

PLAY 4 ME!

Original Plays for children, teenagers, youth theatre and special needs groups by Emer Halpenny

Copyright Emer Halpenny 2019

All rights reserved. Please note that these plays may be reproduced for rehearsal purposes but copyright will need to be applied for performance. In most cases there will be no royalties to be paid, but permission must be sought via email:

info@emerhalpenny.com

The author also requests that she be credited for each performance.

For more plays see

www.emerhalpenny.com

Contact Emer to discuss play commissions tailor made for your group, workshops and speaking engagements.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY DEPOT

By Emer Halpenny

AGE: Older teens – especially good for exam year students as there aren't many lines to learn. And there's no set!

GENDER: mixed – change names as necessary, though you jeopardize much of the comedy...

PARTS: 9

RUNNING TIME: 10 – 15 minutes

HONOR: The Receptionist at The Birthday Depot – chirpy and happy

JUSTIN: 'Create a Cuddly' party worker

JACINTA: 'Create a Cuddly' party worker

SIOUXSIE: 'Princess Fairy Fun' party worker

DEB: 'Princess Fairy Fun' party worker

LEO: 'Arty Party' worker

VINNIE: 'Arty Party' worker

ROMEO: 'Football Maniacs' party worker

BOOKLYN: 'Football Maniacs' party worker

Music : if possible, an orchestral version of Happy Birthday. As it fades, HONOR, the Receptionist, enters with a plate of party buns stacked up, and a cup of coffee, humming to herself as she settles at her desk, centre stage. All seems blissfully calm – signs on four doors off : CREATE A CUDDLY PARTY ; PRINCESS FAIRY FUN ; ARTY PARTY ; FOOTBALL MANIACS. Our first impressions are of a very professional well run set up. The phone rings.

HONOR : Hello? Birthday Party Depot for the Party of your Dreams, Honor speaking, how may I help you? *(pause)* Why yes Madam, we do...*(pause)* We do....*(pause)* We do....*(pause)*... We do! So, you'd like to book a Create-A-Cuddly Party? The staff? Wonderful, Madam! Absolutely professional to their fingertips. They LOVE kids! They love cuddly toys even more! This afternoon at three. See you then.

Suddenly the door of CREATE A CUDDLY bursts open and JUSTIN comes on stage, gasping for air, hot and bothered, coughing and spluttering. He is covered in toy stuffing and has bits of fluff in his mouth.

JUSTIN : Gahhhhahghh! *(spitting noises to get rid of the fluff, please don't really spit!)* Air! *(he takes in an almighty breath)* Sweet precious air! *(breathes in and out calmly for a moment. Just as suddenly, JACINTA's hand bursts through the door and tries to grab him back in.)*

JACINTA : Oh no, you don't! Get back in here – you can't leave me alone with them!

JUSTIN : I'm not going back in there until I can breathe!

JACINTA : You've had your minute. Now let me out! *(She pops her head out and breathes in the air. She is similarly covered in fluff and stuffing).* Fresh

Air!

JUSTIN : How many more of those horrible toys left to stuff?

JACINTA : Well, since I'm stuffing on my own, there's still eight more to do!

JUSTIN : I'll do anything! I'll comb and frill and skip around with the girls, but for God's sake don't make me stuff another cuddly toy. *(he breaks down and JACINTA comes out, not quite closing the door).*

JACINTA : Pull yourself together Justin! You knew what you were getting into when you took this job on.

JUSTIN : I didn't! How could I have known? Chained to a machine full of fluff and stuff, forced to shove stuffing to toy after toy...and the heat...the lack of air...

JACINTA : I saw your application form. You said you loved cuddly toys.

JUSTIN : Yes, I meant when I was five. You know how it is. You say anything to get a job.

JACINTA : I know what you mean. I said I loved kids. *(she shouts back into the room)* Sit down and stop having fun! Unless you can do it quietly! We'll be back in a second!

HONOR : Good news! Another group in at three!

JUSTIN : Nooooo! No more! In the name of all that's decent –

JACINTA : How many?

HONOR : Seventeen. All little girls.

JUSTIN and JACINTA break down crying and drag each other back into the party room.

Peace and quiet once again. The phone rings. HONOR, who has been nibbling happily on a cream bun, gently wipes her mouth and answers the phone.

HONOR : Hello? Birthday Party Depot for the Party of your Dreams, Honor speaking, how may I help you? *(pause)* Why yes Madam, we do...*(pause)* We do....*(pause)* We do....*(pause)*... We do! So, you'd like to book a Princess-Fairy-Fun Party? The staff? Fabulous, Madam! They're like kids themselves! They're so sweet. Adorable. So we'll see you at 3.00 o'clock. Lovely!

The door of PRINCESS FAIRY FUN opens and we hear sweet twinkling fairy music. SIOUXSIE enters, walking backwards, speaking sweetly.

SIOUXSIE : Tra la la children! Princess Siouxsie will be back in just a minney Winnie! Love you! Love ee love ee bye bye! *(she turns around and the sweet smiles turns into a scowl.)* God I hate pink. *(she takes out a cigarette and is about to light it when DEB bursts suddenly through the door)*

DEB : Where do you think you're going?

SIOUXSIE : I was dying for a smoke.

DEB : Gimme one. What about the kids? *(they look back towards the door, then back at each other, shrugging shoulders)*

DEB & SIOUXSIE : Who cares?

HONOR : Ladies! No smoking indoors, remember?

DEB : Come on then.

SIOUXSIE : Right.

HONOR : Where are you going, girls?

DEB : Outside. For a smoke.

SIOUXSIE : Since you won't let us light up in here.

HONOR : What about the children (*standing up, shocked*) Are they unsupervised?

DEB : For goodness sake, what do you think we are?

SIOUXSIE : Of course they're unsupervised if we're out here.

DEB : They're all big girls – the majority of them must be a least five. What's the birthday girl Souixsie?

SIOUXSIE : Four.

DEB : There you go, practically five.

HONOR : (*taking the cigarettes out of their mouths*) No, I'm sorry, but you'll have to go back in immediately.

SIOUXSIE : But it hurts my jaw to smile so much.

HONOR : Inside!

DEB : This isn't worth any money! I hate being happy!

SIOUXSIE : I've got lockjaw! And it's your fault!

(*They exits back into the room and all is quiet again. HONOR sighs and moves back to her desk. The phone rings*)

HONOR : Hello? Birthday Party Depot for the Party of your Dreams, Honor speaking, how may I help you? (*pause*) Why yes Madam, we do...(*pause*) We do....(*pause*) We do....(*pause*)... We do! So, you'd like to book an Arty-Party? The staff? The Best, Madam! The Geniuses of the Art world. So, we see you all at 3.00pm. Lovely!

All calm again until the door marked ARTY PARTY slowly creeps open. Nothing for a moment, then LEO painfully crawls out on his belly, whimpering quietly.

LEO : Never again. No more. No more.

HONOR : Leo? Is that you?

LEO curls himself up into a ball and rocks back and forth. Next the door opens again – we hear the sounds of children gone feral inside and VINNIE fights his way out, screaming

VINNIE : Stay back! Back I tell you! Watch out for that flying Stanley knife! Aghhh! You're all mad! Mad! (*he turns around, we can see he is covered in paint. LEO is likewise splattered, with various colours*)

LEO : Never again.

VINNIE : Tough gig. Tough crowd. Mean.

LEO : It's like Lord of the Flies in there. Except we're the roasted pigs!

VINNIE : Stand up Leo, at least stretch your legs while you can. Before they tie us up again.

LEO : (*standing up, shaking VINNIE*) I won't go back in I tell you! I won't do it! They're not children, they're monsters! Worse! They're monsters in the shape of monkeys that look like children but have paint.

VINNIE : And they not afraid to use it.

LEO : (*really shaking VINNIE*) NOT-GOING-BACK-IN-THERE!! (*VINNIE slaps LEO across his face*)

VINNIE : Pull yourself together man! You can't fold like this!

LEO : Too late! (*whimpering, he crumbles into a heap on the floor*)

VINNIE : Well, I'm not going in alone. *(he drags LEO back inside with him, preferably by the feet. Noise of the children as we hear LEO and VINNIE scream)*

HONOR : Leo? Vinnie? Oh, they're gone. Must be having fun.
Her phones rings again.

HONOR : Hello? Birthday Party Depot for the Party of your Dreams, Honor speaking, how may I help you? *(pause)* Why yes Madam, we do...*(pause)* We do...*(pause)* We do...*(pause)*... We do! So, you'd like to book a Football Maniacs Party? The staff? Super, Madam! Former Manchester United players. Yes, I'm serious! Honestly. So, we'll see you at three. Bye!
ROMEO exits out of the FOOTBALL MANIACS party room, panting, out of breath. He has a stitch and bends over trying to catch his breath.

ROMEO : Honor! What's the off-side rule again?

HONOR : *(Getting out of her place)* I am fed up trying to explain this to you Romeo...

BROOKLYN arrives, also out of breath, gasping for air. He has a bottle of water.

ROMEO : Half time? *(BROOKLYN nods, he hasn't got his breath back yet)*
Thank God! They're so fit! And they know the game so well! I mean, they love it! What the heck is wrong with them?

HONOR : Do you want to know what off-side is or not?

BROOKLYN : I know. It's when you kick the ball at the goal and –

ROMEO : No, you score a goal but –

BROOKLYN : It's when the goalie points to the left side of the pitch and –

ROMEO : I thought it was something to do with what way the linesman's hat is positioned?

HONOR : What is wrong with both of you? It's not brain surgery. It's football!

ROMEO : So, what is off side?

HONOR : It's - *(the phone rings and she goes off to answer it).*

ROMEO : I actually don't care. I actually really hate this game.

BROOKLYN : Oh God! Me too!

ROMEO : Then what are we doing here?

BROOKLYN : It's a miserable way to make a living if you ask me.

ROMEO : Just check on them, will you. See what they're up to. *(BROOKLYN opens the door and we hear the kids cheer and several footballs are chucked out, hitting BROOKLYN and ROMEO)*

BROOKLYN : Arghhh! No amount of money is worth this!

ROMEO : Come on, we'd better get back in there.

(they exit and for a moment there is silence. HONOR checks her watch and presses an intercom button and announces :

HONOR : Bing Bong! Time up! Party time is over! Will parents please collect their children from the back door. Thank you for choosing Birthday Party Depot – for all your Party Fun! Bing Bong!

A moment, then all the party helpers enter at the same time, ad-libbing about how much they hate their job and what a terrible time they have been having. HONOR sits on her desk watching them, and waits for them to quiet down. They gradually do, JUSTIN and JACINTA in a slump, stage right,

fanning themselves and removing fluff; SIOUXSIE and DEB sit one either side of HONOR, cigarettes at the ready, putting black lipstick on and scowling; LEO and VINNIE sitting downstage centre, cleaning their faces with wipes and taking rescue remedy drops; ROMEO and BROOKLYN stage left, sitting on a football each. BROOKLYN now has a black eye and ROMEO a split lip. When there is silence –

HONOR : Well, that's better. Now we can hear ourselves think. Justin and Jacinta – have you something to say?

JUSTIN : Look, I lied when I told you I like cuddly toys. I don't. I hate them! And even if I started off liking them – I hate them now! I hate everything about them! I want to rip them limb from limb but then there'd be fluff and stuffing everywhere...so I can't do that – I have to sit and stuff all day long – I can't go on this way!

