

THE CHAMELEON PRINCESS

A COMEDY IN ONE-ACT

by
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SCENE ONE

The stage is bare except for two thrones side by side in the center. The QUEEN rushes onto the stage holding a letter, shouting aloud to no one and everyone.

QUEEN: Disaster! Catastrophe! Order the guards! Alert the sentries! Call out the dogs!

(SHE quickly reads the letter again as PRINCESS PAULINE and PRINCESS URSULA run on.)

URSULA: *(concerned)* What it is, Mama!

PAULINE: *(annoyed)* What is it now?

QUEEN: I cannot believe that girl! She has really outdone herself this time!

URSULA: Zena?

PAULINE: Who else?

QUEEN: She will be the death of me yet! *(sits on one of the thrones)*

URSULA: Is Zena all right?

PAULINE: What's she done now?

QUEEN: She's run off! It's all in this letter!

URSULA: Run off? With who? *(hopefully)* A prince?

PAULINE: More likely the school master.

URSULA: Oh, but she couldn't! Could she, Mama?

QUEEN: It's all in this dreadful letter! I'll never forgive for this! *(rips the letter in small pieces)* After all I've done for her!

PAULINE: How revolting! He's twice her age.

QUEEN: Who is?

PAULINE: The school master.

QUEEN: Why are you talking about school masters? My eldest daughter has run off and left us!

URSULA: Not the school master? But with whom?

QUEEN: With no one at all! That's what pains me so! She's run off by herself to . . . to "find herself"!

URSULA: She says that?

QUEEN: It's all in the letter! *(rises)* Read it yourself! *(SHE tosses the pieces into the air then paces back and forth fuming.)*

(URSULA picks up some of the pieces of paper and tries to read them.)

PAULINE: That sounds like Zena. Find herself! She's got a mirror. She can just look there and find herself!

QUEEN: She says she has learned all she can possibly learn at the castle. She has to see the world and start to learn things for herself.

URSULA: She wrote that?

QUEEN: Have you ever heard such nonsense?

PAULINE: All the time. I share a bedroom with her.

QUEEN: Well, we must stop her! She couldn't have gotten very far. *(shouts)* Guards! Guards!

URSULA: I think they all went hunting with Daddy.

QUEEN: Just like your father to be away on a hunting trip when catastrophe strikes! Guards!

URSULA: I can call the butler Merton.

PAULINE: Old Merton's half blind. He couldn't find Zena even if she was still in the castle.

QUEEN: Guards! Someone!

URSULA: Bertha in the kitchen can help us.

PAULINE: That old cook has got such a limp, it would take her all morning just to get across the drawbridge.

QUEEN: A disaster! This whole castle is a fraud!

URSULA: I hear someone coming, Mama!

(The servant KARLA runs on excitedly. SHE is wrapped up in a blanket. Her feet and arms are bare.)

KARLA: Your Majesty! Your Majesty!

PAULINE: Karla!

QUEEN: What the devil are you wearing, girl?

KARLA: Princess Zena is gone! I can't find her anywhere. I've been looking ever since I woke up!

