- ONE EYE (f)..... The first of three disgruntled sisters suffering from a rhyming curse. *(29 lines)*
- TWO EYES (f) The second of three disgruntled sisters suffering from a rhyming curse. The only decent one of the three. *(34 lines)*
- THREE EYES (f)..... The third of three disgruntled sisters suffering from a rhyming curse. *(31 lines)*
- WITCH (f) Disinterested enchantress. Bored with everyone's problems and ready for retirement. *(106 lines)*

DURATION: 75 minutes.

PROPS

- Small Notepad
- Large Notepad
- Pens/Pencils
- Lighter
- Cheese Wheel
- Entrail Tree Producing Golden Apples
- 2 Golden Apples
- Shovel
- Knife
- Loop of Entrails
- Red Substance (Blood)
- Dry Ice
- Dynamite
- Rope
- Cell Phone
- 4 Fairy Crowns
- Watering Can
- Chairs

SOUND EFFECTS

- THUNDER and LIGHTNING
- QUITTING/ON-DUTY BELL
- CRASHING and FOOTSTEPS (as if through underbrush)

COSTUMES

With the exception of Avery, these are traditional European fairy tale characters and should be easily recognizable as such. To help the audience identify them easily, each one should be costumed as traditionally as possible. While planning costumes, remember that each character needs a specialized hat to hang on his/her name peg.

AVERY – Professional business attire.

VAL – Peasant shirt, vest, trousers, sensible shoes.

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GIANT – Peasant shirt, vest, trousers, sensible shoes. Although he’s short for a giant, feel free to pad him out so that he looks big.

SNOW WHITE – White gown, cape, tiara, dynamite.

ROSE RED – Scarlet gown, cape, tiara.

DWARF MINION – Colorful clothes, curly shoes with bells on the toes. Beard.

HANSEL – Traditional Dutch clothing complete with short pants, suspenders, etc. Should match Gretel in color scheme.

GRETEL – Traditional Dutch clothing, complete with scene-stealing Dutch cap, frilly skirts (short-ish, so that she can karate kick, but with knee socks or leggings underneath), etc. Should match Hansel in color scheme.

CLEVER HANS – Hair resembling a thatched roof. Peasant shirt, ragged vest, high-water patched trousers, bare feet.

ONE EYE – Long black dress, sunglasses with one huge black lens.

TWO EYES – Long black dress, sunglasses with two large black lenses.

THREE EYES – Long black dress, sunglasses with three large black lenses.

WITCH – Long, flowing black robes, warty nose, pointy hat, scraggly grey hair.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set Design:

Scene 1 (The Prologue) – Given that several of these tales are lesser-known, the first scene acts as a sort of prologue to set the stage for the audience. It’s important, however, not to lose the audience’s attention during the Witch’s offstage monologue (which should only take approximately four minutes and thirty seconds when read at an appropriate pace). You have several options for presentation. Choose whichever one you think fits your budget, suits your cast, and will provide maximum engagement for your particular audience:

- Use the stage directions as given in the script, with characters standing as automatons throughout the Witch’s storybook reading, moving only to exit.
- Project woodcuts or lithographs from some of the original *Grimm Brothers Fairy Tales* on either a scrim or a screen above the stage, with characters either standing beneath the screen or being revealed by the scrim as they’re described by the Witch.
- Have the characters quickly pantomime their stories as the Witch reads them.

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- Make use of shadowbox or puppet theatre for a more storybook feel. This will be especially effective if your audience includes lots of small children.

All of the other scenes take place either in the Happily Ever After Hours Break Room or The Wood. Feel free to be as structured or as whimsical with these set designs as you would like.

Break Room - There should be a row of pegs along one wall where the characters can hang their hats when they go “off duty.” This enables the audience to identify the characters by name more easily as they enter in second scene. Be sure that the On/Off Duty sign is large and in a fairly obvious place to be easily seen by the audience. It must switch back and forth as indicated in the script.

You will need three doors against the back wall of the set marked CASTLE, WOOD, VILLAGE. Technically, characters only need to pass in and out of the door marked WOOD; however, the other two doors should be available for characters to enter through as they “clock out” in the first scene.

Entrail Tree: In the last scene, an Entrail Tree rises directly from the ground. (Lest you haven’t read the script yet, fear not: this is not, in fact, a tree made of entrails. Nor does it produce entrails. You’ll see.) You have a few options for how you can bring about the magical rise of the Entrail Tree:

- Build your set with a trapdoor function that will allow you to bring up the tree directly from the ground.
- Construct a one-dimensional tree that can lie flat and then be brought to rise via a rope and pulley system.
- Use your ingenuity to develop a third option that works better for your particular location and group of actors. Remember that audiences of small, low-budget productions tend to be very forgiving. As long as you get the tree into place at the appropriate time so that the spell can be broken, all will be well.

AUTHOR NOTES

Every writer of comedy knows that there's a delicate line between writing good farce and going overboard. If such a line exists, this script dances along it. Of the plays I've written, I consider this one to be the most entertaining for its sheer ridiculousness. The fact that the plot is ridiculous should surprise no one who's actually read *Grimm's*.

Since first reading the tales as a child, I continue to find many of them inherently creepy. Every few pages, you have people sneaking around in the woods, cutting off parts of their own feet, marrying animals, getting turned into birds, receiving mysterious gifts of clothes from benevolent hazel trees, pushing old women into ovens, burying entrails in the ground, ripping themselves in half, and so forth. In our current climate of political correctness and social monitoring, the idea that anybody ever told these stories to children almost boggles the mind!

Yet the tales speak to something basic in all of us: hence their continued popularity despite their moderately horrific details. The basic ideas that good is rewarded and evil punished; horrible family members almost never get away with being horrible forever; courage and resilience trump social privilege and physical beauty—these are only a few of the universal themes explored in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*.

Although on one level *Happily Ever After Hours* pokes fun at these themes, on another level, it also fulfills them. If you have half the fun presenting this play as I did writing it, then we'll both come away pleased.

A note regarding trigger warnings: Although mental illness is serious and professional therapy actually quite helpful, this play makes light of the proceedings. Because Snow White straps dynamite to her chest in an effort to “end it all,” there could be some slight concern regarding what this might trigger for certain audience members. The decision to put a trigger warning in your program (or not) is totally up to you, but I thought it best to let you know that the option is available.

PROLOGUE
ACT ONE, SCENE 1
EMPTY STAGE

AT RISE: *Bare stage, ONE EYE, TWO EYES and THREE EYES stand center stage, backs to audience. ALL other characters stand in a ring behind them, aligned in order of appearance. As each name is called, the character will face the audience and freeze, staring expressionlessly forward. SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED hold hands, HANSEL and GRETEL in super-hero pose, etc. [NOTE: See Director's Notes for options regarding alternate openings.]*

WITCH: *(Offstage, gentle tones.)* Once upon a time there lived three sisters: One Eye, Two Eyes, and Three Eyes.

ONE EYE, TWO EYES, and THREE EYES rotate to face audience.

Though One Eye and Three Eyes mocked Two Eyes for her ordinary number of eyes and attempted to starve her to death out of sadistic cruelty, Two Eyes did not despair, for a kind and mysterious woman in a pointy black hat gave her a little goat—one that could bleat a table full of food into existence, as goats sometimes can. All went well for Two Eyes...until her sisters discovered her magical food-bleating goat...and slaughtered it. Two Eyes buried the goat's entrails deep in the ground, and from that spot sprang a magnificent tree. Now it just so happened that this particular Goat Entrail Tree produced golden apples, as Goat Entrail Trees sometimes do. Alas, poor Two Eyes soon discovered that not even a golden-apple-producing Goat Entrail Tree could appease her sisters and that a crop of golden apples did little to help her feel any less lonely.

ONE EYE, TWO EYES, and THREE EYES exit.

In that same village lived two children whose parents had abandoned them in the forest in order to ensure more natural resources for themselves. Lost and alone, young Hansel and Gretel

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HANSEL and GRETEL rotate to face audience.

soon stumbled upon an entirely edible house, as children in the midst of strange forests sometimes do. When the poor, unsuspecting homeowner—a little old woman in a pointy hat—realized that her house was being consumed by a set of disenfranchised youths, she began heating a large kettle of...*soup* in her oven...yes, soup. In hopes of giving them some real nourishment, of course. Misconstruing her kind intentions, Hansel and Gretel cruelly shoved her into her own fire. Had they only asked a few questions first, it all could have ended very differently. But they didn't.

HANSEL exits.

Shortly thereafter, Gretel was courted by young Clever Hans,

CLEVER HANS rotates to face audience.

who, sadly, was not very clever at all. He was also poor. But Gretel did not despair. Instead, she gave Clever Hans a series of helpful assets disguised as gifts. Unfortunately, he had no idea what to do with them. When Gretel gifted him with a needle, he stuck it into a hay stack. The knife he stuck in his sleeve, and the goat he put into his pocket. He dragged a piece of bacon home on a string, carried a calf on his head, and so forth. Now, Clever Hans may have been a bit slow, but he wasn't stupid. Even he could sense that things weren't going well with Gretel, so he sought guidance from a wise old woman in a pointy hat. She advised that the time had come for a bit of romance. "Just cast some sheep's eyes at her," she told him, "and she'll be all yours. Women can rarely resist men who shower them with adoration...even if those men are idiots." Gouging the eyes out of the sheep proved challenging, but his Gretel was worth it. Gretel, being somewhat hardened to violence at this point, what with having recently attempting to murder that poor old woman, was able to react more positively to having a bucket of sheep's eyes thrown into her face than you might imagine. But still. Every relationship has its limits. The two soon parted ways.

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CLEVER HANS and GRETEL exit.

In this same village lived a tailor.

VAL rotates to face audience.

One fine morning, he killed seven flies with one blow.

GIANT rotates to face audience.

The local giant, upon hearing that the tailor had killed “seven in one blow,” and being somewhat stronger of brawn than of brains, assumed that the tailor had killed seven *men* and challenged him to a competition performing feats of strength. The tailor, being stronger of brains than of brawn, used his cunning to outmatch the giant. When the giant squeezed water from a rock, the Valiant Tailor squeezed whey from cheese. When the giant threw a stone as high in the air as he could, the tailor threw a bird, which promptly flew away and never came back, to the astonishment of the poor giant. This nonsense went on for some time, with the tailor pulling con after con, until eventually he even became a king of the giants through false pretenses. And thus he learned that brains trump brawn, that lies are only wrong if you get caught, and that there’s a sucker born every minute, even in the realm of giants. And the giant learned nothing.

VAL and GIANT exit.

Finally, in this same village lived two sisters: Snow White and Rose Red.

SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED rotate to face audience.

Although they had a loving mother, and should have grown into sweet, loving, sympathetic young women, they turned out to be selfish, irritable—and, frankly, a bit off. Day after day, they ran free through the deepest parts of the forest, carrying on strange communications with mysterious creatures. Every day they held hands while whispering in unison—

SNOW WHITE, ROSE RED and WITCH: We'll not leave each other, never. We will be together forever. Never to sever. Together. Together. *Forever.*

WITCH: That was disturbing. As I was saying. The two vowed never to leave one another, but as you can imagine, all of that playing alone in The Wood eventually led to trouble. One of them got tangled up with a dwarf—

DWARF MINION rotates to face audience.

and I think there was something about a bear—and the next thing they both knew—

SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED release hands, slowly rotate heads to lock soulless eyes, and turn forward to stare straight ahead again.

—the relationship soured. And then...