JACINTA : And I lied when I said I like children. Well, children like this anyway – I don't want to skip around and sing songs and dress teddy bears up in frilly dresses. I'm artistic – I want to create things! I don't want to be limited by cuddly toys in pink fluffy slippers.

HONOR : What about you, Siouxsie and Deb? And don't light those up in here – remember the rules.

SIOUXSIE : I just think kids would have more fun if they'd toughen up a little bit. I don't want to sing about fairies and princesses. I want to get physical! I want to get tough! I want to use these doc martin boots!

DEB : Yeah! Those kids are very small and fragile. You have to tip toe around them. They like everything to be pink or silver. It's a pain!

HONOR : Hmmm. And you, Leo and Vinnie?

LEO : *(tries to speak but he's not making any sense)*

VINNIE : He's in shock. What he's trying to say is that we can't cope with the arty types – they're too freely expressive. They get an idea and that's it – they think they can just create it, there and then. No thought for who has to clean up after them.

LEO : It's like they go back to the wild. There are no rules. And without rules, there's chaos! Chaos I tell you!

HONOR : OK, and what about you, Romeo and Brooklyn?

ROMEO : Look, it's simple. We don't know football.

BROOKLYN : We don't like football.

ROMEO : We don't understand it.

BROOKLYN : Don't see the point.

ROMEO : We hate it!

General ad-libbing from everyone about what it is they'd like to do. HONOR stands up and they go quiet. She picks up four files off her desk and sits down again.

HONOR : OK, this is what we'll do: Justin and Jacinta, I'm taking you off Create-A-Cuddly *(they react 'yes!')* and putting you on Arty-Party.

JACINTA : Great! I get to be creative!

JUSTIN : So long as I can breathe.

HONOR : Siouxsie and Deb, when you've had your cigarette, come back in and I'll brief you on your new assignment – Football-Maniacs.

SIOUXSIE : That's what I'm talking about!

DEB : Get to use the boots! (*they exit, cigs in mouth*)
HONOR : Romeo and Brooklyn. It's clear you don't like football. You're in the wrong job. I'm moving you to Create-A-Cuddly.
BROOKLYN : Oh, that's a nice change.
ROMEO : At least if we get hit with something, it'll be soft.
HONOR : Leo and Vinnie. It seems to me, you two need the biggest rehabilitation. You've been damaged psychologically and mentally. We need to do something drastic. I'm putting you on Fairy-Princess Parties.
LEO & VINNIE : Huh?
HONOR : Oh yes, it'll be good for both of you. Just think – tea parties and songs, little gentle children who just want to do your hair and paint your nails.
JUSTIN : Think of it as therapy. I wouldn't mind it myself.
LEO : We'll give it a go.
VINNIE : I don't know – we end up covered in make-up instead of paint.
LEO : But at least they'll be gentle.
VINNIE : There is that. Okay. But if you tell anyone I know about this –
LEO : Let's both be sworn to secrecy.
HONOR : So, is everybody happy? (*they all ad-lib that they are*). Good! Well, it's almost three o'clock – back to work everyone!
MUSIC as they all exit into their new party room.

THE END

PRODUCTION NOTES

Nothing much is needed: a desk, centre with a keyboard, a phone and if possible, some kind of sound effect for Honor to buzz for the 'bing bong'. You could make a sign for each of the party rooms and place them accordingly, but it's not necessary.

PROPS: phone and keyboard on Honor's desk; cuddly toys strewn about near Create a Cuddly party room, or flung out during the scene; bits of fluff stuck to the workers; soft balls, preferably footballs, to be thrown out onto the stage from the Football Maniac's party room; rope to tie up Leo and Vinnie – also make sure they are covered in paint and/or face paints; various artistic objects (preferably soft) to be flung out after them; fake cigarettes for SOUXSIE and DEB.

COSTUMES: the students are old enough to decide on their own, but as a guideline – HONOR: dress smartly in some sort of suit, neat hair, makeup; JUSTIN and JACINTA: either dungarees or jeans and a t-shirt – have fun sticking fluff and stuff all over them; ROMEO and BROOKLYN: jeans and a football shirt each, matching; SOUXSIE and DEB: think punk – black and pink, tutus with ripped tights, doc martin boots or similar, lots of black eyeliner and

black lipstick; LEO and VINNIE: jeans and an old t-shirt – have fun smearing them in paint and dirt and sticking paint brushes in their hair etc.

BOOKED UP

By Emer Halpenny

AGE: mid teen to young adult
GENDER: 2 X Female, 4 X male
CAST NUMBER: 6
DURATION: 15 minutes

CHARACTERS:

ARCHIBALD O'FLAHAHA, an obnoxious bookshop owner
CASSY, shop assistant
EMALINE, shop assistant
FRANK, a badminton coach
LAURENCE, theatre director
JACK CANDOO, motivational writer

The bookshop of ARCHIBALD O'FLAHAHA, a dusty, musty, old place, which would have a delightful charm if it weren't so horribly cluttered. ARCHIBALD, an obnoxious character, is at his desk, centre, with his feet on the desk – facing us directly, so that his feet block our view of his head. He is barking down the phone. Either side of the desk we can see two huge piles of books – in fact they are more like walls of books.

ARCHIBALD : It doesn't bother me that every other bookshop in town is accommodating you. Archibald O'Flahaha does what he likes. My father did what he liked and his father before him. We O'Flahas have been in the book business for generations and I don't do book signings in my shop! I don't care! Nothing! No *no no!* Nothing will change my mind! How much? *(He sits up straight now – we can see that he is as unruly looking as his shop)* Maybe I will change my mind. By God how much are you lads making if that's the sort of commission you can afford to – yes, yes, I'll do it. Ok yes. Yes, yes. I will. Yes... blah blah blah. Whatever. Call me when you get here. *(He puts the phone down and stares at it, shaking his head in disbelief).* Who would have thought there'd be so much interest in de-cluttering for God's sake? What's the world coming to? *(He stands, stretches, looks through some piles of paper on the desk, gets agitated and finally flings them on the ground.)*

ARCHIBALD : *(shouting)* Cassy! CASSY!

A young woman's head pops up from behind the wall of books to his right. This is CASSY, who works for him. She is timid and soft spoken, but we can hear her clearly.

CASSY : Yes, Archibald?

ARCHIBALD : *(He jumps, even though he must have known she was about the place somewhere)* Don't sneak up on me like that. What are you doing? Slacking off again I suppose?

CASSY : No, Archibald, I was compiling –

ARCHIBALD : Ah! Compile me backside! I'm looking for that document.

CASSY : Document, Archibald? What document, Archibald? *(As she says this she turns a full 390 turn as smoothly as she can – remember we can only see her head so this should look a little surreal).*

ARCHIBALD : The one from the book-signing people. The one I told you to fling in the bin.

CASSY : *(pointing)* It's in the bin. *(He checks the bin, taking out crumpled up pieces of paper, and smoothing them. CASSY's head disappears behind the books again.)*

ARCHIBALD : And what about a cup of tea? Ah, she's gone again. Where's the other one? Emaline! EMALINE! *(EMALINE'S head pops up from behind the book wall on his left. She is also timid and soft spoken, but we can hear her clearly)*

EMALINE : Here I am, Archibald.

ARCHIBALD : *(without looking up)* Cup of tea.

EMALINE : Right, Archibald. *(She disappears. ARCHIBALD looks up)*

ARCHIBALD : Wait! Emaline! Where are you? *(She re-appears and he jumps as before with CASSY)* Agh! Will you two stop that! What are you doing behind there?

EMALINE : I am compiling a list of –

CASSY : *(popping up)* I too am compiling.

EMALINE : What do you compile?

ARCHIBALD : Stop! No, no! No talking to each other! I won't allow it! You're odd enough on your own. If you get together you'll probably plot to overturn me or file me away or something. *(They look at him without speaking. He looks from one to the other.)* Not a sound to pass between you. By order of the King of the Shop! *(He finds that very funny and chuckles heartily as he exits with the found document.)*

CASSY and EMALINE stay looking at each other for at least 10 seconds, then they disappear each behind her book wall. They are gone for another 10 seconds. CASSY re-emerges with a badminton racquet and a note, folded several times. She shuttlecocks it across the stage where it lands inside EMALINE's book wall – note: experiment with this – what kind of paper – or should you put the note inside a shuttlecock instead? Etc. You want to get it right on the night! – EMALINE emerges and opens out the note. The women both have a stepladder behind the book wall so they can sometimes appear higher than other times. EMALINE stands on the step ladder and silently reads the note while CASSY looks directly at us and narrates:

CASSY : I estimate I've been here perhaps 171 days. I often get lonely. When I do, I work. I stack and sort and file and compile. Always compile. Presently I am compiling Beckett. I divide them into early, late and dark years. And of course, 'let's just mess with people's head' years. *(EMALINE nods and disappears. CASSY stays where she is until EMALINE re-appears also with a badminton racquet. CASSY steps up on her stepladder when she receives the note EMALINE bats over. As before, EMALINE will recite what CASSY reads).*

EMALINE : 197 days. Sometimes I dream I hear the outside world. My love is Film Noir. I can compile it any way I like, it doesn't matter. People cannot make head nor tail of it anyway. We should meet.

There is a bell as a customer enters. EMALINE mimes that they should be quiet and open a book and read and write. CASSY nods and they both disappear as FRANK enters. He is dressed in a tracksuit and baseball cap and carries a plastic bag. He browses around for a minute.

FRANK : Excuse me? Hello? Anyone working here?

CASSY : *(appearing above the books)* How may I be of service? *(FRANK jumps)*

FRANK : Wow! You scared me there. I mean, you took me by surprise. I wasn't scared, of course. *(A big manly cough).*

CASSY : Sir?

FRANK : You probably recognize me – that's ok, I'm used to it. I'm a pretty well known badminton coach over at the Big Arena. I guess you already know that.

CASSY : No Sir.

FRANK : Oh. Well. The name's Frank. *(He goes to shake her hand, she doesn't respond).* Nice to meet you. Take it. You shake it.

CASSY : Oh. *(She timidly shakes his hand.)* Nice...to meet you.

FRANK : See? Now we're friends.

CASSY : I've never had a friend.

FRANK : Well, you do now. Say, I'm looking for a book.

CASSY : *(looking around at all the mounds of books)* We have many books.

FRANK : Yes, I can see that. By the way, what's your name?

CASSY : Cassy.

FRANK : Cassy. I'm looking for a particular book on badminton. It's called 'Bizarre Badminton Techniques through the Ages.' Do you have it?

CASSY : Just a minute Frank, I'll check.

FRANK : Great. *(She disappears for a moment then reappears with her badminton racquet. She hits a note across to EMALINE, who appears and reads it. CASSY narrates)*

CASSY : 'Bizarre Badminton Techniques Through the Ages.'? *(EMALINE disappears and reappears with her racquet, sends a note back and narrates as CASSY reads. FRANK looking agog from one to the other)*

EMALINE : Section 8, level 2, area 33B, item 478.

CASSY : Just a moment Frank. *(She disappears and FRANK turns to EMALINE).*

FRANK : Hello. *(EMALINE looks at him for a moment, then disappears behind the books. CASSY returns)*

CASSY : Here you are, Frank.