QUEEN: Of course she's gone, stupid girl! She left a letter. Look! (*points to the bits of paper on the floor*)
KARLA: I can't read, Your Majesty!
QUEEN: Always an excuse with that girl!
URSULA: Zena must have slipped out of the castle sometime during the night. She's run away!
KARLA: (*hopefully*) With a Prince?
PAULINE: Fat chance.
QUEEN: (*to KARLA*) I insist on your telling me why you are dressed like that!
KARLA: My dress has been stolen! I woke up and it was gone!
URSULA: Zena must have taken it!
QUEEN: Oh, my poor dear Zena, alone out there in the cold cruel world!
KARLA: In my dress!
QUEEN: (*to KARLA*) Run down to the gate house and see if any of the guards are there. There must be someone who's not on that blasted hunting trip!
KARLA: But, Your Majesty – !
QUEEN: Put on another dress then do as I tell you!
KARLA: But I don't have another dress!
QUEEN: Always an excuse with that girl!
URSULA: Oh, go quickly, Karla! We must find Zena!
KARLA: Yes, Princess Ursula. (*exits*)
QUEEN: Oh, what is to become of her!
PAULINE: If she goes down to the gate house wearing nothing but a blanket she'll get their attention.
QUEEN: I mean Zena! What's to become of her!
URSULA: Don't worry, Mama. Zena is very smart. You know that.
QUEEN: But what good are brains in the real world!
PAULINE: It would help if Zena had a lick of common sense.
URSULA: Don't say such things, Pauline.
QUEEN: I fear she's right, Ursula. Zena is very smart but I don't think she always has both feet on the ground.
PAULINE: Enough on the ground to run away.
QUEEN: Oh, my baby! (*suddenly furious again*) I'll teach her to do this to me! We'll find her and bring her back and – !
URSULA: And what, Mama? You won't do anything drastic, will you?
PAULINE: Burn all her books. That'll get her goat.
URSULA: Oh, you wouldn't do that to Zena, would you, Mama?
QUEEN: There's no telling what a mother will do when catastrophe strikes!
PAULINE: (*sitting on the throne next to one the QUEEN sat on earlier*) Well, whatever happens, give me a call when Zena is brought home. I don't want to miss that.
QUEEN: Pauline, how many times do I have to tell you not to sit on your father's throne!
PAULINE: He's not using it. He's in Bavaria. Hunting.
QUEEN: I'll never forgive that man! Never here when you need him!
PAULINE: If Zena doesn't come back, can I have her dressing table? It's better than mine.
QUEEN: Get off that throne! (*exiting*) Oh my poor darling Zena . . . ! (*furious*) How can you do this to me! (*SHE is gone*)
PAULINE: Hey, Ursula. If I get her dressing table you can have her tapestry stand. I hate tapestry!
URSULA: (*upset and tearful*) Oh!!! (*rushes off to where her mother exited*)
PAULINE: How about her chamber pot then?

SCENE TWO

Sprightly music plays as PAULINE exits and the scene changes to the forest. A WOODCUTTER is chopping at an invisible tree with his axe as PRINCESS ZENA enters. SHE is dressed in a servant's dress which doesn't fit her exactly. SHE watches the WOODCUTTER, then HE sees her and stops chopping.

WOODCUTTER: May I help you, Miss?
ZENA: Oh, don't let me disturb you, Mr. Woodcutter. I was just observing that you are using the thirty-degree angle cut rather than the traditional forty-five degrees.
WOODCUTTER: That's right, Miss.
ZENA: And I was curious as to why since that angle is not usually used on maple trees, especially in this season when the sap flow is weakened by the warm northeasterly winds.
WOODCUTTER: You forget, Miss, that the silver maple tends to blossom later in the season so the saturation of sap is stunted somewhat.
ZENA: Of course! How silly of me to forget.

WOODCUTTER: You take quite an interest in trees, I see. Perhaps your father is a woodcutter?

ZENA: Oh, no. Papa wouldn't know which end of an axe was which. Although he does have an impressive collection of battle axes in the long gallery.

WOODCUTTER: You don't say. Then I take it that the study of trees is your own personal hobby.

ZENA: Oh, yes. I spend a great deal of time in the arboretum.

WOODCUTTER: Then you would know all about this blight we've had with the aspens.

ZENA: Isn't it terrible! I think it quite the worse thing since all the weeping cedars were attacked by the cicada influx.

WOODCUTTER: But that was twenty years ago! Surely you cannot recall that.

ZENA: I read about it in my school master's almanac. Luckily the new sycamore crop that year was not affected.

WOODCUTTER: That was because –

ZENA: Because of the April frost which protected the sycamore buds from sprouting too soon. I know. It was such a relief, I can't tell you.

WOODCUTTER: You're not from around these parts, are you, Miss? I don't recall ever having set eyes on you before. I would have remembered.

ZENA: I must not keep you from your work. Judging from the angle you are using and the amount of sap that has solidified in the outer sections of that maple, it will take you much of the rest of the morning to fell that tree.

WOODCUTTER: I expect you're right, Miss.

ZENA: So I'll be on my way then. Thank you for such an illuminating conversation. Good day.

WOODCUTTER: (*tips his hat*) Good day to you, Miss.

(*SHE exits and HE stares after her for a moment.*)

Remarkable girl.

SCENE THREE

HE continues chopping as music plays and the scene returns to the palace where the two thrones remain. The WOODCUTTER exits and the QUEEN enters with PAULINE, URSULA, KARLA (still wrapped in the blanket), and the CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.

CAPTAIN: And have you any idea when the Princess may have departed the palace, Your Majesty?

QUEEN: Some time during the night, I suspect. How should I know? You are the Captain of the Guard. How can she just walk out of the castle? Wouldn't one of your men have seen her?

CAPTAIN: I am afraid just about all of my men are occupied elsewhere.

QUEEN: Elsewhere?