THUNDER and LIGHTNING. WITCH enters. DWARF MINION inserts himself between SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED, holding their hands. The WITCH'S voice changes as she enters.

and then—there was...me.

ROSE RED: You.

WITCH: Me.

SNOW WHITE: You.

WITCH: Me!

DWARF MINION: *You.*

WITCH: Yes, yes. We've covered this. Me!

SNOW WHITE: This is all your fault.

WITCH: I fail to see what I had to do with any of it.

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SNOW WHITE: You cursed that bear—I mean, my husband. The prince. You know. Reginald. You sent him into The Wood—directly toward *our house*—

WITCH: Not this again. He looked good as a bear. You seemed to like him well enough.

SNOW WHITE: He was a *bear* who played *hop scotch*. And, oh yes, he didn't *eat me*. Of course I liked him well enough.

ROSE RED: And then you sent that horrid dwarf—

DWARF MINION: Standing right here.

ROSE RED: You enchanted his nasty beard to get tangled in that bush—

DWARF MINION: Still standing right here.

ROSE RED: And you sent that dopey prince Oliver and bewitched me to fall in love with him—

WITCH: Love spells? I would *never*.

ROSE RED: We were going to stay together forever.

SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED: Together. Together. *Forever*.

DWARF MINION drops their hands and backs away.

DWARF MINION: That's so creepy.

ROSE RED: Shut up, minion.

SNOW WHITE: You've ruined us!

WITCH: You ruined yourselves. I simply provided the ways and means.

SNOW WHITE: Mother dead, Rose Red married off to that *buffoon* of a prince, and *me* married to his *brother...the bear*—

WITCH: (*Cackling, wiping tears from eyes.*) Ah ha ha. That's right. Oh, I'd *forgotten*. Married to a bear. I love that part. Say it again.

SNOW WHITE: No.

WITCH: So you're married to a prince who's occasionally a bear. What's so bad about that? I know a few women who wouldn't mind so much if their biggest problem was that their husbands hibernated eight months of the year. They'd probably be thrilled.

SNOW WHITE: They've never had to smell his breath when he woke up.

ROSE RED: Yikes.

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WITCH: Well! It looks as if my work here is done. Wishes granted, curses lifted, fates settled, stories all tidied up...nothing left to do but live happily ever after. Or not. That's up to you. Either way, I think *someone's* earned a little break. (*Indicating herself.*)

SNOW WHITE: No! You can't just leave us like this.

WITCH: Like what?

ROSE RED: Everything's all messed up! Those three girls with the weird eyes all have self-esteem issues. And they can't stop rhyming. What's with all the rhyming?

WITCH: The what?

SNOW WHITE: And Hansel and Gretel are being indicted for *murder*—well, maybe it's just manslaughter—I don't really know—

WITCH: Not my problem.

ROSE RED: Clever Hans is heartbroken, Snow White and me are separated...and the only one who's even coming *close* to a happy ending is that idiot of a tailor, and he doesn't even deserve it because he's a *jerk*. Those poor giants...

WITCH: Your point?

SNOW WHITE: I think her point is that at the very least, we all probably need therapy.

WITCH: Ah. I thought there was something I forgot. (*Pulls out cell phone.*) Excuse me. I have to make a call. (*Exit.*)

ROSE RED: Well. Isn't that just typical.

SNOW WHITE: What?

ROSE RED: Oh, come *on*. Where *were* you, Miss Let's-Tell-the-Witch-What-We-Really-Think? "We'll get her alone, Rose. Then we'll show her."

SNOW WHITE: We will. Everything is in place now. She's played right into my snow-white hands.

DWARF MINION: Ugh, a revenge plot? You've got to be kidding me.

ROSE RED: What do you *mean* everything is in place?

SNOW WHITE: You'll see.

ROSE RED: What will I see?

SNOW WHITE: You'll see.

ROSE RED: When?

QUITTING TIME BELL rings.

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SNOW WHITE: Now.

SNOW WHITE snaps her finger, Lights out with finger snap.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2
HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM.

AT RISE: *Chairs are set in half-moon semi-circle facing audience. At rise, characters enter from the three doors back stage left marked as follows: CASTLE; VILLAGE; THE WOOD. Characters enter from these doors at their first speech. Each hangs his/her hat on the proper peg before he takes a seat. QUITTING TIME BELL rings again. Arm of the clock moves from ON DUTY to OFF DUTY.*

VAL: Dis is an outrage, dat's what it is. An outrage.

GIANT: Yeah.

VAL: I can't believe it. It's gotta be da dumbest thing we ever done.

GIANT: Yeah.

ROSE RED: I sincerely doubt that.

VAL: Nobody ast you, *Rosie*.

ROSE RED: I've told you a million times. Don't call me that.

CLEVER HANS: Actually, you've only told him (*Pauses to take out small notebook and make a mark in it.*) eighty-six times.

ROSE RED: Here we go.

CLEVER HANS: I counted.

ROSE RED: Of course you did.

HANSEL: Good show, my man!

GRETEL: Don't encourage him.

HANSEL: But Gretel! Just look at him. I think the poor creature could do with a boost.

GRETEL: He's part of the patriarchy, *Hansel*.

HANSEL: Well. Only a little.

GRETEL: He threw a bucket of eyeballs in my face.

HANSEL: Right.

CLEVER HANS: Hello, Gretel.

ONE EYE: (*Mocking him.*) Oh Hans! You are so Clever!

THREE EYES: You're the smartest boy ever!

TWO EYES: Oh, would you two just—whatever.

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CLEVER HANS: The smartest boy ever. Hmmm, thank you. But I'm not sure that's even possible to know—

AVERY: (*Enters from stage Right.*) Oh, hello. Is this—um— (*Consults paper.*) the Happily Ever After Group?

VAL: So. You're the one's been sent ta "straighten us out." How nice. And on a *Friday*, too.

CLEVER HANS sits up very straight.

AVERY: Well, I wouldn't exactly put it like that—

ROSE RED: Of course you wouldn't.

AVERY: But excuse me—the agency's instructions were a bit confusing. I mean, there has to be some sort of mistake. These protocols seem a bit—

HANSEL: Hello! Allow me to welcome you. I'm Hansel.

GRETEL: And I'm Gretel.

AVERY: Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Hello, all. (*Takes a seat, signals for others to join her.*) I'm sure we're all going to have a remarkable time of healing and discovery together.

ROSE RED: I'm sure we are.

AVERY: Now, then. According to your employer, none of you have ever had therapy before, but due to some recent reports to the Better Business Bureau—

VAL: (*Suspicious.*) Reports? What reports?

AVERY: Murder, cannibalism, fraud, child abuse, cruelty to animals, torture...I mean, it's some pretty grim stuff. I feel that there must have been some sort of misunderstanding and that many of these claims are unfounded.

ROSE RED: Oh, *certainly*.

AVERY: But never mind that. Let us begin. Now. First we must go around the circle, greet one another, and tell something we're struggling with.

VAL: Oh, we must, must we?

AVERY turns her head slowly and fixes him with a look. VAL shifts in his seat, drops his eyes, and mutters to himself. GIANT pats him on the back. VAL slaps GIANT'S hand away.

AVERY: I will allow you to go first.

GIANT: (*Chuckling.*) Yeah.

VAL: (*Blustering.*) Well—of all the—what are you—

AVERY: Your name?

VAL: Da Valiant Tailor. But you can call me Val.

AVERY: Say hello, everyone.

ALL: Hi, Val!

AVERY: And what's one of your struggles?

VAL: Don't got any.

AVERY: Everyone has problems, Val.

VAL: Not me. Don't got none.

GIANT: Yeah?

VAL: I mean, other than you.

AVERY: Interesting. (*Takes notes.*)

VAL: Why's dat "interesting"?

AVERY: Okay, moving on—

VAL: No, wait—you can't just—

AVERY: (*Pins VAL with another look.*) Now then. Let's continue.

VAL: Joke's on you, lady. Dis one don't got a name.

GIANT: Hi. My name's Pete.

VAL: It is?

ALL: Hi, Pete!

AVERY: And what's your greatest struggle, Pete?

GIANT: My greatest struggle is that I keep gettin' confused.

AVERY: How unfortunate.

VAL: You're name's *Pete*?

AVERY: Would you like to tell us about it?

GIANT: Nah. (*Glances at VAL.*) Not right now.

VAL: Pete. Huh.

ROSE RED: Typical.

VAL: You got somethin' to say, *Rosie*?

ROSE RED: Not to you, *Valerie*.

AVERY: Is there a problem, Val?

VAL: It's just—he's "The Giant."

AVERY: He's not that tall.

GIANT: (*Sadly.*) Yeah.

ROSE RED: Honestly, you're so insensitive.

VAL: *I'm* insensitive?

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AVERY: Now, then. No more of that, you two. Let's move along.

HANSEL and GRETEL rise and come forward center.

HANSEL: Hello! I'm Hansel—

ALL: (*Lackluster.*) Hi, Hansel.

GRETEL: And I'm Gretel!

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) groans, etc.

HANSEL and GRETEL: And we have no problems!

GRETEL: Other than the patriarchy.

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) groans, etc.

HANSEL: We haven't had any problems *lately*. Not since Gretel suggested that we work together in a mutually-collaborate effort to vanquish our common foe—

GRETEL: —by pushing her into her own oven—

HANSEL: —and listening to her anguished cries—

GRETEL: —until they faded away into silence—

HANSEL: —and we knew at last that we had succeeded.

AVERY: I see. And has your life always been this perfect?

HANSEL: Not at all, Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist!

GRETEL: Not at *all*.

HANSEL: Once our parents abandoned us in The Wood—

GRETEL: —where we nearly starved to death—

HANSEL: —but maybe you already know how that turned out—

GRETEL: —so there's no point in going over it again—

HANSEL: —but you could tell her about that other thing.

GRETEL: What other thing?

HANSEL: You know. That other thing. (*Indicates Clever Hans.*)

GRETEL: Oh. That thing.

CLEVER HANS waves at GRETEL.

HANSEL: You see, my sister was once betrothed—

GRETEL: —but it doesn't matter because it didn't work out—

HANSEL: —because he threw a bucket of eyeballs in her face—

GRETEL: —and because betrothal is a construct of the patriarchy.

AVERY: Hmm, I see. How do you feel about the breakup now?

GRETEL: I feel great! It's like I've been telling you, girls. We don't need a man to make us feel worthy—

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) We know, yes, shut up, etc.

AVERY: Yes, well, thank you for that, um (*Consults notes.*), Hansel and, um, Gretel...

HANSEL: Thank you, Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist!

ROSE RED: Excuse me, but how long is this going to take?

AVERY: Your employer scheduled a ninety-minute session.

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) groans, etc.

AVERY: I'm sorry, but a court order is a court order.

VAL: And if we refuse?

AVERY: The courts will freeze all your company assets until you comply.

CLEVER HANS: Freeze our—what?

AVERY: Yes. No more paychecks until you complete your therapy sessions.

CLEVER HANS: They'll freeze them in a *freezer*?

AVERY: Pardon?

CLEVER HANS: Why would they *freeze* them?

VAL: She means they'll keep it all locked up, genius.

ONE EYE: Poor Clever Hans, so far behind.

THREE EYES: He's feeble-mindedness defined.

TWO EYES: Oh, would you two just...never mind.

CLEVER HANS: Hi, Two Eyes.

TWO EYES and Clever Hans exchange waves.

Come on, guys, let her say something.

ONE EYE: Why? Why *should* we let her talk—

THREE EYES: To you, you walking cuckoo clock?