FRANK : Great. Listen, I couldn't help noticing you play a bit of badminton yourself. Mind if I try something? *(She doesn't speak so he continues. He takes a shuttlecock out of his plastic bag and throws it towards her. She automatically hits it – it is a fantastic shot, hit right off the stage into the wings. He throws another 3 or 4 shuttlecocks at her, amazed.)* Dear God! She's a natural! I've never seen a serve like that in all my coaching days. Why don't you come down to the Big Arena with me when you finish work?

CASSY : I never finish work. I cannot remember THE OUTSIDE.
Suddenly ARCHIBALD appears and CASSY turns away, quickly finding something to do, but still visible.

ARCHIBALD : Ah! A customer! I hope you're being looked after, customer?

FRANK : Yes indeed. *(Hands the book to him)* Just this please.

ARCHIBALD : Thirty quid.

FRANK : That's a rip off.

ARCHIBALD : Take it or leave it.

FRANK : I'll take it. Here. *(He hands over the money and ARCHIBALD rudely shoves it into FRANK's plastic bag.)*

ARCHIBALD : No point wasting one of mine. Call again.

FRANK : *(as he exits, quietly to CASSY)* I'll be back. I'm going to break you out of here. Be ready. *(he exits. Nothing for a moment, then he returns.)*

Um, bring your racquet with you, won't you? We're a bit short on spares over at the arena. *(FRANK exits. THE GIRLS disappear).*

The doorbell goes again as LAURENCE enters. He is wearing a black turtleneck top and black trousers, a scarf and carries a laptop in a briefcase. He is on his mobile, hands free.

LAURENCE : No no no no on no...I've said it to them a thousand times. If you don't light it correctly, you may as well put mannequins on the stage. And get me a decent mime artist for the love of – No, she's no good – I saw her in "Goodbye Monsieur Marceau", hated her. It moved you to tears? Well, I laughed. Laughed my way through it. No she's hopeless too. I need an actress whose technique is flawless! I don't care where – just find someone! *(He clicks off and sighs heavily. To ARCHIBALD)* I say, chappy –

ARCHIBALD : *(incredulous)* "Chappy?"

LAURENCE : Looking for a book on mime. Well, anything you've got on mime actually.

ARCHIBALD : Did you just call me "Chappy"?

LAURENCE : No.

ARCHIBALD : Well that's ok then. What do you want?

LAURENCE : Books on mime – anything you've got.

ARCHIBALD : You'll have to wait a moment. I keep a couple of girls around here but I keep losing them. Hold on. Back in a minute. *(He exits. Both girls reappear, CASSY with her badminton racquet. EMALINE stops her with a gesture and begins to mime. CASSY and gradually LAURENCE 'translate')*

CASSY : Wait – I do not have your skills with the racquet. Allow me *(LAURENCE joins in)* to express myself through my body: I am so sad here in this place. I can read and write and compile, but I want more. Where, oh where is my knight in shining armour?

LAURENCE : Saint Laurence Oliver himself, my namesake! I've found her! What is your name, oh talented one?

EMALINE : I think I am...Emaline. I have no memory of my life before – this.

LAURENCE : He has enslaved you here! Never fear Emaline, my Mime – I shall whisk you away from here! I'll put you on the National Stage and together we'll tour Europe. I shall be your Knight in Shining Armour!

ARCHIBALD : *(returning)* Right, this is all we have on mime.

LAURENCE : Sir you disgust me!

ARCHIBALD : That's very rude.

LAURENCE : You have enslaved this creature for long enough. Now, she's coming with me!

ARCHIBALD : Ah, no she's not.

LAURENCE : I'd like to see you stop me.

ARCHIBALD : I've got a contract – this piece of paper I never lose (*he takes it out from his breast pocket*) always keep it safe. Here you are, see – She signed a contract to work here for life. Ha ha ha ha ha! The other one too! They both belong to me and there's nothing you can do about it.

LAURENCE : Emaline? Is this true? (*Taking the contract and showing it to her*)

EMALINE : It is my signature, I am sure.

ARCHIBALD : (*snatching it back*) So now if you'll excuse us, we have some work to do. Got a very important book signing this afternoon.

LAURENCE : I SHALL return Emaline. And I'll take you from this – this – murky hovel!

ARCHIBALD : No need to get personal! (*LAURENCE exits*) Cassy, Emaline: a new task for you. This motivational writer guy – Jack Candoo - is going to be here any second. For a book signing of all things. Root out all copies of his book...it's called "Clear Your Clutter Without a Mutter". What a name! What an idea! Clear your clutter indeed.

The door rings and JACK CANDOO enters. He is confident and smooth talking.

JACK : Archibald O'Flahaha?

ARCHIBALD : Jack Candoo?

JACK : Sure is! (*They shake hands*) Nice to meet you Archie.

ARCHIBALD : Bald.

JACK : Yes but you're so tall, no one would notice. (*JACK talks away, as ARCHIBALD tries to get a word in but cannot. JACK is good at this sort of thing*). Thing is Archie, this shop is perfect. It's like a 'before and after' picture. Folks come in here and buy the book today – we'll encourage them to look around at the disgusting mess everywhere – but not for long, because the great (if a little bald!) Archibald O'Flahaha has also read the book – at least he will be reading it! And folks can come back next week to see the transformation – because there will be a transformation Archie, I promise you that.

ARCHIBALD : Look, Jack...Can't you just do this book signing thing and then – well – clear off?

JACK : (*laughs heartily*) Afraid not Archie. (*slaps him on the back*) I'm not leaving till this place is spick and span. You're going to sell my book for me! And don't forget your commission!

ARCHIBALD : I like my mess.

JACK : (*gravely*) It's a reflection of your inner soul, Archie. I don't think you want everyone to see your inner soul looking like this, do you?

ARCHIBALD : My inner -...?

JACK : (*rolling up his sleeves*) Naturally my desk will have to be clear of all clutter (*he gathers up the papers and books from the desk*)

ARCHIBALD : Your desk? That's my desk! What are you doing with those?

JACK : *(dumping the books and clutter on the floor downstage centre, and imagining punters as they enter, where they'll go etc)* When folks open the door, they'll see first the mess – they'll be like "what the hey?!" And then they'll see me, Jack Candoo, sitting like a cherub, at a spotless desk, waiting to sign my books.

ARCHIBALD : Like a cherub?!

JACK : Say, can we get a really soft tone light bulb and hang it just over me there – and of course we'll have to replace these books with my own copies...I'll just make a start on this pile...want to help me out Archie? Make a start on that pile over there? *(He begins removing books from CASEY's tower of books, while ARCHIBALD reluctantly starts on EMALINE's side.)*

ARCHIBALD : You know I'm only doing this for the money, right? I mean, destroy my shop by all means, please, don't worry about the empire I've built, and my father and his father before him –

JACK : What the...? Archie, there's a girl trapped behind these books! Hey, miss? Can you hear me? Give me your hand! Archie, help me.

ARCHIBALD : *(as CASSY emerges from the book tower)* Oh that's just Cassy. There's another one around here somewhere.

JACK : Archie look! *(EMALINE has emerged from her book tower)*

ARCHIBALD : Ah, there she is.

JACK : *(to the girls)* Are you okay? What are your names? Can you speak? Can you understand me?

CASSY : We understand you.

EMALINE : The light...it hurts my eyes...

JACK : Archibald, quick – get some water! *(ARCHIBALD is about to complain when FRANK enters dramatically.)* I'm sorry – I don't think we're going to do the book signing today – we've just found these girls trapped behind these books. They look like they haven't seen the light of day for years.

FRANK : That's why I'm here – I promised Cassy I'd come back and break her out of here. I've got the National Badminton Team outside the door to back me up.

ARCHIBALD : Pah! PAH! Badminton! I used to play that – found it too gentle for my liking. Misplaced a couple of racquets around here too...

(LAURENCE enters dramatically.) Oh for goodness sake –

LAURENCE : I've come back Emaline! And I have the law on my side.

JACK : Wait! Hold on a minute...what in the heck is going on here?

Archibald, I'm hoping you've got a very good explanation for all this.

LAURENCE : Monster! He's been keeping them prisoner here. He probably doesn't even pay the national wage!

ARCHIBALD : I'm supposed to pay them a wage?

LAURENCE : *(wildly, to anyone)* You see?!

FRANK : That's it – I'm calling the team in – your number's up pal!

ARCHIBALD : Don't you 'pal' me –

JACK : Whoa! Time out! *(There is silence. He addresses Frank)* What's your name, friend?

FRANK : Frank.

LAURENCE : Laurence.

ARCHIBALD : Jack! Emaline! Cassy! Archibald! Now that we've all introduced ourselves could we please-

(He is cut off mid line by a punch as FRANK launches himself at ARCHIBALD, followed closely by LAURENCE. This fight scene takes place behind the screen of books, stage L, with suitable ad-libs and arms, hands, head, feet occasionally in view – possibly the odd rubber chicken and/or sink plunger. CASSY and EMALINE calmly begin to tidy up the books around the book screen, stage R. JACK pleads with them.)

JACK : Ladies! Please – can't you see what's happening? *(as he follows them around trying to distract them, and they plant books in his arms.)* Why are you? – What are you? – If I could just – will you just let? *(and so on until he loses his calm demeanor)* I CAN'T TAKE ANYMORE OF THIS!!! The energy in this room is stifling!! *(Exact timing is necessary here : as he utters this last line and flops in a slump downstage right, the contract – in LAURENCE's hands – is ripped in two, viewed high above the book screen. Immediately CASSY and EMALINE snap out of their trance. They look at each other and fling the books aside, most of them landing on JACK)*

EMALINE and CASSY : Woo hoo!

CASSY : Free at last! Where is the evil old codger? I have a few things I want to get off my mind. *(She rolls up her sleeves and heads towards ARCHIBALD but is stopped in her tracks by FRANK)*

FRANK : Cassy! You're safe now.

LAURENCE : Emaline! Now we are free to travel the world. You shall be my muse.

EMALINE : I don't think so!

CASSY : Yeah, we've been trapped by a man long enough thanks all the same. Emaline, how does the Bahamas sound to you?

EMALINE : *(who is already stuffing notes of money from the desk cash box into her pockets)* I'm already on it.

FRANK : But Cassy! You and me – and ... the badminton tournament...?

LAURENCE : Emaline? The world stage awaits...!

ARCHIBALD : *(emerging from behind the screen, looking even scruffier than before)* Forget it. Once the curse is broken, they develop into free spirits. You'll never pin them down. *(to EMALINE)* Hey! Leave me with something! *(she leaves the cash box and walks up to him)*

EMALINE : Oh, you can have this: *(she flicks him on his forehead.)*

ARCHIBALD : Ouch!

CASSY : *(joining her)* Oh, that's not enough. Here – take this as well. *(She punches him in the stomach and he doubles over)* Let's go Emaline! *(They leave).*

ARCHIBALD : *(straightening up and looking from FRANK to LAURENCE)*

Women, eh?

FRANK : I don't understand...

LAURENCE : Nor do I – I thought she cared for me...

ARCHIBALD : *(taking a new sheet of paper and a pen from his pocket)* That reminds me lads. Look, to show there's no bad feeling, I want to compensate you both...just a token few thousand euro to ease the pain...

FRANK : Huh?

LAURENCE : Pay us?