PAULINE: Bavaria.

CAPTAIN: And you believe the Princess is disguised as a servant?

KARLA: She stole my dress!

QUEEN: Hush, you dreadful girl. And why are you still dressed in such a ridiculous manner? I told you to go and change your dress.

KARLA: I haven't any other dress.

URSULA: You can borrow one of Zena's.

PAULINE: Sure. She's not using any of her dresses today.

KARLA: We're not the same size!

QUEEN: Always an excuse with that girl! Be gone and don't come back until you are properly clothed!

(*KARLA exits.*)

CAPTAIN: So the Princess is wearing a servant's dress –

PAULINE: That doesn't quite fit her.

CAPTAIN: And no travel bag or any such thing?

URSULA: It doesn't look like anything is missing from her room.

PAULINE: She even left all her lousy books!

QUEEN: What does it matter what she is wearing and what she took with her! Go and find her!

CAPTAIN: Certainly, Your Majesty. I will comb the kingdom looking for her.

QUEEN: Look everywhere! Leave no stone unturned!

PAULINE: I suggest you start with the book shops.

CAPTAIN: One thing before I start, Your Majesty.

QUEEN: (*impatient*) What is it now?

CAPTAIN: I can better figure out what the Princess might do if I know something about her . . . uh . . . character.
QUEEN: She is a high-born and well-bred Princess! That's all you need to know!
URSULA: What he means, Mama, is –
QUEEN: I know what the creature wants to know and it's none of his business!
CAPTAIN: Yes, Your Majesty.
URSULA: But we've got to help him, Mama! (to GUARD) Zena is very very smart, Captain.
CAPTAIN: I see.
PAULINE: Too smart for her own good.
QUEEN: Hush, Pauline.
URSULA: Zena is so smart, Captain, and she knows so much about everything . . .
PAULINE: Most of it useless.
URSULA: That sometimes she becomes a sort of expert on . . . well, whatever subject it is being talked about.
CAPTAIN: I see . . . I think.
PAULINE: What my sister is trying to say is that Zena becomes whomever she is with.
QUEEN: Pauline!
PAULINE: He ought to know. (to CAPTAIN) If Zena is with the gamekeeper, she knows everything about wild game and such. If she's with the bishop, she becomes an expert on religion. When she meets with the blacksmith about her horse, Zena becomes a regular know-it-all on smithing.
CAPTAIN: Amazing! Something like a chameleon!
QUEEN: Are you calling my daughter a lizard!
CAPTAIN: Oh, no! I apologize, Your Majesty! I . . . ! I . . . !
QUEEN: Stop babbling and go and find the princess! And you better return to the palace with her before the King gets back or you'll spend the rest of your days guarding the compost heap! (exits in a huff)
CAPTAIN: Oh dear . . . !
PAULINE: Good luck, Captain. You'll need it.

SCENE FOUR

Music plays as PAULINE and URSULA exit in one direction and the CAPTAIN exits in the opposite direction. The two thrones are removed and replaced by two stools. The two SEAMSTRESSES enter with their sewing and sit on the stools. ZENA enters and observes the two old spinsters sewing as the music fades out.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Hello, my dear. Are you lost?
SEAMSTRESS TWO: She doesn't look lost. (to ZENA) You aren't lost, are you?
ZENA: Not at all.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: I told you she wasn't lost.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: She looked lost to me. (to ZENA) Are you sure you're not lost, my dear?
ZENA: I am quite fine, thank you. I was just observing your sewing techniques.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Oh. Are you interested in sewing, my dear?
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Of course she's not interested in sewing. A young pretty girl like her.
ZENA: I am very interested in sewing. It is a particular hobby of mine.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: (to her sister) Did you hear that? She *is* interested in sewing.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: She doesn't look very interested to me.
ZENA: I notice you are using the double crossover stitch on the hem but the alternating parallel pattern on the seam. Of course, the double crossover is most efficient on tweeds and such but I rarely see it on the smoother fabrics.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: My, but she is interested in sewing!
SEAMSTRESS ONE: I told you she was.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: But she didn't look like she was interested.
ZENA: On the other hand, the opposite approach works best on silk, I believe. Something about the pull on silk makes the alternating pattern more effective. Don't you agree?
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Oh, we don't get to work with silk very often. Much too expensive for our customers.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Except for the ladies at the manor house.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: I was not referring to the ladies at the manor house. They require silk all the time.
ZENA: Don't you find velvet the most satisfying to work with? Not the crushed velvet, of course, but the seared kind. It drapes so much better, especially when cut on the bias.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: It takes a lot of patience to work with velvet. It is so unforgiving.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: I prefer a good cotton, myself. Bleached and ready for the needle. There's nothing better.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Except silk.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Except silk. But we don't get much call for silk.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Except for the ladies at the manor house.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Except for the ladies at the manor house.
ZENA: Well. I have enjoyed our little conversation. Thank you both. But I must be moving on.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Moving on? But I thought you were lost.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: She doesn't look lost to me. *(to ZENA)* Are you?
ZENA: Not at all. Good day to you both. *(exits)*
SEAMSTRESS ONE: My, but she was interested in sewing!
SEAMSTRESS TWO: She didn't look interested.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: But she was.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Yes, she was. But she didn't look it.