TWO EYES: (*Long pause.*) Sorry. I've got nothing. (*Another pause.*) Rhymer's block.

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) groans, etc.

AVERY: Now, then, ladies. If you're done? Please introduce yourselves one at a time.

ONE EYE: Hi, I'm One Eye.

ALL: Hi, One Eye!

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TWO EYES: Hi, I'm Two Eyes.

ALL: Hi, Two Eyes!

THREE EYES: Hi, I'm Three Eyes.

ALL: Hi, Three Eyes.

AVERY: And?

VAL: Are you sure you want to do dis?

AVERY: What do you mean?

ONE EYE: We sisters three are under curse.

THREE EYES: As you can see, we speak in verse.

TWO EYES: Take it from me. It is the *worst*.

AVERY: Excuse me, but did you say....a curse?

THUNDER and LIGHTNING.

ONE EYE: When we two chopped the Entrail Tree—

THREE EYES: The curse fell down upon us three.

TWO EYES: No clue why it included me.

AVERY: I'm sorry....did you just say...*Entrail Tree*?

ONE EYE: The stench was nasty, sure. Like, woah.

THREE EYES: It gave us golden apples, though.

TWO EYES: Trust me, you don't want to know.

AVERY takes notes.

CLEVER HANS: Excuse me, Ms. Avery? I have a question.

AVERY: Certainly. But first you must introduce yourself.

CLEVER HANS: Hi, my name is Clever Hans.

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) Snickering, coughing, etc.

AVERY: Do it properly, please.

ALL: Hi, Clever Hans.

CLEVER HANS: Hi.

ALL: Hi.

CLEVER HANS: Um, hi.

ROSE RED: Oh, come *on*. What do you want?

CLEVER HANS: Um, Excuse me? Avery Ainsworth? Um, hi.

AVERY: Hello.

CLEVER HANS: Hi. I was wondering if we're ever going to talk about courting?

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AVERY: Courting?

CLEVER HANS: Because I'm really bad at it, and I want to get better.

This one time, I was courting this girl? Gretel? Right over there?

And, um—

GRETEL: Remember, ladies. “Courting” is merely a social construct designed by the patriarchy to keep women from realizing their own innate power and making their own choices.

HANSEL: And also to exert dominance. Don't forget that part, Gretel.

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, *Hansel*.

AVERY: Hansel. Gretel. Thank you for your input. But it's time to let—

Clever Hans—was it?

CLEVER HANS: Yes, ma'am.

AVERY: How nice. It's time to let Clever Hans speak.

SNOW WHITE: (*Offstage.*) NO! It's time to let *me* speak!

ROSE RED: *Finally.*

AVERY: What was *that*?

VAL: Don't ask.

SNOW WHITE and DWARF MINION enter.

SNOW WHITE: Greetings, *minions*.

ALL: Hi, Snow White!

AVERY: Snow White?

SNOW WHITE: The one and only!

AVERY: Well, then. Hello. Welcome. Please take a seat.

SNOW WHITE: Excuse me?

AVERY: You're a little late to group, but I'm sure we'll be able to bring you up to speed. Won't we? And who's your guest?

DWARF MINION: Hi, I'm—

SNOW WHITE: Excuse me, but who are *you*?

AVERY: Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

VAL: She's a therapist.

GIANT: Yeah.

SNOW WHITE: I KNEW IT. (*Pacing, yelling at the sky.*) So this is it, huh? This is your next big move? Well, guess what! It's not going to work! BECAUSE I PLANNED FOR THIS. DO YOU HEAR ME? I PLANNED FOR THIS!

AVERY: Interesting. (*Takes notes.*)

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VAL: It's just that she's got this whole revenge thing going with the woman in the pointy hat.

AVERY: The woman in the pointy hat?

VAL: Yup. They're always at each other's throats.

GIANT: Yeah.

DWARF MINION: And guess who always gets stuck right in the middle of it?

CLEVER HANS: I don't like it. It's scary.

SNOW WHITE: QUIET, FOOLS!

AVERY: Now wait just a moment. If you would like to speak in group, you must understand that while you are free to say what you wish, there are still rules that govern our interaction with one another. These rules have been put in place to ensure the mutual emotional protection of all group members. Now, if you would like to take a seat and introduce yourself properly, I will allow you to continue.

SNOW WHITE: You'll—you'll *allow me* to continue?

AVERY: Yes.

SNOW WHITE: I don't think you understand what's going on here.

AVERY: How about you explain it to me.

SNOW WHITE: What's going *on here* is that I'm finally going to *end this*.

AVERY: How nice. And what is it that you're going to be ending?

SNOW WHITE: (*Flings open her cape to reveal rows of explosives strapped to her chest. There is a lighter in her hand.*) *Everything.*

Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM.

AT RISE: *Lights up.*

CLEVER HANS: But what do you *mean* you're going to end everything? That's a lot of things to end.

ROSE RED: Are you going to start counting them?

CLEVER HANS: Well there's me. Then there's you. And you and you and you and you. And those guys. And the Giant. And then there's my mother. And the goat that I put in my pocket that one time—

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VAL: (To ROSE RED.) What's wrong with you?

ONE EYE: Stop your counting, little dope.

THREE EYES: Did you think a *list* would bring us hope?

TWO EYES: Leave him alone. It's how he copes.

AVERY: I'm sorry, I'm afraid I really must insist that you do the proper introduction.

SNOW WHITE: Fine. I'm Snow White—

ALL: Hi, Snow White!

SNOW WHITE: And this is my dwarf minion.

DWARF MINION: Hey.

AVERY: I'm sorry...did you say *dwarf*?

DWARF MINION: Don't, okay? Just don't.

ROSE RED: He's sensitive about his height.

GIANT: Yeah.

AVERY: I see. Well, that's a separate issue. I'd like to return to a statement you made earlier (*Consults notes.*) when you said that you would end...“everything”? And the fact that you also have explosives strapped to your chest. I thought perhaps it would be prudent if we just concentrated on those two issues for now.

SNOW WHITE: Fine. Whatever.

AVERY: Let's start with the dynamite.

SNOW WHITE: Nobody touches the dynamite!

AVERY: Of course not. Would you like to tell us why you're wearing it?

VAL: Ain't it obvious? It's because she's nuts.

ROSE RED: Nobody calls my sister nuts.

VAL: Sorry to break it to you, doll, but she ain't wearing that stuff because she's sane.

AVERY: Why *are* you wearing it? Just so I can be clear in my notes about why I'm Baker Act-ing you.

SNOW WHITE: (*Pacing.*) Well, it's like this. I got to thinking. We're all stuck in these horrible stories, right? We try to make things better, we ask for advice, but nothing we do ever *works*. Nothing ever *changes*. It's all the fault of the Witch. Don't you see? She doesn't *deserve* us.

VAL: Nobody deserves you, Sweetheart.

HANSEL: Now, then, old man, let's not be rude to the ladies—

GRETEL: Quiet, Hansel. She's obviously a strong woman who can fight her own battles. As are we all! Right, girls?

ROSE RED: Nobody asked you, *Gretel*.

SNOW WHITE: SILENCE! Now then. Here's what's going to happen. I'll give you a few moments to say your goodbyes, and then (*snaps on lighter*) I'm ending this.

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) No! Why! Stop! You can't!

ALL rush at SNOW WHITE, who jumps up on chair holding hand out to stop everyone, putting lighter close to fuse. ALL back up in alarm.

ROSE RED: *This is your genius plan? You blow us all up?*

SNOW WHITE: My *genius plan*, sister dear, is to eliminate the reason for the Witch's existence. Think about it. Does she have her own story? No! What does she *do* all day when she's not helping us? Nothing! That's what! All she has is *us*, and without *us*, there's no *her*. Don't you see?

AVERY: (*Taking notes.*) Somewhat...irrational...paranoid...danger to self and others...

VAL: Then why not just blow *her* up?

GIANT: Yeah!

SNOW WHITE: Because she has *magical powers*, moron. Think about it.

DWARF MINION helps SNOW WHITE down from chair.

She can teleport, freeze time, and...and...turn people into *bears*. I don't think a little bomb would be much of a challenge. But *you* on the other hand. Look at you. All of you. So weak. So helpless. So defenseless.

GRETEL: Not quite!

GRETEL charges at SNOW WHITE as if to karate kick her. SNOW WHITE evades. GRETEL goes skidding across the floor.

SNOW WHITE: Minion! Deal with this...thing.

GRETEL: I'm no *thing*. I am *woman!* Aaaaaaahhhh!

DWARF MINION, looking bored, easily puts GRETEL in a headlock.

SNOW WHITE: Now, then. Where were we?

HANSEL: Unhand my sister!

GRETEL: Stay out of this, *Hansel*.

ROSE RED: Yeah, strong women can take care of themselves. Right, Gretel?

VAL: Not dat you would know anything about dat, would you, *Rosie*?

GIANT: Yeah.

AVERY: Mr. Tailor—excuse me—

VAL: Val.

AVERY: Val, I really must insist that you curtail your use of negative statements.

VAL: Wazzat?

ROSE RED: She wants you to stop saying stupid stuff. So basically that means you should just stop talking.

VAL: We got da Ice Queen over there wit' dynamite strapped to her chest, and that overgrown dwarf wit' Miss Bossypants in a headlock, and you want *me* to—

ROSE RED: She sure does, *Valerie*.

AVERY: The same goes for you, Ms. Red. As amusing as you both might find your mutually-antagonistic interplay, the current situation does seem somewhat delicate. Perhaps we can deal with your relational issues later.

ROSE RED: Our *relational issues*?

DWARF MINION: And I'm *not* overgrown. Take it back.

VAL: Of all the stupid—

HANSEL: (*Jumping in front of AVERY manfully.*) Now, now, let's all calm down. No need to take your fear and anger out on Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

GRETEL attempts to back herself and DWARF MINION toward HANSEL so that she can kick him.

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, *Hansel*.

HANSEL: Now, Gretel, I'm only trying to be a gentleman.

GRETEL: By affirming through your actions that women are inherently more fragile than you, and thus in need of your protection?

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HANSEL: Good point. (*Sits down.*) My apologies, Ms. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist. I had no right to infringe upon your right to protect yourself. I respect you as a woman—no, I respect you as a *person*.

AVERY: It's *Dr.* Ainsworth.

HANSEL: You're a *doctor* too? Guys, she's not just a psychologist! She's a doctor!

AVERY: Well, actually—

DWARF MINION: Excuse me. You're on my foot. If you could just...

GRETEL: What. This?

GRETEL stomps on DWARF MINION'S foot. Surprised, he releases her. GRETEL takes another pass at SNOW WHITE, with equally dismal results. At a motion from SNOW WHITE, DWARF MINION moves to recapture GRETEL. The two begin circling one another and continue to play cat and mouse until the WITCH enters.

Come and get me, you oversized wacko.

DWARF MINION: I'm *not* an oversized wacko. I'm a normal-sized one.

AVERY: (*Makes notes.*) Oh dear.

CLEVER HANS: (*Wringing hands.*) What's going on? Why is this happening? I don't like this.

ONE EYE: Oh, calm down there, Clever One.

THREE EYES: It's all just a bit of fun.

TWO EYES: Just take deep breaths. Come here... (*Awkwardly.*) hon?

ONE EYE and THREE EYES laugh at TWO EYES. CLEVER HANS crosses to TWO EYES, who comforts him.

ROSE RED: Well, isn't that sweet. Little Miss Entrails, caring for the Dim Wit.