ARCHIBALD : Yes...I feel a bit bad dragging you into all this. I just need you to sign your names here first, so I can keep it all – you know, legal and above board...*(they absent mindedly sign their names. While they're doing this, JACK suddenly realizes what is happening)*

JACK : Friends! Don't sign your –

ARCHIBALD : Too late! Now, this place is a bit of a state, so chop chop lads, let's get to work. Oh, and I wouldn't mind a cup of tea.

FRANK / LAURENCE : *(each heading off behind a screen of books)* Yes, Archibald... *(ARCHIBALD settles himself behind his desk as we saw him at the opening)*. Must compile. Compile. Compile...

ARCHIBALD : Now, Mr. Candoo, what about this book signing, eh?

JACK : *(standing, shocked)* What ARE you?!

ARCHIBALD : I'll tell you what I am! I'm the owner of this shop. Archibald O'Flahaha. I've been in this business a long time. Before that, it was my father's business, and his father before him... *(while he speaks, the music slowly fades up as JACK crumbles in a heap again and FRANK and LAURENCE alternately appear above their screens.)*

THE END

PRODUCTION NOTES

The column of books: Cassy and Emaline need to be hidden 'within' (in fact, behind) these. It's unlikely that you will be able to assemble to huge piles of books although you might be able to use some tall bookcases. We used office dividers and piled books as high up as we could manage, in varying heights, which satisfactorily gave the right impression. Then I discovered book wallpaper, which works really well too. Cassy and Emaline will both need a sturdy footstool or stepladder so they can pop up and down with ease. The idea is to make the whole set look shoddy and untidy, so plenty more piles of books around these 'walls' of books will help also.

The passing of notes: You will need to experiment with the weight of the paper for this – perhaps write the notes on some light card and fold it several times – you could scrunch up paper either, though it's a little out of character for both Cassy and Emaline. Have the players practice several times so there are no wayward notes on the night.

ECLECTIC PICNIC

By Emer Halpenny

AGE: mid teen to young adult

GENDER: 4 female, 3 male (although Rosie and Flintman could be either)

CAST NUMBER: 7

DURATION: 15 mins

CHARACTERS:

ESTELLE

ROSIE

ESTONIA

MAX

CINDY

HEALY

FLINTMAN

The distant sound of a band playing, which fades gradually. A lone girl sits in a largish tent, facing out. She sets herself up to meditate:

ESTELLE: Gong; check. Incense; check. Meditation stool; check. Mantra; mantra...mantra (*she searches through her bag for her mantra*). Mantra, mantra, mantra, mantra, mantra...ah! Here it is...Mantra – ‘Om’. Okay...got my mantra. (*she checks it again*): ‘Om’. (*she practices various ways of saying it, then readies herself to meditate, getting comfortable, lighting the incense and then hitting the little gong. She assumes the position*) Om..... Om.....

ROSIE: (*popping her head in the tent flap, which is directly behind ESTELLE’s head*) Hi dee Hi! It’s me: Rosie.

ESTELLE: Oh for goodness sake – can’t you see I’m...busy.

ROSIE: Oh, sorry. I just wanted to check on you. What are you...?

ESTELLE: It’s private.

ROSIE: Oh. I see.

ESTELLE: I *can* have some private time in my own private tent, I suppose?

ROSIE: Oh God, yeah! Do what you like. Except don’t break any of the rules.

ESTELLE: Ok.

ROSIE: You know; the festival rules?

ESTELLE: Right.

ROSIE: You’ve read the festival rulebook I suppose?

ESTELLE: (*losing patience*) Look! I’m trying to – (*she doesn’t want to say*)

ROSIE: What? What are you trying to do? I’d love to know.

ESTELLE: I’m trying –

ROSIE: Yes?

ESTELLE: to –

ROSIE: Yes?

ESTELLE: get some privacy.

ROSIE: *(looks hurt for a moment, then after a decent pause starts sniffing)*
 Are you smoking? *(it dawns on her this could be more serious, gasping)* Are you smoking funny cigarettes Estelle?

ESTELLE: It's incense!

ROSIE: I'll check that in the rulebook. *(she goes. ESTELLE tries to get back into a meditative state. Takes a few deep breaths.)*

ESTELLE: Om.... Om...
(ESTONIA pops her head in the tent flap and watches ESTELLE for a moment, bemused.)

ESTELLE: Om.....Om.....Om.....

ESTONIA: Om....em G! *(try to blend the word 'om' with 'omg')* Estelle what are you doing!

ESTELLE: For the love of –

ESTONIA: Are you having one of those mental breakdowns?

ESTELLE: No!

ESTONIA: Can I come in?

ESTELLE: No! *(ESTONIA comes in anyway, and sits next to ESTELLE, also facing out.)*

ESTONIA: So... what are we doing?

ESTELLE: We aren't doing anything. I was trying to –

ESTONIA: Yahhuh?

ESTELLE: think.

ESTONIA: Think?

ESTELLE: Yes. I was trying to think. To have a bit of a think.

ESTONIA: That is so random, Estelle. You were always so deep.

ESTELLE: Yes, well, I'm not getting very far. What do you want Estonia?

ESTONIA: Can I sleepover? Please?

ESTELLE: Sleepover? In my tent? There's hardly any room!

ESTONIA: Estelle, it's a six man tent!

ESTELLE: Yes, but there's all my stuff.

ESTONIA: I could squeeze in. Please? I won't make a sound. I'll be over here *(she moves to a corner of the tent)*. Not a peep.

ESTELLE: What's wrong with your own tent?

ESTONIA: I'm scared. *(ESTELLE looks at her)*. Petrified. *(She keeps looking, losing patience, but knows she will help her friend)*. Terrified. Look at the way my hand is shaking. Look at it.

ESTELLE: Okay! You can stay.

ESTONIA: Yippie!

ESTELLE: But be quiet.

ESTONIA: My lips are sealed.

ESTELLE: Good. Thanks.

ESTONIA: *(whispering)* But what are you doing? Really, like?

ESTELLE: Alright, but don't tell anyone.

ESTONIA: Not a word.

ESTELLE: I'm meditating. *(ESTONIA's face is blank)*. You know, quieting my mind? *(nothing)*. When I said I was thinking, that wasn't right. In fact, I'm trying not to think. To think of nothing at all. *(ESTONIA snaps into recognition)*.

ESTONIA: Now that, I can do!

ESTELLE: Alright well just do it over there. Over there. Now *(coughs, gets ready, a little self conscious. She hits the gong. ESTONIA reacts)*

ESTONIA: Oh! *(whispering)* you nearly gave me a heart attack!

ESTELLE: Om... Om...

ESTONIA: *(gradually picking up the mantra)* Om....
(MAX pops his head in and watches for a minute)

MAX: Guys? Guys? Hello? Look up...

ESTONIA: OMG! I'm hearing voices!

ESTELLE: It's not a voice. It's Max.

ESTONIA: Oh hi Max! I thought you were, you know, God.

MAX: *(he is pleased)*. Thanks!

ESTELLE: What is it Max?

MAX: Have you guys seen Cindy? She's disappeared. Again.

ESTELLE: We haven't been out for a while.

ESTONIA: I thought I saw her over by the stage door, with her arms wrapped around one of the roadies, but that couldn't be right, could it?

MAX: I'm not sure...

ESTELLE: What say you go find out, Max?

MAX: Yeah, okay. What are you guys doing?

ESTELLE: Nothing.

ESTONIA: Meditating. *(ESTELLE looks at her. ESTONIA gestures 'what?', then cops on and covers her mouth.)*

MAX: Meditating, eh? *(he acts as if they are up to no good but he approves.)* Okay. If you say so. Carry on. *(he exits)*.

ESTELLE & ESTONIA: *(after hitting the gong)* Om.... Om...

MAX: *(pops head back in)*. If you see Cindy, tell her I'm looking for her ok?

ESTONIA: Ok Max!

MAX: In fact, have her wait here for me.

ESTELLE: *(groans in despair)*

ESTONIA: And if the roadie is with her?

MAX: *(sadly)* No, I'd rather he didn't wait.

ESTONIA: Ok! *(MAX exits. The girls continue to meditate for a few moments, until ROSIE pops her head back in.)*

ROSIE: Hi dee Hi!

ESTONIA: *(without opening eyes)* Hi dee Ho!

ROSIE: Checked the rulebook. What are you guys doing?

ESTELLE: Nothing.

ESTONIA: Med – *(she cops on just in time)*. Med. Med...Medding.

ROSIE: Medding?

ESTONIA: Yah, medding? You mean you don't know what medding is? *(she feigns laughter, ESTELLE feebly joins in)*

ROSIE: Well of course I do. I just wondered whether it was allowed. You know, at festivals... Anyway, I couldn't find anything in the rulebook about incense.

ESTELLE: Good.

ROSIE: So...Carry on. *(they ignore her)*. Have a cool...med. *(she exits and after a couple of seconds, pops her head back in to see if she can figure out*

what medding is. She watches them for a moment, but it seems boring so she exits again. After a few moments, CINDY pops her head in.)

CINDY: Pssst! Pssst! Guys!

ESTONIA: *(opens one eye)* Max? Is that you?

CINDY: Max is here?

ESTELLE: No Cindy, he was here. He's looking for you.

CINDY: Yowsah! I'm outta here.

ESTONIA: Oh! Cindy! Cindy!

CINDY: *(urgently, as she is trying to get away)* What! What is it? Quick.

ESTONIA: He said to wait here for him. And he'd be back in a minute.

CINDY: Oh Gawd.

ESTELLE: Don't feel you have to.

CINDY: Nah, I'd better. Get it over with. *(she enters the tent and sit the other side of ESTELLE)* So. What are we doing?

ESTONIA: Medding.

CINDY: What?

ESTELLE: Nothing. We're... telling ghost stories.

ESTONIA: Eek! Are we? Oh My GOD!

CINDY: I absolutely LOVE ghost stories! And Max hates them! This is the best! I've got this really gorey one, about a little girl who says goodnight to her mum one night, it's really stormy right? And –

ESTELLE: Actually Cindy, we were just finishing up. Estonia's terrified *(ESTONIA whispers the word 'terrified')* and we're just getting ready for bed. *(she yawns).*

ROSIE: *(popping head in)* Did I hear you say you were telling ghost stories?

ESTELLE: Why, is that against the rules too?

ROSIE: O quantro... it's encouraged!

CINDY: Really?

ROSIE: Oh yes, quite so. Carry on. I might join you later, after my rounds... Finished medding then?

CINDY: Medding?

ROSIE: *(snorts as if to say, 'duh, of course')*. Yeah! *(she exits).*

CINDY: Well, isn't this a nice tent?

ESTONIA: Isn't it, though?

CINDY: It is, isn't it?

ESTONIA: Gorgeous, isn't it?

CINDY: It is, it really is...*(to ESTELLE)* ... isn't it?

ESTELLE: Isn't it awfully cramped though?

HEALY: *(pops his head in the flap, is about to speak, but breaks into a mad bout of coughing, so pops out again. We can hear him finish his coughing fit outside. Then he reappears.)* Anybody want to buy some drugs?

ESTELLE: Not unless they can induce sleep. For other people...

HEALY: *(letting himself into the tent)* That can be arranged.

ESTONIA: OMG! A drug addict in our tent.

ESTELLE: My tent.

CINDY: A very cute drug addict at that.

HEALY: I'm not a drug addict.

ESTONIA: But you said –

HEALY: Oh I sell them, but I never take them myself. What, do you think; I'm mad? *(he sits next to CINDY)* Hey babe.