SCENE FIVE

Music plays and the two SEAMSTRESSES exit with their stools as the scene shifts back to the palace where the QUEEN enters and paces, followed by PAULINE and URSULA.

QUEEN: A chameleon indeed! What a ridiculous notion!
PAULINE: But it's true. Zena just seems to soak up knowledge from whoever she talks to. Freaky.
QUEEN: Don't call my eldest daughter a freak! She's just . . . unusual. That's why I worry about her so!
URSULA: Don't worry, Mama. Zena will be fine. She's smart.
QUEEN: What if she comes upon bandits!
PAULINE: Then she will start talking like a bandit. I know her.
URSULA: Perhaps the Captain of the Guard will find her before she gets into any trouble.
QUEEN: That incompetent oaf! He called my eldest daughter a lizard! Where are my smelling salts? Karla! Oh, where is that girl?
URSULA: Karla!
PAULINE: Lizard . . . chameleon . . . whatever . . . I still say Zena is weird.

(KARLA enters. SHE now wears a beautiful princess gown.)

KARLA: Yes, Your Majesty!
QUEEN: My smelling salts! Quickly – ! *(sees the gown)* What are you wearing?
KARLA: You told me to put on a dress.
QUEEN: Not Princess Zena's coronation gown!
KARLA: It's the only thing in her closet that fits me. But the tiara was a little big so I didn't wear it.
QUEEN: Insolence! Take it off this instant!
KARLA: But you said – !
PAULINE: I think it looks good on her. That color made Zena look pale, don't you think?
QUEEN: Has everyone in this castle taken leave of their senses!
URSULA: I always thought that was Zena's best color.
QUEEN: Take it off!
KARLA: Okay. Okay. *(leaving)* I wonder where I left that blanket . . . *(exits)*
PAULINE: It's just a dress. Zena's got dozens of them.
QUEEN: My eldest daughter has run off and her maid is prancing around the palace in a coronation gown! What could be worse! Where are my smelling salts? Karla! *(starts to exit)*
PAULINE: You better find Karla another dress, Ursula. Look in the toy chest. We used to have lots of dress-up costumes in there.
URSULA: That's a good idea.
QUEEN: And don't forget my smelling salts!
URSULA: Yes, Mama. *(exits)*
QUEEN: I'll never forgive your father for not being here!
PAULINE: The only way Daddy could find Zena is if she were a deer and he was hunting.
QUEEN: Don't speak disrespectfully of your father. After all, he is the king, the no good louse. *(exits in a huff)*
PAULINE: Long live the king. The louse.

SCENE SIX

Music plays and PAULINE exits. The scene changes to a forest where the PRINCE is sitting on a log. HE holds a daisy and pulls off the petals one by one. The music fades out.

PRINCE: To be . . . Or not to be . . . To be . . . Or not to be . . . To be . . . *(runs out of petals)* Blast! *(pulls out another daisy and begins to pull off its petals)* To be . . . Or not to be . . . To be . . . Or not to be . . . To be . . .

(ZENA enters and observes him for a few moments before speaking.)

ZENA: Excuse me . . .

(The PRINCE jumps up, startled. HE looks around then sees ZENA. HE is relieved.)

PRINCE: Oh . . . You surprised me.

ZENA: I fear I interrupted your soliloquy.

PRINCE: I thought it was . . . them.

ZENA: Them?

PRINCE: Them. You know. From the palace.

ZENA: You've run away from a palace.

PRINCE: How did you know?

ZENA: Stands to reason. You're a prince but you don't want to be. You are weary of court affairs and regal ceremonies and boring dinners with ambassadors and . . . you can guess the rest.

PRINCE: Exactly!

