

HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS

By Ruth Buchanan

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HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS

A Full Length Comedy

By Ruth Buchanan

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

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 female, 5 male)

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

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

DURATION: 75 minutes.

PROPS

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

SOUND EFFECTS

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

COSTUMES

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

AVERY – Professional business attire.

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

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

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

ROSE RED – Scarlet gown, cape, tiara.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set Design:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AUTHOR NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

PROLOGUE
ACT ONE, SCENE 1
EMPTY STAGE

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

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

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

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

ONE EYE, TWO EYES, and THREE EYES exit.

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

HANSEL and GRETEL rotate to face audience.

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

HANSEL exits.

Shortly thereafter, Gretel was courted by young Clever Hans,

CLEVER HANS rotates to face audience.

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

CLEVER HANS and GRETEL exit.

In this same village lived a tailor.

VAL rotates to face audience.

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

GIANT rotates to face audience.

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

VAL and GIANT exit.

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

SNOW WHITE and ROSE RED rotate to face audience.

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

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

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

DWARF MINION rotates to face audience.

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

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

—the relationship soured. And then...

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

and then—there was...me.

ROSE RED: You.

WITCH: Me.

SNOW WHITE: You.

WITCH: Me!

DWARF MINION: *You.*

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

SNOW WHITE: This is all your fault.

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

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

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

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

ROSE RED: And then you sent that horrid dwarf—

DWARF MINION: Standing right here.

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

DWARF MINION: Still standing right here.

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

WITCH: Love spells? I would *never*.

ROSE RED: We were going to stay together forever.

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

DWARF MINION drops their hands and backs away.

DWARF MINION: That's so creepy.

ROSE RED: Shut up, minion.

SNOW WHITE: You've ruined us!

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: No.

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

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

ROSE RED: Yikes.

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

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

WITCH: Like what?

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

WITCH: The what?

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

WITCH: Not my problem.

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

WITCH: Your point?

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: What?

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

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: You'll see.

ROSE RED: What will I see?

SNOW WHITE: You'll see.

ROSE RED: When?

QUITTING TIME BELL rings.

SNOW WHITE: Now.

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

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

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

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

GIANT: Yeah.

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

GIANT: Yeah.

ROSE RED: I sincerely doubt that.

VAL: Nobody ast you, Rosie.

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

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

ROSE RED: Here we go.

CLEVER HANS: I counted.

ROSE RED: Of course you did.

HANSEL: Good show, my man!

GRETEL: Don't encourage him.

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

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

HANSEL: Well. Only a little.

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

HANSEL: Right.

CLEVER HANS: Hello, Gretel.

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

THREE EYES: You're the smartest boy ever!

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

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

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

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

CLEVER HANS sits up very straight.

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

ROSE RED: Of course you wouldn't.

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

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

GRETEL: And I'm Gretel.

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

ROSE RED: I'm sure we are.

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

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

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

ROSE RED: Oh, *certainly*.

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

VAL: Oh, we must, must we?

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

AVERY: I will allow you to go first.

GIANT: (*Chuckling.*) Yeah.

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

AVERY: Your name?

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

AVERY: Say hello, everyone.

ALL: Hi, Val!

AVERY: And what's one of your struggles?

VAL: Don't got any.

AVERY: Everyone has problems, Val.

VAL: Not me. Don't got none.

GIANT: Yeah?

VAL: I mean, other than you.

AVERY: Interesting. (*Takes notes.*)

VAL: Why's dat "interesting"?

AVERY: Okay, moving on—

VAL: No, wait—you can't just—

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

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

GIANT: Hi. My name's Pete.

VAL: It is?

ALL: Hi, Pete!

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

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

AVERY: How unfortunate.

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

AVERY: Would you like to tell us about it?

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

VAL: Pete. Huh.

ROSE RED: Typical.

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

ROSE RED: Not to you, *Valerie*.

AVERY: Is there a problem, Val?

VAL: It's just—he's "The Giant."

AVERY: He's not that tall.

GIANT: (*Sadly.*) Yeah.

ROSE RED: Honestly, you're so insensitive.

VAL: *I'm* insensitive?

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

HANSEL and GRETEL rise and come forward center.

HANSEL: Hello! I'm Hansel—

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

GRETEL: And I'm Gretel!

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

HANSEL and GRETEL: And we have no problems!

GRETEL: Other than the patriarchy.

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

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

GRETEL: —by pushing her into her own oven—

HANSEL: —and listening to her anguished cries—

GRETEL: —until they faded away into silence—

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

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

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

GRETEL: Not at *all*.

HANSEL: Once our parents abandoned us in The Wood—

GRETEL: —where we nearly starved to death—

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

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

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

GRETEL: What other thing?

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

GRETEL: Oh. That thing.

CLEVER HANS waves at GRETEL.

HANSEL: You see, my sister was once betrothed—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVERY: Your employer scheduled a ninety-minute session.

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

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

VAL: And if we refuse?

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

CLEVER HANS: Freeze our—what?

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

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

AVERY: Pardon?

CLEVER HANS: Why would they freeze them?

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

ONE EYE: Poor Clever Hans, so far behind.

THREE EYES: He's feeble-mindedness defined.

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

CLEVER HANS: Hi, Two Eyes.

TWO EYES and Clever Hans exchange waves.

Come on, guys, let her say something.

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

THREE EYES: To you, you walking cuckoo clock?

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

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

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

ONE EYE: Hi, I'm One Eye.

ALL: Hi, One Eye!