CINDY: *(giggles)*

HEALY: So what's the scene here?

ESTELLE: Nothing.

ESTONIA: We're medding.

CINDY: We're telling ghost stories.

HEALY: Deadly. Or we could do a bit of all three. *(he hits the gong and ESTELLE gives him a dirty look. MAX pops his head in.)*

MAX: Aha! There you are Cindy!

CINDY: Hello Max. Dear.

MAX: *(whining)* I've been all over the camp looking for you Cindy. I was really worried.

CINDY: Oh sit down Max, before you cry.

MAX: *(squeezing in between CINDY and HEALY)* Did you have to bring him?

CINDY: Who?

MAX: The Roadie.

CINDY: He's not a Roadie. He's a drug pusher.

MAX: Oh. And that's supposed to soften the blow, is it?

HEALY: Name's Healy, man. Just introducing myself to these lovely ladies. Actually, didn't get any of your names...

MAX: Max. I'm Cindy's boyfriend.

HEALY: Hey, Cindy.

CINDY: *(giggles)*.

MAX: I'm right here, you know.

ESTELLE: I'm Estelle. This is *my* tent.

ESTONIA: I'm Estonia.

HEALY: Estonia?

ESTONIA: Yah! You know, like the country?

HEALY: Fascinating. So, who wants to buy some drugs?

ROSIE: *(pops head in)* Did I hear someone say 'drugs'?

HEALY: No, I said 'mugs'. I'm selling mugs, do you want one?

ROSIE: That depends. What do they say?

HEALY: I love Estonia.

ESTONIA: Aw.

ROSIE: God, no. Thanks. This is getting cosy in here.

ESTONIA: Isn't it though?

ROSIE: I just have to report a rowdy group for singing 'kumbayah' with dirty lyrics, and then I'll be with you.

ESTELLE: I think everyone is leaving actually.

CINDY: Hurry up Rosie! We about to start telling ghost stories.

MAX: That is so cruel Cindy. You know I'm uncomfortable with anything supernatural.

CINDY: You're scared you mean.

MAX: I'm not scared, I just think that sort of thing should be left well enough alone.

HEALY: You're scared man.

MAX: I'm not – oh, alright then. Go ahead, have your silly ghost story telling thing.

CINDY: I've got the best one: it's really gorey, about a little girl who says goodnight to her mum one night, it's really stormy right? And –
(*FLINTMAN pops his head in dramatically.*)

FLINTMAN: I've just seen a ghost!

ESTONIA and MAX Scream.

CINDY: Where?

HEALY: Savage. Maybe I can sell something there. Where did you see it, man?

FLINTMAN: I've seen a ghost I tell you!

CINDY: Oh come in, come in and sit down. (*FLINTMAN enters. He is in shock.*) My God he's shaking. Max – do something!

MAX: Come on, come in. (*he helps him to sit down*)

FLINTMAN: It was horrible! HORRIBLE!

MAX: Don't tell us! We don't need to know.

FLINTMAN: I was queuing at the 'all-you-can-eat' buffet down the end of the camp, you know it?

HEALY: Do I know it? Man, I love it! Best fried squirrel I ever had... (*they all look at him.*) what?

ROSIE: (*popping head in*) Did I hear someone say something about frying a squirrel?

ESTELLE: Do you actually go somewhere, or just hover outside the tent?

FLINTMAN: Aghhh!

CINDY: It's okay. She's a friend. A friend: 'Rosie'. Can you say 'Rosie'?

FLINTMAN: I've had a terrifying paranormal experience; I'm not thick.

MAX: We know. We know.

HEALY: What's your name, friend?

FLINTMAN: Name's Flintman. (*He looks at CINDY*) 'Flintman'.

MAX: Okay, she was only trying to be nice.

CINDY: Thanks, Max. (*they smile sweetly at each other*)

FLINTMAN: I'm sorry: it's just it was so...

ROSIE: Have you started the ghost stories then?

FLINTMAN: Aghhh!

ALL: Shhhh!

MAX: Do you want to talk about it, Flintman?

FLINTMAN: I do.

Everyone waits. There is a long silence. They look at each other.

MAX: Off you go.

FLINTMAN: It was horrible! HORRIBLE!

HEALY: You said.

FLINTMAN: One minute I was stuffing my face with kung pao chicken, and the next I was staring into the gaping face of death.

ESTONIA: I'm not sure I want to hear –

FLINTMAN: Eyes like a demon from the bowels of hell! Lips: purple and blistered – pulled downwards in an evil snarl; pockmarked skin and those fingernails?

CINDY: Dirty?

FLINTMAN: Filthy! Long and gnarled, clinging to me like a desperate soul condemned forever! He grasped me! I thought he meant to drag me back down to the underworld with him... And then...

HEALY: Then?

FLINTMAN: He thrust something in my hand. He insisted I take it. He spoke some words: the words of a madman: "He-uh. Hava smoke-a-dah. Den giz a show fer sumtin sterangah...."

MAX: He was speaking in tongues.

FLINTMAN: The tongue of the devil himself!

CINDY: Max – give him something to drink.

MAX: I've got a hip flask here...

ROSIE: Is that - ?

MAX: Tea. Strong. Sweet. Here Flintman. Drink...drink....

(He helps FLINTMAN to drink the tea. Then HEALY stands)

HEALY: Ok. It's time for a confessional...

CINDY: *(stands up immediately)* I told a Roadie I was single. I'm sorry Max.

MAX: It's ok. *(he cries quietly)*

ESTONIA: *(stands up)* I pretend I'm stupid because it's easier... sorry.

ALL: It's ok...*(adlibbing perhaps)* I don't believe it anyway.

HEALY: Actually, I meant; it's time for me to confess.

ALL: Embarrassed adlibs.

HEALY: I'm not a drug pusher.

ESTELLE: Well, you wouldn't be a very good one if you were; we bought nothing.

HEALY: I'm a cop. *(he shows his badge. Everyone takes it and studies it, very impressed – adlib)* Special Forces: drug squad. Yeah. We were staking out your tent: I think it was the incense that alerted us at first.

ROSIE: I know what you mean!

HEALY: Then, everyone's erratic behaviour; people coming and going so much. But really, we were after Dotsey McGuigan.

MAX: Who?

HEALY: The real drug pusher here is a shady character called Dotsey McGuigan. Nasty piece of work. Ugly from drug use. Our friend here met her earlier.

FLINTMAN: Her? That was a girl! The damned demon from the depths of Hades? Is a GIRL?!

HEALY: Yup.

ESTONIA: Drugs are so bad for you.

CINDY: I'm so never going to take them.

MAX: Well Flintman, it looks like you had a lucky escape rather than a brush with a ghost.

FLINTMAN: She sure looked like a ghost.

HEALY: The sad thing is, she probably will be one sooner rather than later. *(genuine quiet thought provoking moment)*. Well, I had better go arrest her. Do you want to give me whatever it was she thrust into your hand?

FLINTMAN: Huh?

HEALY: You said she thrust something into your hand and said: *(coughs)* "He-uh. Hava smoke-a-dah. Den giz a show fer sumtin sterangah...."

FLINTMAN: That's very good.

HEALY: Thank you.

FLINTMAN: Alarmingly good.

HEALY: It's all part of the job. The um... *(he gestures for FLINTMAN to give him the drugs)*

FLINTMAN: Oh God, I didn't keep it. I threw it in the bin.

HEALY: Where?

FLINTMAN: The big one just outside the stage door.

HEALY: Kids, I'm out of here. It's been fun. See you around. *(he exits. No one speaks for a moment.)*

ESTONIA: Golly.

(HEALY pops his head back in suddenly – ESTONIA and FLINTMAN squeak)

HEALY: And one more thing: you're good kids. Stay that way, ok?

ESTONIA: Ok Healy! *(he exits)*. Well, that was fun.

ROSIE: Estonia, want to come sleepover in my tent? We can do some of that medding... if you want.

ESTONIA: I'd love to! Great! *(aside)* Whatever that is...

ROSIE: Ok everyone, I'll be back on my rounds in the morning. Nightie night! Sleepie tight!

ESTONIA: Nightie! *(they exit, to adlibbed goodbyes)*.

CINDY: Are you okay now, Flintman?

FLINTMAN: I'm still a little shaken.

MAX: Come on, we'll look after you. It's been a long day for everyone.

CINDY: *(watching MAX helping FLINTMAN up)* Aw. Look at you: all kind and stuff.

MAX: *(embarrassed)* Well...

CINDY: See you tomorrow Estelle. Night.

ESTELLE: Goodnight.

MAX: *(after CINDY and FLINTMAN have exited.)* Will you be okay Estelle? On your own, I mean? I can ask Estonia to come back...

ESTELLE: No! I mean, no, thank you Max. I'll be just fine on my own.

MAX: Ok. See you.

ESTELLE: See you Max.

(he exits. She looks around. Sighs happily. Hits the gong and -)

ESTELLE: Om.... Om....

BAND MUSIC UP AS LIGHTS FADE

THE END

BRAMBLED

By Emer Halpenny

AGE: mid to older teens

GENDER: Mixed

CAST NUMBER: 17 +

DURATION: 25 mins depending on movement/dance

CHARACTERS:

WRITER

SOPHIA

BRIGID

DAWN

FAITH

HOPE

CHARITY

BELISAMA

BOINNA

ANA

CARA

MOTHER / QUEEN

KING BENNETT

SIR ONE

SIR TWO

SIR THREE

RAKTABI

RAKKI II (and as many as you wish – played by 1 – 3 or more)

CHORUS (play the brambles – movement important)

Scene 1: In the Beginning...

Lights come up slowly on a group of about twenty girls standing close together in the centre of the stage. There is nothing else on stage. One girl, the WRITER, leaves the group and walks around the stage, as if looking for something. The others watch her with interest. The WRITER walks off stage left and returns immediately with a small desk, which she places downstage left. She exits and returns with a chair, which she places at the desk. She exits and returns with an A4 notebook and pen. WRITER sits at the desk and begins writing.

WRITER: Once upon the time, there was a beautiful girl.

A girl leaves the group and moves towards downstage right.

WRITER: She lived in a castle, which was impenetrable.

The GIRL (Sophia) looks at the rest of the group questioningly. Some of them shrug shoulders.

WRITER: Thick brambles grew up around it so that she was cut off from the world for what seemed like one hundred years.

Some of the group break away and form the brambles around the GIRL.

SOPHIA: (*peeping through or above 'brambles'*) Okay, could I just ask? Am I like, a princess?

WRITER: Um, I hadn't decided.

SOPHIA: But I live in a castle.

WRITER: Yes...but if you're going to be a princess, then I'll have to consider the political and historical situation of the story...

SOPHIA: Well?

WRITER: Well, I'm not quite ready to do that yet.

SOPHIA: But I'm wealthy?

WRITER: Oh, yes; very.

SOPHIA: Good. Beautiful and wealthy. What more could I ask for?

WRITER: Your freedom? You are trapped in your castle after all.

SOPHIA: Well, is 'trapped' the right word? I mean, am I alone?

WRITER: No, not at all; you have your subjects; people who work in the kitchens and stables, your lady friends and your family...

The 'brambles' break off here and begin miming activities of daily castle life.

SOPHIA: That's not so bad.

The Castle folk will gradually move off stage, retrieve props and bits of set and return, continuing their activities, creating a picture of typical castle life. They will also now wear costumes to suit the scene, and bring on a Princess dress which they will dress Sophia in.