ZENA: So you ran away to . . . find yourself.

PRINCE: Precisely!

ZENA: And have you? Found yourself?

PRINCE: *(depressed)* No . . .

ZENA: Neither have I. But I will.

PRINCE: What a remarkable girl. It's almost as if you can read my mind!

ZENA: I can. Now tell me which is the worst: the royal cloak that itches, the silk gloves that make you sweaty on the palms, or the crown which is heavy and cumbersome?

PRINCE: Astonishing! I hate all those things!

ZENA: The worst for me is the tiara. It digs into my head until I feel like I want to scream.

PRINCE: So does the crown! You understand it all!

ZENA: I suppose they want you to marry some princess from a far-off land. You've never meet but they sent you her cameo portrait that makes her look like a duck.

PRINCE: Yes! A duck with ribbons in her hair!

ZENA: Was she smiling in the portrait?

PRINCE: No.

ZENA: That means she has bad teeth.

PRINCE: Really? I hadn't thought of that. I was hoping that her not smiling meant she was . . . well, just melancholy.

ZENA: Like you.

PRINCE: Exactly! You are incredible!

ZENA: No. Just a royal runaway like yourself.

PRINCE: If you're a princess, maybe I can marry you instead of Miss Duck With Ribbons. Are you rich? I've got to wed a rich princess. My kingdom is bankrupt.

ZENA: I'm rich enough. But it doesn't matter. I cannot marry you.

PRINCE: Why not? We are perfect for each other!

ZENA: Meaning we are the same?

PRINCE: Yes!

ZENA: Why would I want to marry myself? I'm trying to find myself but that doesn't mean I want to marry myself.

PRINCE: You are confusing me. But I still love you and want you to be my wife.

ZENA: No thank you.

PRINCE: Someday I'll be king and you can be a queen!

ZENA: Farewell, Prince Melancholy. I'll leave you now to your soliloquy. I believe you were on "Not to be."

PRINCE: Don't go! With you as my bride I can at last be happy!

ZENA: But then you would no longer be a Melancholy Prince and would have no identity at all. What possible chance could you have in finding yourself then?

PRINCE: You're confusing me again.

ZENA: Good day, Your Highness. Be sure you find yourself before you return to your castle.

SCENE SEVEN

Music plays as ZENA exits and the PRINCE stares after her with a dumbfounded look. HE exits and the WOODCUTTER returns and mimes chopping down another tree. The CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD enters and the music fades away.

CAPTAIN: You there! Woodcutter!

WOODCUTTER: *(stops chopping)* Are you addressing me?

CAPTAIN: Of course I am. I come in the King's name!

WOODCUTTER: Long live the King!

CAPTAIN: Yes. Of course. I am on a quest for the King. Well, actually the Queen. But it's all the same thing. I am looking for a runaway princess.

WOODCUTTER: A princess! Why did she run away?

CAPTAIN: None of your business. She is disguised as a servant. Have you seen anyone suspicious today? A stranger? Someone who might be the princess in disguise?

WOODCUTTER: Let me think. There was an old tramp who passed by an hour ago. I gave him a small coin. He looked destitute. I can't imagine he was a princess in disguise.

CAPTAIN: Certainly not. Anyone else? Think, Woodcutter!

WOODCUTTER: Oh! This morning there was this extraordinary young lady who stopped and chatted with me for a while. But she couldn't have been a princess.

CAPTAIN: And why not?

WOODCUTTER: She knew all about trees and sap and blossoms and . . . She was something of an expert on the subject. No princess would know such things.

CAPTAIN: This one would. Which way did she go?

WOODCUTTER: Down that way, I believe. *(points)* But I tell you no princess would know so much about trees.

CAPTAIN: And you spoke with her this morning?

WOODCUTTER: Yes, Captain. About mid-morning, I'd say. The sun was not yet directly overhead.

CAPTAIN: That means she could be miles away by now. Oh, dear. I better hurry! Good day, Woodcutter. *(leaving)*

WOODCUTTER: The same to you, Captain. But I tell you it can't be the same girl. She knew all about the cicada influx!

SCENE EIGHT

Music plays as the CAPTAIN exits and the WOODCUTTER watches him go. As the WOODCUTTER exits, the COOK enters and SHE stands over a big pot, stirring it with a large spoon and putting in various ingredients. ZENA enters and the music fades away.

ZENA: That smells delicious!

COOK: It's getting there. Needs to boil a bit longer. *(tastes some with her spoon)* And needs a few more spices. *(SHE tosses in a few more ingredients)* That ought to do it.