SNOW WHITE: Shut up, Rose.

ROSE RED: Oh, I see. So you're allowed to come in here ranting and raving and threatening to *blow us all up*, but I'm not even allowed to talk?

SNOW WHITE: Pretty much.

AVERY: Now, ladies—I know this is a tense situation, but—

VAL: I thought we said we'd heard enough from you.

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HANSEL: Okay, Val, let's just calm down.

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, Hansel—

ROSE RED: Out of my way—

SNOW WHITE: Will you all just SIT DOWN—

CLEVER HANS: Oooohhhhhh, I don't like this! (*Shouting.*) "Star of midnight / Star of fire / Give me now my one desire / Shine down clear / Shine down bright / Send the Witch to make it right!"

THUNDER and LIGHTNING.

WITCH: (*Enters, texting.*) What now?

CLEVER HANS: You came! Oh, I'm so happy!

SNOW WHITE: You.

WITCH: Me.

ROSE RED: You!

WITCH: Me!

DWARF MINION: You!

WITCH: Ehhh, whatever. What do you want?

CLEVER HANS: My Lady, everyone was fighting, and I didn't like it.
And Snow White might explode!

WITCH: So?

CLEVER HANS: So...help?

WITCH: Why would I help? I hate Snow White. And the rest of you are annoying.

CLEVER HANS: But you always help me in the story...

WITCH: That's different. That's the *story*. I have no choice. But I don't have to help when I'm off the clock.

CLEVER HANS: What?

WITCH: Open your eyes, boy. It's after hours.

SNOW WHITE: Oh, ho ho. Now they get a glimpse of your true colors!

WITCH: (*Bored.*) Oh, you're still here?

AVERY: Hello, I don't think we've met. I'm Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist—

WITCH: Desino.

AVERY freezes.

There. That's better.

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VAL: What did you *do* to her?

WITCH: Do you really care?

GIANT: Yeah.

WITCH: She's frozen. So what?

CLEVER HANS: But why would you *freeze* her? Why is everybody freezing everything today?

WITCH: It's not a big deal. Happens all the time.

CLEVER HANS: But I don't like it! Why is she *frozen*? Guys?

WITCH: Let it go.

CLEVER HANS: Two Eyes, what's going on? I don't like this!

TWO EYES comforts him again.

WITCH: You're the one who summoned me, kid. You can't whine about the consequences.

CLEVER HANS: I thought you would *help* me. Like *last time*. When I needed help with Gretel and you told me about the eyeballs.

SNOW WHITE: You think she *helped you*? Think about it. How did that work out for you?

CLEVER HANS: Um, not too well. I did my best. I caught all the sheep and gouged their eyes out and gave them to Gretel in this big bucket, but it didn't really help—Ohhhhh.

SNOW WHITE: You see? She's not a helper. She's a *ruiner*.

ONE EYE: Black boots, black robe, pointy hat—

THREE EYES: Rides the night winds like a *bat*—

TWO EYES: Not that there's anything wrong with that.

WITCH: What's with them?

ROSE RED: What do you mean?

WITCH: Why are they talking like that?

SNOW WHITE: Don't you *know*? You've cursed them, obviously.

WITCH: I never! And besides, even if I had, it wouldn't outlast the story.

Curses don't affect you after hours. You know that. The only thing that would cause this would be—Come here, you three.

WITCH touches ONE EYE and THREE EYES on the forehead, reaching TWO EYES last.

Interesting....

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VAL: What?

HANSEL: What is it, My Lady? What's wrong? Are they okay?

WITCH: They're glitching.

SNOW WHITE: They're *what*?

WITCH: Glitching. It means one of them has tried to change the story.

Maybe all of them.

ALL: (*Horrified.*) Gasps, cries, no! etc.

VAL: Change...the story?

ROSE RED: Is that even...possible?

ONE EYE: How could you say such things! How dare you!

THREE EYES: Oh, I see. This must be where you—

TWO EYES: I'm sorry.

Pause while her sisters gape at her.

I didn't mean to scare you.

ONE EYE: Scare us? Why, Two Eyes—you—what ever—

THREE EYES: We thought the curse was odd, but never—

TWO EYES: I meant no trouble whatsoever.

ONE EYE: What was it that you tried to switch?

THREE EYES: Go on and tell us. We won't snitch.

TWO EYES: Why don't you just ask the Witch?

WITCH: I'm sure I don't know.

TWO EYES takes CLEVER HANS'S hand.

Ahhh. I see.

HANSEL: Gretel, look!

GRETEL: No way.

WITCH: Dear child, he has a story of his own. With someone else.

He's not for you.

ONE EYE: Oh, you little fool. I knew it!

THREE EYES: Way to go. You really blew it!

TWO EYES: I ask you, please. Don't misconstrue it.

CLEVER HANS: What? Two Eyes? What's happening? Why is everybody mad at us?

WITCH: You think you're misunderstood, girl? That there's never been a love like yours? Very well. But know, all of you, that there are consequences to trying to change your stories. And remember. Changing things in there means changing things out here. And of course, the reverse is true as well. But this isn't the time for Plot Theory.

VAL: Not that it matters if, you know, you let her *blow us up*.

GIANT: Yeah.

WITCH: Ah yes. I had forgotten. You seem to be in the middle of a *situation*.

VAL: You could call her that.

SNOW WHITE: I am *not* a "situation."

WITCH: And what are you?

SNOW WHITE: YOUR DOOM!

WITCH: Desino.

ALL freeze but the WITCH and SNOW WHITE who circle one another.

So this is your plan, is it? To have that poor idiot summon me here so that you could blow me up? It won't work on me, you know. I'll be gone before the fuse runs down.

SNOW WHITE: That is *not* my plan.

WITCH: Then please. Enlighten me.

SNOW WHITE: If you must know, my plan is to blow *all of us* up, so that you have no further reason for existence.

WITCH: So that's how you think it works. That's precious.

SNOW WHITE: That *is* how it works...isn't it?

WITCH: Never mind that. You know when I unfreeze them, they're just going to ask for my help, right?

SNOW WHITE: Which you don't have to give, technically, because you're off duty.

WITCH: Exactly. I wonder what I'll do?

SNOW WHITE: Wait, what—

WITCH: Desino.

ALL but the WITCH are now frozen.

Every day. Every day it's something. "Our parents abandoned us, My Lady!"; "My sisters are starving me to death, My Lady!"; "I need help winning the girl I love, My Lady!" It just never *ends*. No time to eat. Not time to sleep. No time to work in my garden. And now even in my *off hours*—! No. This has to *stop*.

WITCH snaps her fingers. All but SNOW WHITE and AVERY unfreeze, groaning.

CLEVER HANS: Help us, please, My Lady!

HANSEL: You really must give us a sporting chance, Old Girl.

WITCH: I must, must I?

HANSEL: Well, only if you want to—um—support the struggle of the poor and the underrepresented whom society has—um—a little help, Gretel?

GRETEL: It's pointless.

WITCH: Quiet, all of you. Before I blow you up myself.

CLEVER HANS: Please, please don't do that.

WITCH: (*Longsuffering sigh.*) Okay. Here's the deal. I will give you one chance. One chance to prove to me that you're not a cluster of incompetent fools incapable of accomplishing even the simplest of quests. You will have until (*Consults time.*) sunrise to complete this quest. And listen well, because I'm only saying it once. Are you ready?

HANSEL: Yes!

WITCH: "Find the broken spar and mast; / Fix them to the foredeck fast. / Climb the empty tower tall; / Knock the webbing from the wall. / Weave yourselves some fairy crowns; / Sing and prance down through the town. / These three cause ill to depart— / They warm the blood and stir the heart. / Bring me golden apples three, / Then you'll get a boon from me." And the boon is that I'll keep her from blowing you up. Unless you ask for something else, of course. It's your funeral.

CLEVER HANS takes a deep breath as if to respond.

Desino.

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ALL freeze. The WITCH snaps one finger and SNOW WHITE unfreezes, groaning.

Here's the deal, Sugar Toes. I've given them a seemingly impossible task. If they complete it, I help them get rid of you. If they don't complete it, you all blow up. Either way, I'm rid of you. So that's something. And I'll take this, thank you very much. *(Snags lighter.)*

SNOW WHITE: Hey, wait just a minute—

WITCH snaps fingers, all but AVERY unfreeze, groaning.

WITCH: Whelp, my work here is done. Back to my gardening. Toodle pip!

Lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1 HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM

AT RISE: *Characters are clustered into groups according to teams. Team One: ONE EYE, HANSEL, GRETEL, CLEVER HANS. Team Two: THREE EYES, ROSE RED, VAL, THE GIANT. Off to the side SNOW WHITE is tied to a chair with TWO EYES and the DWARF MINION standing guard. AVERY is still frozen.*

VAL: Arright. Team One, report.

HANSEL: *(Saluting.)* We will focus on accomplishing the first two of the Witch's tasks. Sir!

GRETEL pulls down HANSEL'S salute and shakes her head.

SNOW WHITE: I think you mean "failing." Minion!

DWARF MINION: *What.*

SNOW WHITE: Excuse me?

DWARF MINION: Um. Well, seeing that we'll all be dead in a few hours, I assumed that the imposed barriers of class distinction no longer hold sway.

SNOW WHITE: Excuse me?

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HANSEL: He means he doesn't have to listen to you anymore.

DWARF MINION: Sorry. I should have used smaller words, as befitting my station. My bad.

SNOW WHITE: I'll overlook it. *This once.* Anyway, I'm hungry. Perhaps while you're busy exercising your personal freedoms, you would like go to the village and fetch me a fresh cheese.

ROSE RED: You think this is a good time to be *sending out for cheese?*

SNOW WHITE: Is there a bad time to send out for cheese?

ROSE RED: You're unbelievable.

GRETEL: I thought you preferred apples.

SNOW WHITE: Don't even talk to me about apples. I want my cheese. Dwarf! Go. Now.

VAL: Go ahead. Two Eyes can keep an eye on things. I mean, two eyes. Both of the eyes she has. On things. You know what I mean.

ROSE RED: Well said.

DWARF MINION: I might as well go. It puts me out of the blast zone, anyway. *(Exits.)*

VAL: You *(Points to ROSE RED.)* shut up. You *(Points to HANSEL.)*, repeat for me what your two tasks are.

HANSEL: Well, erm. Let's see. Find the fairy web...of gold. Something something something...old...? Dum be dum be dum...dah dee dah—

ALL: *(Ad libs.)* Sighs, groans, etc.

GRETEL: "Find the broken spar and mast; / Fix them to the foredeck fast. / Climb the empty tower tall; / Knock the webbing from the wall." But I'm only repeating it for clarification purposes. Not because anybody told me to.

VAL: An' where will you be enterin' the story?

GRETEL: Through The Wood.

VAL: *(Prompting.)* And why is that?

GRETEL: Because the tower is deep in the heart of The Wood. Then we pass through its darkest core and arrive at the coast, where we will find the derelict ship.

HANSEL: As I said. Find the broken spar...of gold—bah bee bah bee bah bee—mold?

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, Hansel.

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HANSEL: But—he—he just! Just a few minutes ago! He *just* asked me—

GRETEL gives HANSEL a look.

Never mind.

SNOW WHITE: Oh yeah. You guys are going to succeed *for sure*.

CLEVER HANS: Um, excuse me? Mr. Tailor?

VAL: I told ya a million times, kid. Call me Val.

CLEVER HANS: Actually, you haven't told me a *million* times. It's only been—um...where's my notebook? I know I put it somewhere—

ROSE RED: Now you've done it.