WRITER: So I'll just get on with creating the story, if you don't mind...

SOPHIA: I'd like a throne.

WRITER: Alright, you may have a throne. (*A throne is carried in and placed upstage centre*).

SOPHIA: Ooh, lovely. Carry on. Everyone; carry on. (*She sits on the throne and watches with great interest.*)

WRITER: The castle folk were used to the girl and her demanding ways.

SOPHIA: I say! What's my name?

WRITER: Sophia.

SOPHIA: Sophia; I like it.

BRIGID: Mistress Sophia, would you like me to read to you? I have some fascinating books written by the best minds in the castle – including yours truly.

SOPHIA: Oh no thanks Brigid. I'm really not interested.

BRIGID: In this one, 'Life Outside the Brambles', the writer (me) postulates about whether the grass really is greener on the other side... It's very intriguing.

SOPHIA: How many books have you got there?

BRIGID: Several – but I can get more...

SOPHIA: Place them here, would you Brigid?

BRIGID places the pile of books at SOPHIA's feet. SOPHIA puts her feet up on them.

SOPHIA: Ahh, that's great. I wonder if I might have a cushion too?

BRIGID: Mistress Sophia, I thought I would read to you. I thought you might be interested in learning about the world outside the castle. Out 'there' beyond the brambles...

SOPHIA: Nah, you're alright Brigid. But I would like that cushion.

BRIGID: Yes, Mistress. (*Sighing, BRIGID leaves to get a cushion.*)

SOPHIA: I think I'll have a little snooze...

She closes her eyes and settles herself. DAWN, the Court Musician tiptoes centre and gestures to a group of three girls to join her.

DAWN: Shhhh! Ready everyone? We'll begin with 'Morning Has Broken'; this will gently waken Mistress Sophia, and she'll be delighted with the sound.

They begin singing 'Morning Has Broken' – loudly. SOPHIA awakes with a bolt.

SOPHIA: Agh! What is it? Who am I? What's going on?!

DAWN: Good morning Mistress! We have been working all night long on a morning chorus for you.

SOPHIA: Oh. That's lovely Dawn, thank you. But isn't it a little early?

DAWN: It's 11.30am.

SOPHIA: You must be exhausted.

FAITH: (*Yawning*) Well, you know Dawn; no one could tell her to stop rehearsing.

HOPE: Yes, she is so sure that some morning, Mistress Sophia, you will appreciate her work. With us.

SOPHIA: Oh I do. I just wonder, what's the point of it all?

DAWN: What's the point of it all? What's the point of music?

CHARITY: Come, Dawn; come sisters; let us leave Mistress Sophia in peace. Perhaps the royal horses in the stables will appreciate our singing.

SOPHIA: Royal horses? Then am I...?

WRITER: I thought at this stage, you were acting very much like a 'Princess.'

SOPHIA: (*clapping her hands with glee*). A princess! I knew I was.

BRIGID: (*arrives with a cushion*). Your cushion, My Lady.

SOPHIA: Thank you Brigid. I'll have a little rest, then I'll inspect my kingdom.

BRIGID: Your kingdom?

SOPHIA: That is all...(*She settles herself to sleep.*)

BRIGID: I wonder if the King is about? Mistress Sophia seems to be confused.

CHARITY: We woke His Majesty already. He is on his rounds since early this morning.

HOPE: Do you think we should fetch him? Or the Queen?

FAITH: Leave it with us.

DAWN: Perhaps if we worked on the opening chord, make it subtler...

CHARITY: Come on Dawn.

There is peace and quiet for a moment before we hear the arrival of SOPHIA'S SISTERS. They are in the middle of a heated debate – or a typical sisters' squabble. They shout over each other, disturbing the peace and quiet. SOPHIA jumps.

SOPHIA: What is going on!

CARA: She ruined my life's work!

BELISAMA: Hardly your life's work Cara – you're still a teenager.

BOINNA: She means she has spent her whole life working on it, and see how much you care?

BELISAMA: Like you do? You started it all.

ANA: Oh I think you started it Belisama.

BELISAMA: Be quiet Ana!

ANA: No you be quiet!

They begin their row again. SOPHIA is forced to leave her throne.

SOPHIA: Quiet! *(Everyone freezes for a moment. She looks towards the WRITER).* Seriously? You've given me four sisters?

WRITER: I felt you needed them. *(WRITER clicks her fingers to unfreeze the sisters.)*

BOINNA: Who are you talking to Sophia? I demand that you settle this.

CARA: I'll tell you what happened; there I was, tending to my plants and my flowers, minding my own business in my little garden...

BOINNA: Minding her own business, not bothering anyone, not looking for trouble –

CARA: Yes alright, Boinna! I can tell the story by myself.

BOINNA: I'm just backing you up.

CARA: Well, thank you but I am fine. So, there I was –

BOINNA: Right, well I'll remember that the next time you scream for help.

BELISAMA: Oh she's always screaming. If we were to take her screaming seriously we'd never get on with anything.

ANA: Well since you were the cause of upsetting her this time, Belisama, I think you should take it seriously.

CARA: Alright! I'm telling the story!

BOINNA: Maybe I should have ignored you.

BELISAMA: That's what I'm saying –

ANA: Just let her finish –

SOPHIA: Please! Will you all just pipe down. That's better. Now, I'll ask the questions and you can each answer in turn. Cara; you were in your garden...?

CARA: *(Sniffing)* Yes, I had just planted all my summer seedlings and had left them for just a few short minutes to ask Boinna for some water. When I returned, I found every living thing in the garden had been burnt to a cinder!

ANA: And we all know who was responsible for that.

CARA: Blackened and shriveled and dead!

SOPHIA: And why do you suspect Belisama?

CARA: Hello? She *is* the fire tender...?

BELISAMA: Oh yes, I *am* the fire tender; I keep the fire stoked, and I am careful who I give it to – only those who need it, such as the cooks in our kitchens and the smiths who make our iron works.

SOPHIA: I'm beginning to see a pattern here...

BELISAMA: Mother made me the Fire Keeper because she knew I could be trusted. Why would I be so reckless with it? And why would I want to ruin your garden?

CARA opens her mouth to answer, but cannot think of a reason.

BOINNA: Because you are jealous!

BELISAMA: Me? Jealous? Why would I be jealous of Cara?

BOINNA: Because she grows things and you destroy them.

SOPHIA: Actually, Belisama protects things – she controls the fire and who can be trusted with it. I think it's unfair to blame her without proof.
CARA opens her mount and points her finger accusingly but cannot find fault
CARA: Well...
ANA: Then who destroyed the garden?
BOINNA: Maybe it was your fault Ana.
ANA: I beg your pardon?
BOINNA: You look after the royal aviary; perhaps some of your birds attacked the garden.
ANA: My birds?
BOINNA: Yes, perhaps they were angry...
ANA: Angry birds? Really, Sophia – can you see how this is nonsense?
SOPHIA: I can see that you are all devoted to the tasks you have been entrusted with. Cara, you tend the earth. Belisama, you keep the fire safe.
Boinna?
BOINNA: I look after the water of the kingdom, and all that lives in it and by it.
SOPHIA: Of course. And Ana; you are the keeper of all that flies in the air.
ANA: Mother chose each of these tasks for us on the day we were born. You know that.
SOPHIA: *(to WRITER)* The four elements are my sisters?
WRITER: Yes, what do you think about that?
SOPHIA: It's weird...but comforting on a bizarre level. And I suppose Mother is -
WRITER: Nature.
SOPHIA: Go figure. I wonder who I am?
WRITER: You haven't figured that out yet.
SOPHIA: Is that a question or a statement?
WRITER: Very much a statement. You've got quite a journey. *(WRITER clicks fingers.)*
ANA: Sophia? Who do you keep talking to?
SOPHIA: Myself.
WRITER: Hah!
SOPHIA: Come on, take me to Mother; I'm dying to meet her.
BOINNA: Sophia, you're acting very odd today.

(They exit)

Scene 2 : Raktabi the Brambles

MOTHER NATURE/ THE QUEEN is dressed in gardening attire, complete with sun hat and gardening gloves. She is kneeling on a gardening pad, possibly weeding. She has her back to us. Presently it becomes clear that RAKABI, the spirit of the BRAMBLES is directly in front of her, and facing us.

RAKTABI: That tickles!
 QUEEN: Oh, stop jiggling about Raktabi.
 RAKTABI: You know pruning always makes me giddy.
 QUEEN: Well if you stayed still it'd be over a lot sooner.
 RAKTABI: Oh I don't mind it. At least you aren't trying to hack me down.
 Not like that husband of yours. What is his problem?
 QUEEN: He's valiant.
 RAKTABI: That's no excuse for violence. It's not like I provoke him.
 RAKKI II: Oh I don't know; calling out "Hello, your Majesty? Try your luck
 again, your Majesty?" That's not provoking him?
 RAKTABI: He looks threateningly at me.
 RAKKI II: Oh so your problem is how people look at you, is it?
 RAKTABI: Shut it, you.
 RAKKI II: You!
 RAKTABI: You!
 RAKKI II: You! Anyway, I agree he's bothersome.
 QUEEN: I'll talk to him. Again.
 RAKTABI: I mean, here I stand, minding my own business. Is it my fault that
 the rest of the world is on the other side of me? I ask you – can I help it?
 I'm rooted here for goodness sake! What can I do?
 QUEEN: It's your task to be here. It's his to...eliminate you.
 RAKTABI & RAKKI II: Like, that is so unfair, right?
 QUEEN: It is what it is, Raktabi.
 RAKKI II : And it's ridiculous anyway, his trying to cut me down. Everyone
 knows the more you attack me, the stronger I get.
 QUEEN: I said I'll talk to him.
 RAKTABI: And those knights of his? I laugh at them! I laugh at their pathetic
 efforts to destroy me! Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Do you hear? I'm laughing!
 QUEEN: Yes Raktabi, dear. Now, do hold still.
 RAKTABI: I don't think you're taking this seriously.
 RAKKI II: You're the one laughing and you say she's not taking this
 seriously...
 QUEEN: Really? You don't think so?
 RAKTABI: Not entirely, no.
 QUEEN: Whom do you know me as?
 RAKTABI: Pardon?
 QUEEN: I know I'm Queen here, but what is my real name – who do you
 know me as?
 RAKKI II: Don't -
 RAKTABI: M.N.
 QUEEN: Say it, properly.
 RAKKI II: Don't speak!
 RAKTABI: Mother...
 QUEEN: Go on.
 RAKTABI: ...Nature. Mother Nature.
 QUEEN: Yes. I'm Mother Nature. You think I don't take your survival
 seriously?
 RAKTABI: Everyone else hates me. (*Silence, while QUEEN looks at her.*)

RAKKI : Everyone else wishes I were dead and withered.
RAKTABI: This is all I know! This is it!
QUEEN: What?
RAKTABI & RAKKI : I am Brambles!
RAKTABI: I tangle and confuse and rip and tear at anyone who tries to get past me – but I’m misunderstood!
RAKKI: I’m not so bad, once you get to know me... once you stop struggling, I’m really quite...interesting.
RAKTABI: Well, *I’m* interesting, I don’t know about you (*to RAKKI*).
RAKKI II: There you go again, Miss High and Mighty. I’m as special as you are, you know.
QUEEN: Look, you don’t need to convince me; I know what you are.
RAKTABI: I’m getting really fed up with everyone trying to tear me down.
QUEEN: Just ignore them.
RAKKI II : Ignore them? I feel their hatred every day! How can I ignore them?
QUEEN: Tolerate them, then.
RAKTABI: I’ve been tolerating them for years! I’m tired. I’m fed up. I’m hurt.
RAKKI II: I’m even hurting myself... (*prodding RAKTABI*) I mean you.
RAKTABI: You!
RAKKI II: You!
QUEEN: Oh, come on now. You’re bigger than that.
RAKTABI: Really, I’m not.
RAKKI II: I’m not.
RAKTABI: I’m going to do something.
QUEEN: What are you going to do?
RAKKI II: I’m going to fight back. They think my just sitting here quietly has been a problem? Wait until they see this!
QUEEN: Raktabi – Please dear, don’t be rash –
RAKTABI: It isn’t going to be pleasant, but do you know what? I’m really going to enjoy this!
QUEEN: Raktabi – no!
RAKTABI & RAKKI II: Too late! Hell hath no fury like a Bramble scorned!