ZENA: May I have a taste?

COOK: Certainly, my child. Help yourself.

(COOK hands her the spoon and ZENA sips it.)

Be careful, though. It's quite hot.

ZENA: Mmmm! I like the slight taste of the beet root. But I think the oregano is a trifle weak.

COOK: You think so. *(SHE tastes it)* I think you might be right, my child. *(adds more ingredients)*

ZENA: Do you add the carrots raw or seared? I find if you slightly fry them in butter before mixing them with the chopped onion that the flavor permeates the mutton just enough to soften the skin ever so slightly.

COOK: My, but you do know your cooking, my child! You must have trained at the Royal Culinary School.

ZENA: Never seen the place. Which do you prefer for the final boiling? Sea salt or grated chives?

COOK: Sea salt is hard to get most of the time. If the chives are ground up instead of grated it works better.

ZENA: Unless you add just a touch of goat's milk. That usually does the trick.

COOK: Goat's milk! I never thought of that! *(gives her the spoon)* Now try it, my child. I'd like an expert's opinion.

(ZENA tastes the spoonful.)

ZENA: Delectable. Of course it needs to simmer for a little longer. Spread the ashes about a bit and the temperature ought to be just right.

COOK: You will join me for dinner, my child? I have so many questions to ask you about sauces. I'll bet you know a lot about sauces.

ZENA: Sauces are a particular favorite with me. But I fear I must be moving on. I have much to do before darkness comes so I say my farewell to you.

COOK: But you can't go now! I wanted to ask you about ginger biscuits!

ZENA: Always dry the ginger in the sun for half a day to get the best flavor! Good day, ma'am! (*exits*)

COOK: What about fruit tarts! We've got to talk about fruit tarts!

(*ZENA is gone.*)

What an extraordinary child!

SCENE NINE

Music plays as the COOK exits with her pot and the two SEAMSTRESSES re-enter and sit on their stools sewing. The CAPTAIN enters and the music fades out.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Hello, kind sir. Are you lost?

SEAMSTRESS TWO: He doesn't look lost. (*to CAPTAIN*) You aren't lost, are you?

CAPTAIN: I am the royal Captain of the Guard!

SEAMSTRESS TWO: I told you he wasn't lost.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: He looked lost to me. (*to GUARD*) May we help you, sir?

CAPTAIN: I am searching for a young girl. She is dressed as a servant.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: There are plenty of servant girls in the village, sir. And I believe they all dress like servants.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Except the ladies at the manor house.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Except the ladies at the manor house. Who aren't servants at all.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Of course they're not.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Except for their servants, of course.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Of course.

CAPTAIN: (*frustrated*) I am not looking for a servant girl. I am trying to find a girl who is disguised as a servant!

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Hard to tell the difference, I would think.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Yes. A servant dressed like a servant would look a lot like a girl who was not a servant dressed like a servant.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Even if she were a lady.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Even if she were a lady.

CAPTAIN: This girl is a princess!

BOTH: A princess!

CAPTAIN: A runaway princess. Disguised as a servant.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: How extraordinary!

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Certainly extraordinary!

CAPTAIN: Has any young girl passed this way today? A stranger? A girl you didn't recognize?

SEAMSTRESS ONE: We don't recognize too many people these days. The eyes aren't what they used to be.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Too much sewing.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Definitely too much sewing.

CAPTAIN: You would remember this girl if you talked to her.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Well, if we talked to her that would be a different matter.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: An entirely different matter.

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Talking and seeing are two very different things.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Very different. Our seeing is not so good these days . . .

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Too much sewing.

SEAMSTRESS TWO: But our talking is still good. Wouldn't you agree, sister?

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Talking? Oh, we still talk.

CAPTAIN: (*getting angry*) All I want to know is if you talked to any young girl today that you didn't know?

SEAMSTRESS ONE: Young girl . . . ?

SEAMSTRESS TWO: Today?

BOTH: No.