VAL: Okay, okay, kid. Not a million times. We get it. What do you want?

CLEVER HANS: There's something about what the Witch said. Something I have to think about.

VAL: Okay... (*Long pause.*) and?

CLEVER HANS: I'm thinking.

TWO EYES seems to have an epiphany. She waves her arms for attention, but nobody notices her.

ROSE RED: We don't have time for this.

CLEVER HANS: No, wait! There's something. The last part—just let me *think*.

VAL: Better do your thinking on the road, kid.

CLEVER HANS: No—there's something—the *apples*—

ROSE RED: *We're* getting the apples.

HANSEL: Right ho! After also doing the rest of it. You know. *Weave* the...bum be dum dum *crowns*...Da be dah be dah be.... *Towns?*

GRETEL: “Weave yourselves some fairy crowns; / Sing and prance down through the town. / These three cause ill to depart—/ They warm the blood and stir the heart. / Bring me golden apples three, / Then you'll get a boon from me.” Honestly, Hansel.

VAL: All of dat stuff. That's our business.

GIANT: Yeah.

HANSEL: I say! Good show, Gretel!

GRETEL: I don't need the affirmation of the patriarchy, *Hansel*.

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HANSEL: No, of course not. But Gretel, *I'm* not the patriarchy. I'm—

VAL: Off you go.

SNOW WHITE: Have fun failing.

GRETEL: You're an embarrassment to woman-kind.

SNOW WHITE: Whatever.

CLEVER HANS: But—but—if you would all just wait—I think I—wait.

Two Eyes, don't you see—it's—

Team One exits through door marked "The Wood," dragging CLEVER HANS.

VAL: Okay, listen up, bozos.

GIANT: Yeah!

VAL: You too.

GIANT: Okay.

VAL: We get in dere, we weave dose crowns, we do some prancin', then get da golden apples. Any questions?

TWO EYES waves, but is ignored.

ROSE RED: Sounds fantastic.

SNOW WHITE: Don't you mean *fait*astic?

TWO EYES waves frantically.

VAL: Don't worry, sweetheart, we'll be back before you have time ta miss us. Just keep your eyes on dese two. And don't let nobody blow up.

SNOW WHITE: And tell the Dwarf to hurry up with my cheese!

ROSE RED: Shut up about the cheese!

Team Two exits through the door marked "Castle."

SNOW WHITE: So...know any good jokes? Oh, that's right. You can't talk without your sisters here to rhyme with you. (*Begins slowly working on a rhyme of her own.*) Poor Two Eyes...can't talk...without her *rhyme supply*.

TWO EYES: Or *can I?*

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SNOW WHITE gasps, lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 2
THE WOOD

AT RISE: Team One wanders single-file through The Wood with much stopping to bicker. Characters enter in order of their first speeches.

GRETEL: Come along, now. Step lively!

HANSEL: Ah, it's good to feel that crisp mountain air in my lungs again!

CLEVER HANS: We're not on a mountain.

HANSEL: It's a figure of speech.

CLEVER HANS: What's a figure of speech?

HANSEL: That's an excellent question, Clever Hans. I've been meaning to tell you. It's about time *someone* tells you. A figure of speech is something not meant to be taken literally—

GRETEL: Oh, shut up, Hansel. Nobody—

HANSEL: —asked me. Yes, Gretel, so you keep saying. But apparently I'm just the patriarchy. So what would I know?

GRETEL: Excuse me?

HANSEL: Never mind.

CLEVER HANS: Where's One Eye? Has anyone seen her?

HANSEL: One Eye, are you back there, ma'am?

ONE EYE: Yes, everyone. Here I am.

HANSEL: You'll want to stay close. After all, you never know what might be lurking in The Wood after hours.

CLEVER HANS: It's after hours! Wouldn't The Wood be pretty much empty, since everyone's clocked out for the night?

HANSEL: That's what I'm hoping. But who knows?

GRETEL: You know, you really shouldn't call her *ma'am*. It's rude. You're basically classifying her by her age *and* her gender instead of recognizing her inherent personhood. It's not—

CLEVER HANS: Wait a minute... She answered me. One Eye, you talked without your sisters here. I didn't know you could do that.

HANSEL: Jumping jelly beans!

GRETEL: How did you do that?

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ONE EYE: You spoke to me first, so tit for tat?

HANSEL: I didn't know it worked like that! Oh dear, now I'm doing it.

GRETEL: One Eye! I'm glad to know that you can speak without your sisters present. It's always a good thing when the women of the world are able to find their own voices. Although frankly, just between us girls, I do find the rhyming a bit alarming.

HANSEL: I don't know. I think it's rather charming. I did it again! Dang it!

GRETEL: Come! The night passes quickly. We must be getting on.

ONE EYE: To succeed before the dawn!

CLEVER HANS: But, um, guys. I have something to say.

ONE EYE: Go ahead, little man. Talk away.

HANSEL: We're ready to hear what you have to say. I did it again!

Wait a minute... Wait. Hold up. You don't suppose... *I'm cursed?*

GRETEL: Calm down, Hansel. You're not cursed.

ONE EYE: Trust me to know. I'm well-versed.

HANSEL: Well, you know, I wasn't worried *at first*—(*Claps his hands over his mouth.*)

CLEVER HANS: Miss Gretel, listen. The Witch's quest... there's something about it that I noticed. I don't think we actually have to—

GRETEL: Trust me, little man, there's nothing about the Witch's quest that we haven't already figured out. That "Valiant Tailor" might be a chauvinist pig, but he's also sly. All we have to do is fix the mast on the derelict ship and clean some cobwebs from that tower with the creepy long-haired girl in it. Team Two will take care of the rest, and then we're back out of the story by sunrise. And nobody blows up.

CLEVER HANS: But that's what I'm trying to tell you! If you would just listen—

GRETEL: We don't have time to hear your drivel.

HANSEL: Now, now, sis. Don't be uncivil—AAAAHHHH!!! (*Runs off into the trees, exits.*)

GRETEL: Suffering snickerdoodles, Hansel. You're not cursed! (*Chases after HANSEL, exits.*)

CLEVER HANS: Wait—Miss Gretel—Don't you see? It's all about the *apple tree!*

ONE EYE: Hey, you guys, wait. Wait for me!

CLEVER HANS and ONE EYE exit. Lights out.

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ACT TWO, SCENE 3
THE WOOD

AT RISE: VAL and ROSE RED enter, breathless, wearing fairy crowns.

VAL: Well, that was embarrassing.

ROSE RED: You dance like an angry dinosaur.

VAL: A what?

ROSE RED: What was *this*? (*Pantomimes a dancing T-Rex.*)

VAL: As if you were much better. You dance like this. (*Hops around on his toes.*)

ROSE RED: Not that it matters. I don't think anybody was actually watching us. The village seemed deserted.

VAL: Well it *is* after hours.

ROSE RED: Yes. It's a bit creepy, actually. It's weird to see it all quiet like this. I keep thinking that something's going to come bursting out of the trees and scaring us at any minute—

GIANT: (*Enters, twirling a massive fairy crown around one finger, singing.*)

OH I LIKE LIKE LIKE LIKE TO HIKE HIKE HIKE

THROUGH TREES TREES TREES

AS MUCH AS I PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE—

ROSE RED: Please, would you stop singing? It's not helping.

GIANT: (*Continues singing.*)

BUT I LIKE LIKE LIKE LIKE TO HIKE HIKE HIKE—

VAL: Oh, trust us, we know.

THREE EYES: (*Enters, wearing fairy crown.*) Just let him go.

ALL stop to stare at THREE EYES in amazement.

It has a nice flow.

VAL: Well. *Whaddya know.*

ROSE RED: I didn't think she could talk, though.

THREE EYES: Apparently so.

GIANT: Woah.

VAL: Wait a minute. Are we rhyming?

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ROSE RED: We're not now.

VAL: We were.

THREE EYES: Are you sure?

ROSE RED: Hang on...are *you* doing this to us?

THREE EYES: It's fine. Don't kick up such a fuss.

ROSE RED: But I don't *like* rhyiming with you.

THREE EYES: Looks like you'll just have to make do.

ROSE RED: We have to stop this.

VAL: But how?

THREE EYES: That's not our biggest problem now.

GIANT: Yeah. I mean...no! I mean...it's not?

ROSE RED: You're right. Our biggest problem is that if we don't solve the Witch's quest by sunrise—

VAL: Your insane sister will blow us all up. Yeah, we know.

ROSE RED: She's not insane. She's just—just—a bit—

VAL: Go on. What is she, exactly?

ROSE RED: Never *mind*.

VAL: That's what I thought. Now, about that golden apple tree...

THREE EYES: Why are all of you looking at me?

ROSE RED: No need to play stupid. We know all about it.

GIANT: Yeah!

VAL: You and your sisters—the dead goat—dat weird tree—

GIANT: YEAH!

VAL: Da rumors went all over town.

THREE EYES: But don't you know—we chopped it down!

GIANT: NO!

THREE EYES: Afraid so.

ROSE RED: Right, but I know you tucked some of those apples away.

VAL: Yeah. Dere must be sum'thin' left. An' you're gonna show us where they're hidden.

ROSE RED: Some that fell by the wayside, or—or—got laid by for a rainy day, that you hid away, and so on.

THREE EYES: Nope. I'm afraid they're just all gone.

GIANT: NO!

ROSE RED: Great. Just great. What next?

CRASHING in bushes as FOOTSTEPS approach.

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What was *that*?

VAL: Nuthin' to worry about. I'm sure it's just a villager out for a walk.

ROSE RED: In the middle of the *night*?

VAL: Maybe he's sleepwalking.

ROSE RED: I thought we decided that the village was empty.

VAL: (*Nervous.*) Maybe because everyone was out sleepwalking?

GIANT: (*Scared.*) Yeah...?

ROSE RED: Oh, come *on*. I've never seen such babies in my life. I'm sure it's just Team One. Or...or maybe it's Snow White's husband out foraging for a late-night snack. He doesn't leave the story much anymore, even after hours.

VAL: You mean...her husband da bear? That's supposed to make us feel better *how*?

THREE EYES: Perhaps we should move along just now.

GIANT: Yeah.

VAL: Or stay very still so whatever it is out there doesn't hear us.

GIANT: Yeah.

ROSE RED: We don't have *time* to stand still. If we don't get the quest complete by sunrise, we're dead anyway. And I'm sure whatever's out there is probably less deadly than an *explosive bomb*.

DWARF MINION: (*Comes crashing through the trees looking back over his shoulder, trips, falls in front of group.*) Ooof.

ROSE RED: See what I mean?

VAL: Well, well, well. Lookee what we have here. The Dwarf.

GIANT: Yeah.

DWARF MINION: Did you guys hear that?

VAL: What?

DWARF MINION: There's something crashing around out there.

ROSE RED: That was you, you idiot. You're the one crashing around.

DWARF MINION: No, someone other than me. Or *something*.

GIANT: Yeah?

ROSE RED: Wait a minute. What are you doing out here, anyway? Weren't you supposed to be getting cheese?

THREE EYES: A task that should be accomplished with ease.

DWARF MINION: (*Rising.*) I did get the cheese. I was on my way back with it, when this *giant bear* came out of nowhere. I climbed a tree to get away from him, but then I remembered that bears can climb trees too, and I thought I was done for. But this one didn't climb up after me. He just sat down at the bottom of the tree and stared up at me for a while. Only he didn't seem to be staring at me. It was the cheese. I swear he couldn't look away from it. So I dropped it down, he caught it, and went lumbering off into The Wood as calm as you please!