Music, as the BRAMBLE rises up and asserts itself. Movement to Music begins SOPHIA and her SISTERS arrive. QUEEN tries to stop them from going too near RAKTABI.

QUEEN: Stand back girls! It’s dangerous.
SOPHIA: Mother!
CARA: Mother, Belisama has destroyed my little garden!
BELISAMA: Oh for goodness sake! This again.
ANA: Just accept the blame and we can all move on.
BOINNA: Well, I’m not taking sides this time.
SOPHIA: Mother, what’s the matter?
QUEEN: I’m afraid I have no time for your squabbles my daughters, there is something far more serious to deal with.
SOPHIA: What should we do?

QUEEN: Take your sisters away, quickly! Don't come any nearer, it's not safe!

MUSIC rises dramatically as the SISTERS run off, adlib panic.

SOPHIA: What about you, Mother?

QUEEN: I'll be alright Sophia. I'm going to look for your father, find out what he's doing – and stop him!

Lights fade gradually after the Brambles Movement to music shows how dangerous RAKTABI has become.

Scene 3 : In the Stables

DAWN: Alright, are we ready? Let us begin. One, two, one two three four:
DAWN and her chorus sing 'All The Pretty Ponies' to air of 'All the Single Ladies'. They are interrupted by KING BENNET and his knights.

KING BENNET: What is going on here?

DAWN: Oh! Your Majesty! What an honour! Girls – His Majesty has come to hear us sing!

KING BENNET: I have?

SIR ONE, SIR TWO, SIR THREE: You have!

DAWN: Quickly; the new song.

They break into 'Morning Has Broken'.

KING BENNET: Stop! Please ladies... that was, um, really lovely...singing...but we have a very important meeting.

DAWN: In the stables, Your Majesty?

KING BENNET: It's...top secret.

DAWN: Aha... I understand. We'll get out of your way, my Lord.

FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY: My Lord.

KING BENNET: If you wouldn't mind. Thank you. *(The Chorus exits).* Are they gone?

SIR ONE: Yes, back to the castle hopefully.

KING BENNET: Right, well sit down, you three. Pull up a bale of hay, make yourselves comfortable.

SIR TWO: Your Majesty, could I ask why we are meeting in the stable?

KING BENNET: So 'She' doesn't find out what we're planning.

SIR THREE: Who's 'She'?

KING BENNET: Her Indoors; My Better Half; the Old ball and Chain... *(They have no idea what he is talking about.)* Oh for goodness sake – the Queen! I don't want her to over hear us talking about you know what...

SIR ONE, TWO, THREE: Right.

SIR ONE: I don't know what.

SIR TWO, THREE: Me neither.

KING BENNET: The plan! Good my Lords, remember: the plan to break free from our entanglement!

SIR THREE: Ah yes; to cut through the Bramble for once and for all.

SIR TWO: An all for once!

KING BENNET: Yes, but keep it down. You know if the Queen finds out about this we'll all be in trouble.

SIR ONE: Remember the last time? When we doused the blasted thing with weed killer?

SIR TWO: It only made it stronger.

SIR THREE: *(Laughing)* And it destroyed everything in Princess Cara's little garden! That was so funny!

KING BENNET: That wasn't funny Sir Three; that was devastating for poor Cara.

SIR THREE: *(Changes his laughter into tears)*. I know! It was awfully sad. I haven't gotten over it.

SIR TWO: But what can we do my Lord? Every time we try to destroy the Bramble, it grows back stronger.

SIR ONE: When we try to hack through it with our swords, ten more branches grow where there was one!

KING BENNET: Ah yes, but now I have a cunning plan.

SIR TWO: Do tell us.

KING BENNET: I think we haven't been chopping the blasted thing fast enough. We cut it, then stand back waiting for it to repair itself. We're practically encouraging it.

SIR TWO: You're right; then we all get depressed and go back to the castle...

SIR THREE: ...have a great big feast, get really drunk...

SIR ONE: Drown our sorrows –

KING BENNET: - and get into trouble with 'She Who Must be Obeyed.'

SIR ONE, TWO, THREE: Who?

KING BENNET: The Queen! Do you ever listen to me?

SIR ONE: But Sir – the plan?

KING BENNET: Yes: the plan. If we give a sword to every person in the kingdom, and we all hack and chop at the same time – we may have a chance. Instead of you gentlemen always trying to be the hero and going it alone, this time we'll combine our forces and face the Bramble together. It'll be good for community spirit too.

SIR TWO: I can think of only one problem, my Lord.

SIR THREE: Really? Only one? I can think of several –

KING BENNET: What is it Sir Two? What problem do you foresee?

QUEEN: *(surprising the Knights)* How are you going to do it without the Queen finding out about it?

KING BENNET: Oh don't worry about her. Leave the old bat to me. *(The Knights are desperately trying to signal to KING B that the QUEEN is there.)* If I have to tie her up, I shall do it! And Sir Two, what has happened to your voice? *(He turns and sees the QUEEN.)* Agh! My dear!

QUEEN: King Bennet! I'm sorely disappointed in you.

KING BENNET: My dear! Why must you always sneak up on me?

QUEEN: Never mind all that. We have a problem with Raktabi.

SIR ONE: With who?

KING BENNET: Raktabi; it's the name she has for the Brambles. She 'understands' her. Yes I know my dear, that is what we are trying to sort out.

If you would just trust me and leave us to it, we'll have this kingdom bramble free in no time.

QUEEN: I'm afraid the stakes are higher; Raktabi is fighting back... Anyone who attacks her will be killed.

SIR TWO: I guess that rules out your plan, my Lord, eh?

QUEEN: What plan?

SIR THREE: To have the entire population of the kingdom attack the Brambles.

SIR TWO: Yes if you do that, you'll be walking your people into sure death.

SIR ONE: Gosh, imagine if the Queen hadn't come to warn us in time...

QUEEN: Now will you listen to me?

KING: If you think you have a better idea, I'll listen.

Scene 4: Therapy

BRIGID, DAWN, FAITH, HOPE and CHARITY sit in a semi circle near WRITER.

WRITER: So, if you all introduce yourselves and explain a little bit about what's bothering you, we can try to talk through our problems, alright?

Alright. Would you like to start?

BRIGID: *(Stands up, a little shy at first. She speaks directly to the audience).*

Hello everybody, I'm Brigid.

PLANTED MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE: Hi Brigid.

BRIGID: Hi. *(A shy wave to the audience. She turns to WRITER)* I'm a bit shy.

WRITER: You're doing great. It's not easy to stand up in front of an audience. *(To audience)* Isn't she doing great, everyone?

AUDIENCE: Yes!

WRITER: So tell us, Brigid. What's on your mind; what's bothering you?

BRIGID: Well... I don't like to tell tales, but –

WRITER: We're all friends here, Brigid.

BRIGID: Yes well... I'm a goddess, you see.

WRITER: *(encourages audience to be impressed)* Ooooh!

BRIGID: Thanks... I'm the Goddess of Poetry actually, and Art.

WRITER: That's very impressive.

BRIGID: Oh, and Medicine, I'm the Goddess of Medicine too.

WRITER: So, what's the problem?

BRIGID: Well, I don't feel appreciated. I write and I paint and for what? No one seems to care.

DAWN: Same! I try to bring music into people's lives –

WRITER: Perhaps you could introduce yourself?

DAWN: *(Standing)* Oh, yes, sorry. Sorry everyone. *(Coughs, fixes her hair).* Hello; I'm Dawn.

AUDIENCE: Hi Dawn.

WRITER: Are you a goddess?

DAWN: Well, I – never thought about that. I am the very essence of music if you like. Will that do?

WRITER: I guess if you are the essence of music, that's good enough. It's very admirable.

DAWN: (*Embarrassed but pleased*) Oh, well, thank you.

WRITER: You were saying...

DAWN: Yes, I was agreeing with Brigid. It's heartbreaking really, not being appreciated.

BRIGID: That's how I feel: totally despondent.

HOPE: Well, that's not right. You've got to have a little hope.

FAITH: I agree; you must have faith.

HOPE: Always carry a tiny bit of hope in your heart, like a – like a – a ray of sunshine.

CHARITY: There you go Hope, overdoing things again.

HOPE: What did I say wrong now?

CHARITY: There's nothing wrong with what you're saying.

FAITH: It's perhaps a little too much, too soon...

CHARITY: Well, you're one to talk. You can be just as –

FAITH: Just as what?

CHARITY: Just as "schmoozy".

FAITH & HOPE: Schmoozy?

CHARITY: You know what I mean. It puts people off.

WRITER: I'm sorry, ladies – you are...?

FAITH: Faith (*curtsies*)

HOPE: Hope (*curtsies*)

CHARITY: Charity (*curtsies*)

HOPE: Well you aren't being very charitable at the moment.

DAWN: On the contrary; I think she has your best interests at heart.

HOPE: I was only trying to be encouraging.

FAITH: Me too.

CHARITY: Gently, gently, sisters.

WRITER: I like you; all of you. And you three –

FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY: Us?

WRITER: Yes. You three are going to be crucial in this story.

FAITH: Fancy!

CHARITY: What would you like us to do?

WRITER: Dawn; there is a reason these angels are in your choir.

HOPE: She called us angels!

WRITER: I'm talking faith!

FAITH: (*sings a note*)

WRITER: Hope!

HOPE: (*sings next note up on the scale*)

WRITER: And Charity!

CHARITY: (*next note up*)

WRITER: Girls; don't ever let Dawn give up again.

FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY: We won't!

WRITER: Dawn must always be bright!

FAITH: (*Sings a note*)

DAWN: Ok, I get the idea. Come on – let's go work on those scales, eh?
(*They exit, singing and excited*)

BRIGID: Well...

WRITER: Yes?

BRIGID: I'm still depressed. You didn't ask them to sort me out.

WRITER: Oh, for goodness sake! You're a goddess!

BRIGID: With some sort of block, evidently!

WRITER: That's temporary. These challenges are thrown at you from time to time simply to make you stronger.

BRIGID: How do you know that?

WRITER: The key is Sophia.

BRIGID: Sophia? She has no interest in me, or what I stand for.

WRITER: Exactly.

BRIGID: Couldn't you be a little more enthusiastic, the way you were with the others?

WRITER: *(tapping her head, wisely)* It's a mind game, Brigid.