CAPTAIN: That's all I need to know. Good day to you both. *(starts to exit)*
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Just that young girl who knew so much about sewing.
CAPTAIN: What?
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Oh, yes! Her!
SEAMSTRESS ONE: The one who was lost.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: She wasn't lost.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: She looked like she was lost.
CAPTAIN: Tell me about this girl.
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Certainly. She wasn't lost . . .
SEAMSTRESS ONE: And she was very interested in sewing . . .
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Although she didn't look like she was interested in sewing . . .
SEAMSTRESS ONE: But she was.
CAPTAIN: Did she seem to know a great deal about sewing?
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Oh, she knew everything!
SEAMSTRESS TWO: A real expert! Even about alternating double patterns.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: And silks and velvet and –
CAPTAIN: That must be her!
SEAMSTRESS ONE: A princess?
SEAMSTRESS TWO: Who knows about sewing?
BOTH: Oh, no!
CAPTAIN: Tell me. Quickly! Which direction did she go?
SEAMSTRESS ONE: That way . . . *(points left)*
SEAMSTRESS TWO: No, I believe it was that way . . . *(points right)*
CAPTAIN: *(impatiently)* Ladies!
SEAMSTRESS ONE: I think my sister is right. She went that way. *(points right)*
CAPTAIN: Very well. Good day to you both! *(rushes off right)*
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Of course if she was lost she might have gone that way. *(points left)*
SEAMSTRESS TWO: But she wasn't lost.
SEAMSTRESS ONE: Well, she looked like she was lost.

SCENE TEN

Music plays as the two SEAMSTRESSES exit with their stools and sewing as ZENA enters with the FARMER and his WIFE. THEY are in mid-conversation.

ZENA: Of course. But if you plant your barley at the south end of the field near the trees it won't get the afternoon sun and the soil might get too muddy.
FARMER: Hmmmmm. You got a point there, Missy. Those trees are a problem.
WIFE: What are we going to do if it rains too much? We can't afford to lose that barley crop!
ZENA: That's where your alfalfa comes it. It soaks up the water more than barley. Plant alfalfa at the south end and save that side of the hill for the barley.
FARMER: But there's a wind, you see. That side of the hill gets the wind. Barley don't like wind much.
WIFE: I worry something awful about the wind! We'll all starve for sure!
ZENA: That's why you want those beans at the top of the hill. Bean poles can take the wind. And they will act as a breaker for the barley.
FARMER: Hmmmmm. You may have something there, Missy. Never thought of putting the beans on the top of the hill.
WIFE: You do like she says! Or else the wind and the mud will be the ruin of us!
FARMER: Missy, you sure know your farming. Is your Pa a farmer?
ZENA: Oh, no. He couldn't handle anything as complicated as farming.
FARMER: Well his daughter sure can. What's your thoughts on gourds? I usually plant my gourds over there near that stream.
WIFE: Oh, don't plant them there! I got an awful feeling about that stream. It floods just when you least expect it and sometimes in August it's bone dry!
ZENA: I have idea about the gourds. Come look at this spot on the other side of stream.

(ZENA moves off and the FARMER and his WIFE follow; music plays.)

FARMER: Hmmmmm. The other side of the stream?
WIFE: You listen to that girl and you listen good. Or else we'll be starved to death by Christmas!

SCENE ELEVEN

The THREE exit in one direction as the CAPTAIN enters from the other side with the COOK and her pot. HE tastes a spoonful as the music fades out.

COOK: What do you think?

CAPTAIN: Best I ever tasted! And you say this girl gave you the recipe?

COOK: Not exactly a recipe. But she knew what she was talking about all right. My, but was she an expert on cooking! I swear she must have trained at the Royal Culinary School but she denied it.

CAPTAIN: Sounds like the princess all right.

COOK: Princess? Don't talk daft. No princess could know as much about cooking as that girl does! *(laughs)* Princess! Princess, my foot!

CAPTAIN: You said she sounded like an expert?

COOK: She *is* an expert!

CAPTAIN: That's all I need to hear. Which way did she go?

COOK: *(points)* That direction. And when you find her you tell her to stop by some time so we can talk about fruit tarts!

SCENE TWELVE

Music plays as the CAPTAIN exits in one direction, the COOK in the other. The SCHOLAR enters and sits on a log in the forest. HE reads a book for a few moments then ZENA enters, sees him, is curious, and goes over to him. SHE watches him read a few moments more then the music fades out. Without raising his head, which is still in the book, the SCHOLAR finally speaks.

SCHOLAR: Pyrrho. *(pronounced "pie-row")* The later conversations.

ZENA: I beg your pardon?

SCHOLAR: Pyrrho. You were going to ask me what I was reading, weren't you? Well, I've just told you. Pyrrho.

ZENA: *(taken aback)* Oh . . .

SCHOLAR: You were going to ask me that, were you not?

ZENA: Well . . . Yes.

SCHOLAR: *(finally looks at her)* There. Now you know. Greek philosopher. Second century B.C.