ROSE RED: You know who it is, right?

DWARF MINION: Reginald.

VAL: Whadda stupid name for a bear.

ROSE RED: Honestly, how obtuse can you be? He's Snow White's husband, you imbecile. Don't you pay attention to anybody's story other than your own? Come on, Pete. Let's go get those apples. (*Stomps off, exiting.*)

VAL: What's her deal?

DWARF MINION: I don't think she likes you.

GIANT: Yeah.

GIANT exits, deliberately bumping into VAL on his way out.

VAL: Of all da stupid—you know what? Never mind. We don't have time for 'dis. Gotta go check on dat Entrail Tree and find the golden apples somehow. You comin'?

DWARF MINION: No. I think I'll just go back to the village and try to get another cheese.

VAL: Maybe you'd better come wit' us. Cheese won't do you much good if we don't solve the quest in time.

DWARF MINION: But if you solve the quest and I haven't come back with the cheese... (*Shudders.*) I don't like to think about what she might do.

THREE EYES: You do what you have to do.

DWARF MINION: (*Begins backing away, toward village.*) Maybe if she gets her cheese, she'll be in a mood to reconsider blowing everything up.

VAL: I dunno. It's just cheese.

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DWARF MINION: If there's one thing I've learned, it's never to underestimate the power of a good cheese. Good luck.

VAL: Back atcha.

DWARF MINION exits.

Well, let's go check out that Entrail Tree.

THREE EYES: For once, I think I completely agree.

Lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 4 HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM

AT RISE: SNOW WHITE is tied to a chair by the waist (hands can be worked free), TWO EYES pacing, AVERY still frozen.

SNOW WHITE: So let me get this straight.

TWO EYES: Oh, great.

SNOW WHITE: I know, I know. "Here we go again."

TWO EYES: It's like you're reading my brain.

SNOW WHITE: The phrase, dear little Two Eyes, is "It's like you're reading my mind."

TWO EYES: I *know*. But I can only respond in kind.

SNOW WHITE: Oh yes. The rhyming. Silly me.

TWO EYES: What about Miss Avery?

SNOW WHITE: Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist?

TWO EYES: You know she's gonna hold you responsible for this.

SNOW WHITE: Who do you mean, the Witch or Avery?

TWO EYES: That depends. Which would you find more unsavory?

SNOW WHITE: Ha! As if it's going to matter. Your friends are going to *fail*, and then you know what's next. *Boom*. That's it. Curtains. No more. Lights out.

TWO EYES: Clever Hans'll figure it out.

SNOW WHITE: That moron? Hah. Not likely.

CLEVER HANS: (*Enters, bursting through door marked The Wood.*) I figured it out!

SNOW WHITE: Oh, crumbs.

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CLEVER HANS: Hello, Two Eyes.

TWO EYES: Oh! Clever Hans! What a nice surprise!

CLEVER HANS: It's good to see you too. And guess what! I figured it out! Almost the whole quest was just a trick to distract us. All except for the last part. That was real. The other stuff was just a distraction. The apples are all we really need!

TWO EYES: I don't have any more, not even a seed.

CLEVER HANS: I know.

SNOW WHITE: Oh! That's right. Because your sisters chopped the tree down. How sad.

SNOW WHITE lets loose a long string of witchy cackles just as the rest of Team One enters, GRETEL dragging a still-panicking HANSEL along.

HANSEL: The rhymes...the rhymes...they're everywhere.

ONE EYE: It's all right. Calm down. There, there.

HANSEL screams. SNOW WHITE continues to laugh.

GRETEL: What are you laughing about, crone? Don't you know that we've solved our half of the Witch's quest? As soon as the other team is back, we'll call the Witch, and it'll all be over.

SNOW WHITE: You've solved *nothing*. Soon the sun will rise, and the Witch will come and give me back my lighter, and then—(*Lets out a long, evil cackle ending in a cough.*)

GRETEL: Well. That was really something to see—

HANSEL: Gretel, let go, you're hurting me—aaaaaahhhhhh!

GRETEL: Leaping lollipops, Hansel, you're *not* cursed.

HANSEL: Maybe I am! You don't know! You might be a *girl*, but that doesn't mean you know *everything*.

SNOW WHITE: Yeah, maybe he is cursed. What would *you* know, *Gretel*? You wouldn't recognize a curse if it carried a personalized letter of introduction from the Witch herself.

CLEVER HANS: Um, wow. Okay. That was sort of mean.

HANSEL: But also true. Right? I mean, I'm *obviously* cursed, and all Gretel can say is—

GRETEL and HANSEL: —nobody asked you, *Hansel*.

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HANSEL: You see? Do you see? You see what she's like.

SNOW WHITE: Well, we're seeing it, but I'm not sure why we're *watching*. It's not like either of you is much to look at, to be honest.

HANSEL: Thanks *so much*.

CLEVER HANS: I think you look fine, Hansel. You too, Gretel.

GRETEL: Thanks, but my self-esteem isn't based on any man's assessment of my appearance. Besides which, why would I care what *you* think? It's not like you know anything about anything. You're the kid who hid a needle in a haystack and walked home with bacon on his head. And put a cow in his pocket or something. I mean, come on.

CLEVER HANS: Okayyyy, that was even meaner. But I'll forgive you, because you're a sad person who doesn't seem to know better than to say mean things to somebody who's trying to be nice. And you're also wrong, because I have something here—(*Begins patting pockets.*)—it wasn't a cow—if I can just find it—

DWARF MINION: (*Enters, holding huge cheese wheel aloft.*) Looking for this?

CLEVER HANS: No, as a matter of fact, but—

SNOW WHITE: My cheese!

GRETEL: Oh, please.

HANSEL: Careful, Gretel, careful. I think you might be catching it—

GRETEL: Great galloping gumdrops! There's nothing to catch!

SNOW WHITE: Except you might catch a vision of your life flashing before your eyes when I blow you all up. Which should be in about... fifteen minutes, if my watch is accurate. I've never looked forward to sunrise more in my life.

DWARF MINION: That's sick. You know what? I don't think you *deserve* this cheese.

SNOW WHITE: Nobody *deserves* cheese. It's a human right. Like oxygen or basic cable. Or the internet.

DWARF MINION: Not for you.

SNOW WHITE: Give me the cheese.

DWARF MINION: No.

SNOW WHITE: Give it!

DWARF MINION: This is my cheese now. Do you hear me? Mine.

SNOW WHITE: Are you kidding? You have no personal rights. You're a *minion*.

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TWO EYES: That seems, to me, a matter of opinion.

SNOW WHITE: (*Attempts to stand, tied to chair, and begins scooting about.*) You know what? That's it. I've had it! I don't even care if the others aren't back yet. Surely they're within blast radius. Where's my lighter????!!!

CLEVER HANS: The Witch took it. Remember?

SNOW WHITE: OF COURSE I REMEMBER. Fine! It doesn't matter. Minion! Return to The Wood and fetch me two sticks. Quickly! Go on.

DWARF MINION: You're kidding me, right?

CLEVER HANS: Nobody's blowing anybody up. It's time to end this. "Star of midnight / Star of fire—"

SNOW WHITE: No!

CLEVER HANS: "Give me now my one desire—"

SNOW WHITE: Lalalalalalalalalalala—

CLEVER HANS: "Shine down clear / Shine down bright—"

SNOW WHITE: —lalalalalalalala—

CLEVER HANS: "Send the Witch to make it right!"

THUNDER and LIGHTING. WITCH enters.

WITCH: You rang?

SNOW WHITE: Noooooooo!

CLEVER HANS: We have it.

SNOW WHITE: No they don't! They don't have it. It's fine. You can go back.

WITCH: *All of it?*

CLEVER HANS: We don't need all of it, and you know it.

WITCH: Of course I know it. I'm just surprised that *you* know it.

CLEVER HANS: It's just the last two lines. They're the only ones that mattered. Right?

HANSEL: Of course! I see it now! Wait... what?

GRETEL: The last two lines. Ah, yes. I do see.

HANSEL: The last two lines. Hmm. Dah be dah be dah be...*gold*...something, something, something...*sold*? Am I close?

ONE EYE: Almost.

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GRETEL: “Find the broken spar and mast; / Fix them to the foredeck fast. / Climb the empty tower tall; / Knock the webbing from the wall. / Weave yourselves some fairy crowns; / Sing and prance down through the town. / These three cause ill to depart— / They warm the blood and stir the heart. / Bring me golden apples three, / Then you’ll get a boon from me.” Do you hear that? The first tasks only *warm the blood and stir the heart*. They’re decoys. Something to keep us too busy to get to the last ones until it was too late. But the golden apples... those are the things she wants in exchange for a wish.

WITCH: Well. This is a fine kettle of fish.

Lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 5 HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAKROOM

AT RISE: *SNOW WHITE has been untied from her chair and brought center stage as if for judgment, hands tied in front of her.*

SNOW WHITE: They know nothing. Don’t worry about it! You can just go back to your—um—gardening—and we’ll call you when it’s sunrise. Unless you want to save time and give me my lighter right now—

WITCH: I think it’s best in situations like these to follow proper procedure, don’t you? That way in case of a story audit, we’ve got all our ducks in a row. All the ducks that haven’t blown up, I mean.

CLEVER HANS: That was insensitive.

ROSE RED: I’ll say.

CLEVER HANS: Besides, we’re not going to blow up. I have a plan.

WITCH: *You have a plan?*

CLEVER HANS: Yes.

HANSEL: He does! Wait, you do?

WITCH: Interesting. Then why aren’t you rhyming?

CLEVER HANS: What?

WITCH: You should be rhyming. Ah, well. No matter. Some plot threads are best left unpursued.

TWO EYES: Don’t be rude.

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WITCH: No offence intended, little Two Eyes. Maybe he hasn't changed as much as I thought. Or maybe he hasn't changed at all. Maybe his talents have been there all along...just, shall we say, unrecognized.

GRETEL: Why are you looking at me?

WITCH: No reason. You're not the only one. Just the most vocal. Well! What's next? Let's see this clever plan in action.

CLEVER HANS: Um, hello. Excuse me, Mr. Dwarf. Will you do something for me?

DWARF MINION: Me?

CLEVER HANS: Yes. Run into The Wood and see if you could hurry the other team along. If you want. Because for my plan to work, they really should be here.

DWARF MINION: Might as well. If it gets me away from *her*. Here. Make sure *she* doesn't get this.

DWARF MINION hands CLEVER HANS the cheese and exits.

WITCH: Is that *cheese*?

HANSEL: Well, yes...Snow White was hungry earlier, and—um—sent out for cheese.

WITCH: Do you mind? I'm a bit peckish.

CLEVER HANS: Actually, if we could just—there's something else we need to do first—

WITCH: Oh, you go ahead. Don't mind me. (*Takes cheese.*) Anybody mind if I cut this?

During the ensuing speech, WITCH begins cutting shavings of cheese off of the wheel and handing them out to everybody but SNOW WHITE, whom she teases/bates with little slices.

CLEVER HANS: No, it's okay. You can go ahead and cut the cheese.

I'll just—I know I have it here somewhere—

TWO EYES: What are you looking for, dear?

HANSEL: Yeah, what's this big plan?

CLEVER HANS: You know.

HANSEL: I do?

CLEVER HANS: Your sister does. I mean, she should.

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HANSEL: She does?

CLEVER HANS: She gave me some presents once. I didn't know what to do with most of them. Some I hid, others I wore on my head, and one of them I just put in my pocket. Everybody made fun of me about it...so I think I might have moved it, but I can't remember where.