BRIGID: *(looking a little worried at WRITER)* Ok, I have to go...

WRITER: Get Sophia to open her eyes to you – work on it, get her to read a book, paint a picture – maybe even write some poetry...

BRIGID: Have you met Sophia? She's not interested!

WRITER: Make her interested! Sophia is more important here than you can imagine.

BRIGID: If I open her eyes –

WRITER: - you open everyone's eyes...

BRIGID: How delightful would that be...*(she day dreams about it, as WRITER silently exits)* But I must ask: who are you? *(She turns and sees she is alone.)* Oh; she's gone. *(She sees WRITER'S book on the desk, picks it up, flicks through it and smiles).* Right! Now to find Sophia!
She exits.

Scene 5 : The Attack

Lights up on RAKTABI. WRITER is in position at her desk, waiting. Enter KING BENNET, QUEEN, and KNIGHTS SIRs 1, 2 and 3, followed by DAWN, FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, SOPHIE and her SISTERS. The KING is in controlling form, the QUEEN is patiently waiting for something to go wrong.

KING: Right everyone! Follow me, that's it, this way... Knights to the right, citizens to the left. *(The KNIGHTS follow everyone to the left.)* No...Knights to...your other right. *(The KNIGHTS move right. RAKTABI and RAKKI II fold arms and watch with interest).*

RAKTABI: This will be good.

RAKKI II: Pathetic. Mother, are you seeing this?

QUEEN: I tried. I tried.

KING: Right, everyone – axes at the ready? Citizens?

QUEEN: Oh no! You can leave them out of it.

KING: Well, maybe they can just have them at the ready, just in case.

SOPHIA: In case what, Father?

RAKKI II: In case we sweep in and tangle our branches in their lovely hair!

Everyone screams and moves away.

RAKTABI: *(laughing)* That was funny... and it's given me an idea... *(she whispers to RAKKI)*

KING: Ok, just Knights then. Ready, gentlemen?

SIR ONE, TWO, THREE: Ready, my Lord.

KING: One... *(SIR ONE jumps forward enthusiastically)*

SIR ONE: Yay!

KING: Two...

SIR TWO: Hey!

KING: Three...

SIR THREE: Woo hoo!

KING: Not yet – what are you doing?

SIR THREE: You called us.

KING: I haven't given the proper signal. Remember? The word?

SIR TWO: Attack?

KING: Shhhh! Yes, wait until I say 'attack'. Then, attack!

SIR ONE: Got you.

KING: Ok... One –

SIR ONE: Yay!

KING: - two –

SIR TWO: Hey!

KING: three –

SIR THREE: Woo hoo!

KING: Enough! I didn't give the signal! *(to QUEEN)* Did you hear me give the signal?

QUEEN: Leave me out of it.

SIR ONE: But you keep calling us!

KING: I do not! Be quiet Sir One, Sir Two and Sir Three. Await the signal!

SIR ONE, TWO, THREE: Yes, my lord.

KING: Right, everyone –

SIR ONE: One!

KING: *(to citizens)* including you two –

SIR TWO: Two!

KING: On the count of three –

SIR THREE: That's my name!

RAKTABI: Please, King Bennett – let me have them. You know I would be doing you a favour.

RAKKI II: We don't want them, they'd drive us mad.

RAKTABI: Not once they're destroyed...

RAKKI II: Oh yes... *(evil laughter)* Come here; one, two, three...

KING interrupts before the KNIGHTS walk towards RAKTABI.

KING: Alright! No more counting . *(Upset)* I can't even count to three...

SIR THREE: You can't count to three? That's so sad.

SIR TWO: Let's teach him.

KING: They're not listening to me!

QUEEN: Hush dear. Never mind.

BRIGID: *(entering with large book)* Mistress Sophia! There you are.

SOPHIA: Yes Brigid, the whole kingdom is here.

ANA: As ordered by the king.
 BELISAMA: Where were you?
 BRIGID: I was...thinking.
 QUEEN: Nice to know someone is thinking.
 KING: What's that supposed to mean?
 QUEEN: Nothing.
 BRIGID: I've brought you that book, Mistress Sophia.
 SOPHIA: What book?
 BRIGID: The one about life outside the Brambles...you know, the one you said you'd look at later?
 SOPHIA: Did I?
 BRIGID: Sort of. Oh, look! What a handsome looking prince...
 SOPHIA: Prince? Let me see that.
 BOINNA: Ooh, a prince! What's he doing with that sword?
 BRIGID: That's what they do – on the outside. They try to get in.
 SOPHIA: Why would they try to get in here?
 BRIGID: Because they don't know what its like. They're interested in us.
 CARA: I wouldn't mind it if he made his way in here.
 SOPHIA: Give me that! It's not meant for your eyes.
 CARA: Huh!
 BRIGID: That's right; it's for Sophia. You can read about his kingdom, here.
 SOPHIA: Well, I'll just have a little look. Though we are under attack, maybe it's not the time.
 RAKKI II: Oh, you can have a little reading break, while the king sorts himself out.
 RAKTABI: It's such a waste of time, reading.
 RAKKI II: Writing.
 RAKTABI: Painting!
 RAKKI II: Rhyming!
 RAKTABI: You're wasting your time Brigid! Do you hear!
 RAKKI II: You can try all you like, but you'll never come near!
 RAKTABI: We're quite happy not knowing a thing!
 RAKKI II: Leave us alone to laugh at the king! *(she covers her mouth, gasping)* Oh no! I made up a poem!
 RAKTABI: *(covering her mouth)* That's disgusting! Pah! Pah!
 SOPHIA: This is very interesting, Brigid.
 BRIGID: *(innocently)* Is it?
 SOPHIA: This...Prince Handsomé – is that really his name?
 QUEEN: Oh yes, the Prince... but it's pronounced 'handsome-ay', there's an accent on the final 'e'. *(To King)* Darling; you remember the Handsomés, don't you?
 KING: *(who looks up from his sulking)* Oh yes... in the next Kingdom. Used to have them over before - the Brambles. Always a bit jealous of that king actually, with all those sons.
 CARA: Sons! You mean there are more that look like this one?
 QUEEN: I do remember them as a good-looking family.
 ANA: Read on, Sophia.
 BOINNA: How many Princes are there?

BELISAMA: Let me see that for a sec.

SOPHIA: *(holding book away from them)* It says here that we planted the Brambles. Wait a minute... it says that – that *I* was responsible... *(She looks at Brigid)* Me? *(looks at Queen)* ME?!!

RAKTABI & RAKKI II: We'll always be indebted to you.

SOPHIA: Me!!!

CARA: Don't you remember, Sophia? You had me till the earth.

BELISAMA: You had me order the Sun to shine here more than any other part of the kingdom.

BOINNA: You ensured that I kept it well watered.

ANA: And my task was to protect it from the birds.

SOPHIA: I was responsible for the Brambles.

RAKTABI: And for my extraordinary good health.

SOPHIA: But, why?

DAWN: We don't remember.

BRIGID: Nobody remembers.

RAKKI II: Well, obviously, I do. *(Everyone looks at her)* Well, I do.

RAKTABI: But I'm not going to tell anyone!

SIR ONE: One!

SIR TWO: Two!

SIR THREE: Three!

KING: What? Oh yes... Attack! ATTACK!

RAKTABI: No you don't –

QUEEN: Wait!

RAKKI II: WE ATTACK!

Dramatic Movement to Music as RAKTABI and her Brambles reach out to really attack everyone standing near. There follows a battle – KING & KNIGHTS attacking while everyone else gets caught up in the melee. Suddenly HOPE is ensnared and trapped centre.

FAITH & CHARITY: Hope!

Music stops, all freeze

FAITH: Raktabi has her.

CHARITY: Hope is gone.

SOPHIA: Gone?

CHARITY: Hope is gone.

FAITH: There is no Hope anymore...

DAWN: A world without Hope – that's unbearable.

KING: Down your swords my lords. It's over.

RAKKI II: Wise words, your Highness. At last.

SOPHIA: Mother? What does this mean?

BRIGID: It's Hopeless... *(everyone is deflated, defeated; they slump down sadly).*

CHARITY: Faith; what do you think?

FAITH: I believe Sophia will save us.

SOPHIA: I will save you? What can I do?

CHARITY: You can find Hope for us.

SOPHIA: But – she's gone. You said so yourself.

FAITH: I believe you will think of something. Charity; what do you think?

CHARITY: (*picks up the book, which had been dropped DSC*) Take this; it's the story of your life. What will happen next Sophia?

SOPHIA: My life?

CHARITY: (*gives the book to WRITER*) What will happen next?

WRITER: (*with pen at the ready*) I'm waiting...

SOPHIA: I am remembering something –

FAITH: I knew you would!

SOPHIA: When I found her she was just a seedling, damaged and weak. I thought she would die. I was about to give her to Cara, but something made me hold back. Hope was with me that day. Raktabi; you were just a baby. You were innocent and pure: you knew nothing, you had nothing. Except me. And Hope. My sisters helped me (*CARA, BOINNA, BELISAMA & ANA mime the planting of RAKTABI*), but Raktabi was mine. As she grew, I marvelled at her; I thought of nothing else. But she kept growing. She got too big. I forgot about the young damaged seedling – she was far from that anymore. Caring for her became too much. It tired me out. So Mother began to tend to her. I forgot about her. I forgot my baby seedling. I forgot everything.

WRITER: And now?

SOPHIA: Now... I remember. Raktabi, I remember you cried when Hope went away.

RAKTABI: But I never gave up on her. And now I have her all to myself.

SOPHIA: But you can't trap Hope. She will come to you freely.

HOPE appears from within the Brambles

RAKKI II: I hate to say it but I think she's right.

RAKTABI: Don't let them turn you into a sap. You always do that.

RAKKI II: I'm just saying; it makes sense to me.

RAKTABI: Do you think we would ever have amounted to anything if I listened to you all these years?

RAKKI II: Amounted to what? The most hated living thing in the kingdom?

HOPE: I don't hate you.

FAITH: Nor do I.

CHARITY: Nor I.

CARA: It's impossible for me to hate a living thing.

ANA, BOINNA, BELISAMA: We don't hate you.

RAKTABI: Well, you've a funny way of showing it.

QUEEN: You know how I feel about you.

KING: Even I like you in an odd sort of way – who would I play with if you weren't there?

SIR TWO: Play with?

KING: I mean *fight* with! Who would I fight with?

BRIGID: Do we have to fight at all?

DAWN: Yes, can't we just get along?

SOPHIA: Raktabi; do you think you could make a passageway through your branches?

QUEEN: There is no need to destroy you and there is no need for you to imprison us anymore.

RAKKI II: Well... as it happens, Hope broke some of our branches during the fracas.

HOPE: I'm sorry, I was frightened.

RAKTABI: But you have made a natural passageway through us – and it didn't hurt a bit!

BOINNA: Look! Through there!

BELISAMA: The outside world!

ANA: The Handsomé boys! What? You're all thinking the same.

BRIGID: Ooh, the grass is just as green as here.

Everyone runs through the passageway, and RAKTABI turns to face where they have gone. SOPHIA & WRITER remain.

WRITER: So, you figured it all out Sophia.

SOPHIA: There's one last part.

WRITER: Oh yes? What's that Sophia?

SOPHIA: I just want to say...thank you – Sophia.

WRITER: *(Taking her hand and giving her the book).* You're welcome. Sophia.

THE END