ZENA: What?

SCHOLAR: That was your next question, was it not? Who is Pyrrho?

ZENA: Actually . . . I have heard of Pyrrho.

SCHOLAR: Heard of him?

ZENA: A little . . .

SCHOLAR: I've heard "a little" about blacksmithing. But that doesn't mean I know anything about it.

ZENA: Of course.

SCHOLAR: The difference between goodness and morality.

ZENA: The difference . . . ?

SCHOLAR: That was your next question, wasn't it? What is it about? Pyrrho. His philosophy.

ZENA: Of course. That's what I was going to ask next. I think.

SCHOLAR: Well, it's about the difference between goodness and morality. *(closes the book)* That, I imagine, is the extent of your interest in Pyrrho.

ZENA: Well . . .

SCHOLAR: Nothing to be ashamed of. I imagine you know a lot about a lot of things. But not Pyrrho.

ZENA: No. Not Pyrrho.

SCHOLAR: I beg your pardon. *(stands up)* Here I am sitting in the presence of a princess. How absent-minded of me.

ZENA: But . . .

SCHOLAR: How did I know you were a princess? Is that your next question?

ZENA: I . . . No! I am not a princess.

SCHOLAR: You can deny it but you still want to know how I know you're a princess. Admit it.

ZENA: What . . . What makes you think I'm a princess?

SCHOLAR: You are wearing a serving maid's dress. But it doesn't fit you properly. You should have stolen a dress that was your size. Your fingernails are too clean and your hands too smooth to be a servant. Even a serving maid. Your hair was perfectly coiffured yesterday but today it is starting to unravel. You would fix it but you don't know how.

ZENA: Is my hair really that awful?

SCHOLAR: Rather attractive. In a wild way. I see you like to read.

ZENA: Well . . .

SCHOLAR: You read all the time. There are smudge marks on your fingers from holding books and manuscripts. My guess is you like to read certain works over and over again. You not only read but you remember. That is unusual.

ZENA: Who are you?

SCHOLAR: Can't you guess? You're not stupid or unimaginative.

ZENA: A school master!

SCHOLAR: Much worse than that, I'm afraid.

ZENA: A philosopher! Like Pyrrho.

SCHOLAR: Not quite so distinguished as a philosopher, sorry to say.

ZENA: You're not a prince, I hope.

SCHOLAR: A prince reading Pyrrho? You have a wilder imagination than I figured.

ZENA: What are you!

SCHOLAR: If you'll admit you're a princess, I will tell you.

ZENA: All right. I'm a princess.

SCHOLAR: A runaway princess. Tell the whole truth.

ZENA: Yes. And you . . . ?

SCHOLAR: I am a scholar. I know a lot about a lot of things, just like you. But I know who I am and, unlike you, I'm not trying to find myself.

ZENA: I've never met anyone like you.

SCHOLAR: Except yourself.

ZENA: What?

SCHOLAR: When you know so much about different things, as you and I do, you can get confused. I know I once was. I didn't know what to do with my knowledge. It seemed to spring up around me at the slightest provocation. If I was talking to a bird lover, everything I knew about ornithology would spill out of my mouth. When I was with a soldier, I couldn't help but discuss Julius Caesar's military campaigns. When with a physician, I was all talk of bones and organs and herbal cures. It was very tiring.

ZENA: Yes. I can see that.

SCHOLAR: Then one day I decided to stop being a chameleon and used my knowledge for my own amusement and not to fit in with others.

ZENA: A chameleon . . . ?

SCHOLAR: Surely your knowledge of zoology is vast enough to know that a chameleon is –

ZENA: (*testy*) I know what a chameleon is! (*pause*) I just never knew that . . . I was one.

SCHOLAR: I wouldn't let it distress you, Princess. Well. Time to go, I believe.

ZENA: (*alarmed*) Where are you going?

SCHOLAR: We are going to the palace. I'm taking you home. They must be worried sick about you.

ZENA: My mother is probably furious. But I don't want to go back!

SCHOLAR: Why ever not? You got what you came for. No reason not to return home.

ZENA: But I – !

SCHOLAR: Don't be difficult, Princess. You went searching for yourself. Now that you've found her it's time to go back to the palace. (*pause*) You did find yourself, did you not?

ZENA: I . . . Yes. I think I did.

SCHOLAR: I thought so. Come along then. We ought to get there just before dark. (*HE exits and music plays*)

ZENA: But I – ! I mean – ! Wait for me!

END OF FREE PREVIEW