GRETEL: Ah, yes!

HANSEL: We're saved!

CLEVER HANS: But I really can't remember.

HANSEL: Oh no! What do we do!

CLEVER HANS: I guess I just have to think harder.

HANSEL: Step back, everyone. Give him some room!

ONE EYE: We're doomed.

WITCH has reached AVERY.

WITCH: Maybe not.

WITCH snaps her fingers. AVERY unfreezes and stumbles around a bit. When she looks up, the WITCH offers her cheese.

Cheese?

AVERY: Cheese?

WITCH: It'll help with the headache.

AVERY: Did I fall asleep?

WITCH: For a little while.

CLEVER HANS: You haven't been asleep, Miss Avery. You've been frozen.

AVERY: Frozen?

GRETEL: Put on pause.

HANSEL: But now you're back! It's good to see you again, Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Remember how you were asking us earlier about our biggest problems? Well, I don't like to bother you like this just after you've woken up and everything, but I've got an update—

GRETEL yanks HANSEL back and shushes him.

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AVERY: Thank you, but—what—what happened? The last thing I remember...

HANSEL: That's what I'm talking about! Okay, quick recap: The Witch froze you so that you wouldn't interfere with her plan, which was to send us on an impossible quest so that she wouldn't have to stop Snow White over there from blowing us up. Do you see her over there? That's her with the dynamite and the mad face. Give a little wave, Snow White.

SNOW WHITE: My hands are tied, genius.

HANSEL: Well, as you can see, her hands are tied. We did that to keep her from getting two sticks and rubbing them together to light the string of dynamite strapped to her chest. Show her the dynamite.

SNOW WHITE: I'm sure she can see it, *Hansel*.

HANSEL: Yes. Well, as I was saying, we went into The Wood to fix a ship and knock down some creepy cobwebs while the other half went to weave fairy crowns and dance and get the golden apples. That way the Witch would help us and not give Snow White her lighter back. You see?

AVERY: (*Slowly, backing away.*) May I go now?

WITCH: If you'd like.

CLEVER HANS: Wait, Miss Avery, don't go. Maybe you can help me.

AVERY: I'd love to help, but I think this session might have ended, um— (*Consults watch.*) about seven hours ago, and I don't mean to be *that person*, but I'm not really comfortable with *missing time*, so if you don't mind—

CLEVER HANS: Wait. You want to remember what happened to you, right?

AVERY: I'm not sure. On one level, I know that I *should* want to remember it, but—

CLEVER HANS: Well, there's something I want to remember. So you know what that's like. Will you help me?

AVERY: Well, I—I don't—it's just that—

HANSEL: Please? Say, you will, Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

GRETEL: I ask you, woman to woman. Please help us.

SNOW WHITE: It's all right, don't worry. You can just go.

TWO EYES: If you do, she'll kill us, though.

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ONE EYE: And it'll be all your fault, you know.

CLEVER HANS: One Eye, don't carry on so.

HANSEL: They've started...they're here...they've found us...the rhymes...

TWO EYES: (To AVERY.) Don't be alarmed. This just happens sometimes.

AVERY: Wait a minute. You and your sisters spoke in rhyme—

HANSEL: But now it's happening *all the time*.

GRETEL: Oh, pipe down. Rhyming's not a crime.

AVERY: No, but it is strange. I wonder what's causing it. When exactly did you start this rhyming spree?

ONE EYE: When we chopped down our Entrail Tree.

HANSEL: That's not when it started for *me*.

CLEVER HANS: Me neither, Miss Avery.

GRETEL: For me, it seemed entering The Wood was key.

WITCH: Are you certain this is the question you want to be asking right now? The sun's about to come up. Not that I mind either way. I just thought I'd give you a little perspective.

AVERY: This is turning into the strangest night.

GRETEL: Right. Let's get on with the show.

CLEVER HANS: I need Miss Avery's help, though.

AVERY: I fail to see what I can do. Or what the problem actually is. Am I being pranked? What is even happening?

CLEVER HANS: I need help remembering.

SNOW WHITE: No he doesn't! It's okay! You can just go.

AVERY: Remembering what? Are you missing time too? I thought it was just me.

SNOW WHITE: It's just you. Don't worry about it. Better run along quick before you lose more time.

AVERY: And that's another thing. Why are you tied up? What have they been *doing* to you?

SNOW WHITE: Oh, you know...it's been awful, really. They've been so unkind.

TWO EYES: Wait a minute. Stop. Rewind.

AVERY: Seriously, what's with the rhyming? What's going on?

WITCH: They're attempting something that they never should have tried.

AVERY: What, felony kidnapping? Unlawful imprisonment with the intention of committing bodily injury?

WITCH: No. They're attempting to change their stories.

AVERY: What?

WITCH: You see, for every one of them, a certain fate has been predetermined. Attempt to alter your fate in any way, and there are some serious repercussions. That's why it's always best to stick with the script given to you. Because change never has done anybody any good.

AVERY: Well. If that isn't the most ridiculous thing that I've ever heard.

SNOW WHITE: No, it's true. The only *real* way to effect change is to end it all.

AVERY: Hence the dynamite?

SNOW WHITE: It's not just for dramatic effect, you know. It's the real thing. And if that sun rises before they give the Witch her golden apples, then...well. You know.

AVERY: You're crazy.

WITCH: Wait a minute. I thought you were a certified mental health professional, and professionals don't call people—

AVERY: You're crazy too. All right, Clever Hans. I'll help you. What do you need?

SNOW WHITE: It's too late! Don't you see! Even if you could plant the tree, there's no time for it to grow, and—

AVERY: Be quiet. Hans, tell me what you need.

SNOW WHITE: Too late! It's still curtains! Lights out! That's all, she wrote!

CLEVER HANS: Help me remember where I hid the goat.

WITCH: Ah! The *goat*.

CLEVER HANS: The goat.

SNOW WHITE: The goat!

AVERY: Come here, Hans. Sit down.

CLEVER HANS: Okay.

AVERY: Are you comfortable?

CLEVER HANS: Almost.

AVERY: What can I do to help you relax?

TWO EYES comes over and puts a hand on his shoulder.

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CLEVER HANS: Nothing, I'm okay.

SNOW WHITE: Wait, what are you doing? Why isn't he rhyming anymore? What's happening?

WITCH: Quiet! This is getting good.

AVERY: Close your eyes.

SNOW WHITE: Don't close them!

CLEVER HANS: Okay.

AVERY: I'm going to count backwards from five. By the time I reach zero, your mind will be totally blank and free of all care.

GRETEL: I don't think that's something he needs to work at.

WITCH: Quiet.

AVERY: Yes, I must ask for complete silence. The mind is a delicate thing. If he's brought out of the hypnosis before he's ready, there's no telling what might happen to him. He might never be the same. Are you sure you want to do this?

CLEVER HANS: Yes.

AVERY: Okay. Five...four...three...two...one. Hans?

CLEVER HANS: Yes.

AVERY: You're looking for a goat. A goat that you hid somewhere.

CLEVER HANS: Yes.

AVERY: Do you know where you put it?

CLEVER HANS: Yes, ma'am.

AVERY: Would you like to tell me?

Door to The Wood bursts open, and Team Two tumbles in loudly. DWARF MINION is at the front of the pack, yelling. CLEVER HANS jolts backward in his chair, head lolling, eyes rolling back. His head rolls forward and down.

DWARF MINION: I FOUND THEM! GUYS, LOOK, I FOUND THEM!

VAL: Got here as fast as we could! We're here!

ONE EYE: Well, that much is *abundantly clear*.

AVERY: He wasn't ready to wake up!

HANSEL: Oh dear, oh dear.

ONE EYE: Now his brains will disappear.

THREE EYES: Don't blame us. We just got here.

AVERY: I said no noises *whatsoever!*

ROSE RED: Great job, you guys. Best timing *ever*.

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VAL: He just said hurry back! He never—

AVERY: Quiet everyone. Quiet, please. Hans. Hans? Clever Hans?
Can you hear me? Are you all right? Say something.

SNOW WHITE: Uh, oh. Looks like Clever Hans might turn out being
not so clever!

ALL: (*Ad lib.*) Groans, be quiet, shut up, etc.

WITCH comes over and puts a finger to CLEVER HANS'S forehead.

WITCH: He's all right. In fact, he appears to be... thinking.

SNOW WHITE: He's what?

WITCH: Thinking. Quite quickly and quite deeply.

AVERY: Hans. Hans? Say something.

CLEVER HANS: (*Head comes up slowly, opens eyes. It's clear that
he's a different man now.*) We're going to need a shovel.

AVERY: A what?

CLEVER HANS: A shovel, some water, two strong arms, and a very
fast runner. Hansel! Gretel!

*HANSEL and GRETEL step forward. As CLEVER HANS talks, he pulls
out his little notebook and sketches a map without looking down at it.
DWARF MINION joins them when he is mentioned.*

Go with the Dwarf to the location I've marked on this map. There
you'll find the goat that I hid after mother told me that I needed to
stop carrying him around in my pockets. Hansel, take a knife. Do
what needs to be done. Gretel, hold the goat for Hansel. Bring back
the entrails only. Quick, you three. Use all your speed.

HANSEL: (*Saluting.*) Sure thing, boss. We'll get what you need.

GRETEL pulls HANSEL'S salute down.

GRETEL: Trust us, Hans. We will succeed.

HANSEL, GRETEL, and DWARF MINION exit at a run.

CLEVER HANS: And from you, My Lady, I need the cheese.

WITCH: Be my guest.

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SNOW WHITE: What happened to you?

GIANT: Yeah!!!!

AVERY: I told you I didn't know what the effects of waking him out of the hypnosis would be.

VAL: Sorry 'bout dat. Listen, the Dwarf said you wanted us back here fast. We were just trying to do the best we could. We didn't know—

CLEVER HANS: Don't apologize, Val. As you can see, it's all turned out for the best.

GIANT: Yeah!!!!

CLEVER HANS: If not for your ill-timed entrance, who knows where we'd be?

ROSE RED: Congratulations, *Valerie*. It appears you've done something right for a change.

VAL: Thanks, *Rosie*. Feels good, I gotta say.

SNOW WHITE: Except you're forgetting one thing, *geniuses*. Even if you do get those entrails back and buried, in—oh, I don't know—the next *five minutes*, there's hardly time for an *entire tree* to grow and start producing golden apples before the sun comes up.

GIANT: Yeah! Wait—there's not?

WITCH: Oh my, this is all so entertaining. What's going to happen next?

SNOW WHITE: You're not supposed to be enjoying this.

WITCH: I'm not?

SNOW WHITE: No! You're supposed to be worried that time will run out and I'll blow everybody up and then you'll be out of a job and lapse into non-existence!

WITCH: Still stuck on that idea, are you?

CLEVER HANS: (*To AVERY.*) What do you think—a classic existential crisis?

AVERY: I'm sorry...what?

CLEVER HANS: Think about it. At the end of Snow White's story, she's separated from Rose Red—her emotional anchor—and married off to a man who's hardly capable of meeting her emotional needs, given that he's actually a bear most of the time. So is it any wonder that she would then experience a sense of isolation, which in turn removed her sense of moral boundaries?

ALL stare at CLEVER HANS in shock.

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AVERY: Well, yes, but—

WITCH: Let him go. I'm enjoying this.

CLEVER HANS: What would you recommend, Ms. Doctor Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist? How are we to provide an appropriate means for her sublimation?

ROSE RED: Her... *what?*

VAL: Hold up. Wait. What's happening?

AVERY: I think he's diagnosing her. And correctly, I might add.

VAL: What's the subl—sub—sublim-al-nasshon?

AVERY: Sublimation? That's the process by which a subject is brought to focus more on the positive aspects of his or her existence than on the negative ones.

CLEVER HANS: Often when the individual is brought to look at his or her existence from an outside perspective. Through the eyes of someone else, if you will.

GIANT: Yeah?

CLEVER HANS: Yeah. And I don't mean to alarm anyone, but I have a question.

ROSE RED: I can't wait to hear it.

CLEVER HANS: When did we all stop rhyming?

AVERY: Around the time you sent those three off for the goat.

CLEVER HANS: Ah. Yes. Then it's going to work, I think.

SNOW WHITE: It's *not* going to work. There's just no *time*.

CLEVER HANS: That's what you think. But *I* think there's something you don't know.

SNOW WHITE: Like what?

CLEVER HANS: You'll see.

SNOW WHITE: I hate you.

CLEVER HANS: I'm okay with that.

VAL: How long does it take to butcher a little goat, anyway?

CLEVER HANS: Do you really want to know?

GIANT: Yeah!

VAL: Not really.

WITCH: It's almost sunrise...

SNOW WHITE: Hah! Told you. Where's the lighter?

WITCH: (*Holds it out.*) Here.

GIANT: No!

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ROSE RED: Don't *give* it to her!!! Snow White! Don't you remember?!

We were going to be together forever—together—together—
forever—

SNOW WHITE: We still will be together forever.

ROSE RED: Together forever...in *death*? Are you *insane*?

VAL: You're just now getting' that?

ROSE RED: Don't give her the lighter!!!!

WITCH: Why ever not? Fair's fair. I gave you until sunrise. You have
three minutes left.

SNOW WHITE: They'll never get back on time!

HANSEL, GRETEL, and DWARF MINION burst through the doors. HANSEL and GRETEL are slightly smeared with a red substance. HANSEL grips the knife, GRETEL brandishes a shovel, and DWARF MINION holds a loop of entrails aloft. They pause inside the door—obviously posing—in dramatic tableau.

HANSEL, GRETEL, and DWARF MINION: We're back!

Lights out.

ACT TWO, SCENE 6 HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM

AT RISE: *ALL are gathered around a hole in the ground, watching as DWARF MINION stuffs in the goat entrails. GRETEL is leaning on the shovel, out of breath. CLEVER HANS is standing off to the side, paring cheese slices into the cupped palms of TWO EYES. ROSE RED pours water from a watering can into the hole.*

WITCH: My, this is exciting.

HANSEL: Did you...dig straight through the *floor*?

GRETEL: I am WOMAN!

VAL: Quick! Shove it in!

SNOW WHITE: It'll do no good, fools. You have *two minutes*.

ROSE RED: She's right. It's too late. You may as well give her the
lighter. There's nothing more we can do.

SNOW WHITE: Yes! This is it! I *win*. All of my planning. All of my *work*.

It's come down to this moment, when I—

CLEVER HANS: Excuse me. I hate to interrupt. I'm sure you have something lovely prepared, but I have something to say.

ROSE RED: Yes, *please* shut her up. I can't stand the thought of her voice being the last one I hear.

SNOW WHITE: But...Rose! Don't you understand? I'm doing this for *us*. So that we can be together forever. Together...together...why aren't you saying it, Rose?

VAL: Dat's messed up.

ROSE RED: You're not wrong.

CLEVER HANS: As I was saying, there's something interesting I've realized about cheese. Did you know that cheese contains whey? Not just whey, of course. There's also calcium, vitamins, minerals, and other proteins. What's really interesting about cheese, though, is that during the cheese-making process, there's something added to the milk to help separate the sweet milk into curds. It's called *rennin*.

CLEVER HANS and TWO EYES begin moving toward the hole.

WITCH: You don't say.

VAL: Kid, I know you mean well, but we're about to die. And as much as I love cheese, I don't know that now's exactly the time—

CLEVER HANS: (*Sternly.*) Excuse me, Val, but there's always time for cheese. But as I was saying, cheese contains rennin, which is actually—guess what!—a *digestive enzyme*. It's typically found in the intestinal systems of animals like cows and goats.

ROSE RED: Please. Stop talking about animal intestines and just *let us die in peace*.

CLEVER HANS: No, wait. Don't you see? Watch.

CLEVER HANS dumps the cheese into the hole. ALL step back as the hole starts smoking.

It's a *digestive enzyme!*—the perfect fertilizer for a tree made out of goat entrails!

GIANT: Yeah?

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CLEVER HANS: Yeah.

VAL: Yeah!

ALL ad lib celebration, hugs, and cheers as the Goat Entrail Tree, complete with golden apples, slowly rises from the smoke.

TWO EYES: Hans! That's amazing!

CLEVER HANS: I know.

ONE EYE: Wait a sec. Two Eyes! You're not rhyming. Neither am I!

THREE EYES: The curse is lifted!

VAL and ROSE RED pick golden apples from the tree and hand them to the WITCH.

VAL: How ya like dem apples?

WITCH: You did it.

GIANT: We did it!

WITCH: Oh dear.

SNOW WHITE: *(In shock.)* They did it. They—they actually—

WITCH: That's right. You know what that means.

SNOW WHITE: No.

WITCH: Yes.

SNOW WHITE: You wouldn't.

WITCH: I would.

ROSE RED: What is it? What's going to happen to Snow White?

WITCH: Here's the thing. According to Mr. Smarty Pants over there, our girl in white is suffering from a—what did you call it?

CLEVER HANS: An existential crisis, ma'am. A "dark night of the soul."

WITCH: Yes. And the cure? What do you think Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist?

AVERY: *(Almost catatonic.)* That tree. It just grew there... up into the air...out of nowhere...

HANSEL: The rhymes! There here...

CLEVER HANS: I was afraid something like this might happen.

CLEVER HANS takes AVERY'S hand and leads her center stage to stand near the WITCH.

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TWO EYES: Will she be all right?

CLEVER HANS: It appears that Snow White isn't the only one in need of sublimation, ma'am.

WITCH: I was afraid of that. Well, Snow White first. What do you think?

CLEVER HANS: I think experiencing a different way of life might do her some good. A humbling experience, as it were.

WITCH: I know just the thing.

SNOW WHITE: You're not—not seriously considering—no. No. You can't.

WITCH: Think of it this way, my dear. You'll have a chance to do your prescribed therapy, see your story from another point of view, work on your marriage, and hibernate eight months of the year—all at the same time.

SNOW WHITE: No, no, NO! I *won't* be turned into a bear. I just *won't*!

WITCH: We'll see about that. Dwarf, take her through to the Castle and lock her in the dungeon level until I've gathered the proper materials to cast the spell.

DWARF MINION: I'd be happy to.

GRETEL: I'll help.

HANSEL: As will I!

GRETEL: No you won't.

HANSEL: No I won't.

SNOW WHITE: Noooooo—

GRETEL and the DWARF MINION drag SNOW WHITE off stage.

ROSE RED: I'd better go with them. I have a few things I'd like to say to my sister before she turns into a bear.

VAL: I'll come with you.

ROSE RED: No you won't.

VAL: Yes. I will.

ROSE RED: (*Eyes him appraisingly.*) Suit yourself.

ROSE RED and VAL exit.

CLEVER HANS: Actually, Hansel, there is something I'd like you to do.

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HANSEL: (*Saluting.*) Yes, sir.

CLEVER HANS: Take Dr. Ainsworth through to The Wood. It's cool and quiet—a good place for her to begin adjusting.

HANSEL: Yes, sir! Come along Ms. Doctor Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist. I'm going to take you to The Wood! Where it's nice and quiet! You'll like that.

AVERY: (*Dreamily.*) Will I come back?

HANSEL: I think so.

AVERY: (*Vaguely.*) Well, then. Let's go.

HANSEL and AVERY exit.

WITCH: What are you thinking?

CLEVER HANS: You heard the rhyming. I'm thinking Dr. Ainsworth will be in need of sublimation for a while herself, and what with one of our most popular main characters having just been turned into a bear...

WITCH: You're thinking a character substitution? Those can be tricky.

CLEVER HANS: I'm sure you ran a check on her before you hired her. You know the risks.

WITCH: I did check. No family. No real connections. No interests other than her job.

CLEVER HANS: She seems the type. Maybe a stint inside the story will be good for her in more ways than one.

WITCH: Looks like my work here is done. Well! Off to turn a shrew into a bear. Toodle pip. (*Exits.*)

TWO EYES: Hans? Do you have time to talk?

CLEVER HANS: A minute.

TWO EYES: Okay, well, maybe we could go—

CLEVER HANS: No, I mean I literally have one minute. Look at the time. We'll have to hurry and clock in before we're late.

ONE EYE: And we wouldn't want to be *late*.

THREE EYES: Of *course not*. Because getting chewed out by the boss would be the *worst thing* that's *happened to us lately*.

CLEVER HANS: Hey, Pete?

GIANT: Yeah?

CLEVER HANS: Show them out, would you?

GIANT: Yeah!!

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GIANT grabs *ONE EYE* and *THREE EYES* by their collars and manhandles them offstage.

CLEVER HANS: Now then, shall we?

CLEVER HANS holds out his hand. *TWO EYES* takes it and they exit together into *The Wood* just as the *ON-DUTY BELL RINGS* and sign switches to *ON DUTY*.

THE END

RUTH BUCHANAN

After casting and directing her first neighborhood play in a friend's garage at the age of eleven, Ruth Buchanan's dual love-affairs with theatre and command had begun. After earning a bachelor's degree, she went on to pursue a career in education that has thus far successfully spanned a decade. She would like to thank all of her students--past, present, and future--for helping her to hone her skills in public speaking, crowd control, stand-up comedy, quarterbacking, detective work, first aid, and crisis management. When she is not teaching, coaching drama, improving Shakespeare, or doing freelance writing, she travels the world searching for adventure. She has acted in and directed various dramas over the years, but *The Bard in a Box: The Taming of the Shrew* is her first script publication.

Happily Ever After Hours

by Ruth Buchanan

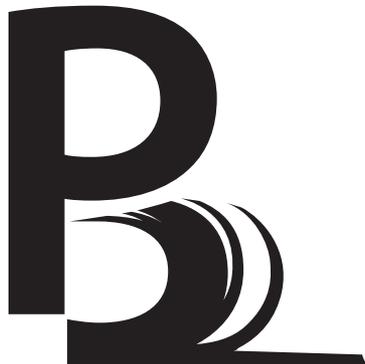
Type: Full Length Play

Genre: Comedy

Duration: 75 minutes

Cast: 8 females, 5 males, 13 total cast

Every night, your favorite fairy tale characters clock out of their stories to enjoy some well-earned rest. But they won't be resting tonight, because tonight, due to an anonymous tip to the Better Business Bureau, all employees of the Happily Ever After Group must begin court-mandated therapy. Despite the professionalism of their psychologist, the first group session goes badly awry. Plunged into an unexpected quest that requires venturing back into the story after hours, members of the Happily Ever After Group find themselves sneaking through The Wood, battling a rhyming curse, and trying to keep from being blown up—all while facing their fears and learning each other's secrets. In this sideways retelling of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, you'll find more comedy, more pop psychology, and way more cheese (both literal and figurative) than you ever bargained for.



BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS
Drama for stage & competition

ISBN: 978-1-60003-840-2