TWO EYES: Hi, I'm Two Eyes.

ALL: Hi, Two Eyes!

THREE EYES: Hi, I'm Three Eyes.

ALL: Hi, Three Eyes.

AVERY: And?

VAL: Are you sure you want to do dis?

AVERY: What do you mean?

ONE EYE: We sisters three are under curse.

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

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

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

THUNDER and LIGHTNING.

ONE EYE: When we two chopped the Entrail Tree—

THREE EYES: The curse fell down upon us three.

TWO EYES: No clue why it included me.

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

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

THREE EYES: It gave us golden apples, though.

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

AVERY takes notes.

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

AVERY: Certainly. But first you must introduce yourself.

CLEVER HANS: Hi, my name is Clever Hans.

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

AVERY: Do it properly, please.

ALL: Hi, Clever Hans.

CLEVER HANS: Hi.

ALL: Hi.

CLEVER HANS: Um, hi.

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

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

AVERY: Hello.

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

AVERY: Courting?

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

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

And, um—

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

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

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, *Hansel*.

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

Clever Hans—was it?

CLEVER HANS: Yes, ma'am.

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

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

ROSE RED: *Finally.*

AVERY: What was *that*?

VAL: Don't ask.

SNOW WHITE and DWARF MINION enter.

SNOW WHITE: Greetings, *minions*.

ALL: Hi, Snow White!

AVERY: Snow White?

SNOW WHITE: The one and only!

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

SNOW WHITE: Excuse me?

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

DWARF MINION: Hi, I'm—

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

AVERY: Dr. Avery Ainsworth, Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

VAL: She's a therapist.

GIANT: Yeah.

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

AVERY: Interesting. (*Takes notes.*)

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

AVERY: The woman in the pointy hat?

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

GIANT: Yeah.

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

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

SNOW WHITE: QUIET, FOOLS!

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

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

AVERY: Yes.

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

AVERY: How about you explain it to me.

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

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

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

Lights out.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

HAPPILY EVER AFTER HOURS BREAK ROOM.

AT RISE: *Lights up.*

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

ROSE RED: Are you going to start counting them?

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

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

ONE EYE: Stop your counting, little dope.

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: Fine. I'm Snow White—

ALL: Hi, Snow White!

SNOW WHITE: And this is my dwarf minion.

DWARF MINION: Hey.

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

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

ROSE RED: He's sensitive about his height.

GIANT: Yeah.

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

SNOW WHITE: Fine. Whatever.

AVERY: Let's start with the dynamite.

SNOW WHITE: Nobody touches the dynamite!

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

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

ROSE RED: Nobody calls my sister nuts.

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

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

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

VAL: Nobody deserves you, Sweetheart.

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

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

ROSE RED: Nobody asked you, *Gretel*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GIANT: Yeah!

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

DWARF MINION helps SNOW WHITE down from chair.

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

GRETEL: Not quite!

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

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: Now, then. Where were we?

HANSEL: Unhand my sister!

GRETEL: Stay out of this, *Hansel*.

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

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

GIANT: Yeah.

AVERY: Mr. Tailor—excuse me—

VAL: Val.

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

VAL: Wazzat?

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

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

ROSE RED: She sure does, *Valerie*.

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

ROSE RED: Our *relational issues*?

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

VAL: Of all the stupid—

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

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

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, *Hansel*.

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

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

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

AVERY: It's *Dr.* Ainsworth.

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

AVERY: Well, actually—

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

GRETEL: What. This?

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

Come and get me, you oversized wacko.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: Shut up, Rose.

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

SNOW WHITE: Pretty much.

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

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

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

GRETEL: Nobody asked you, Hansel—

ROSE RED: Out of my way—

SNOW WHITE: Will you all just SIT DOWN—

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

THUNDER and LIGHTNING.

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

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

SNOW WHITE: You.

WITCH: Me.

ROSE RED: You!

WITCH: Me!

DWARF MINION: You!

WITCH: Ehhh, whatever. What do you want?

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

WITCH: So?

CLEVER HANS: So...help?

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

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

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

CLEVER HANS: What?

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

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

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

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

WITCH: Desino.

AVERY freezes.

There. That's better.

VAL: What did you *do* to her?

WITCH: Do you really care?

GIANT: Yeah.

WITCH: She's frozen. So what?

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

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

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

WITCH: Let it go.

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

TWO EYES comforts him again.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WITCH: What's with them?

ROSE RED: What do you mean?

WITCH: Why are they talking like that?

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

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

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

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

Interesting....

VAL: What?

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

WITCH: They're glitching.

SNOW WHITE: They're *what*?

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

Maybe all of them.

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

VAL: Change...the story?

ROSE RED: Is that even...possible?

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

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

TWO EYES: I'm sorry.

Pause while her sisters gape at her.

I didn't mean to scare you.

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

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

TWO EYES: I meant no trouble whatsoever.

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

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

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

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

TWO EYES takes CLEVER HANS'S hand.

Ahhh. I see.

HANSEL: Gretel, look!

GRETEL: No way.

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

He's not for you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

GIANT: Yeah.

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

VAL: You could call her that.

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

WITCH: And what are you?

SNOW WHITE: YOUR DOOM!

WITCH: Desino.

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

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

SNOW WHITE: That is *not* my plan.

WITCH: Then please. Enlighten me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SNOW WHITE: Wait, what—

WITCH: Desino.

ALL but the WITCH are now frozen.

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

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

CLEVER HANS: Help us, please, My Lady!

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

WITCH: I must, must I?

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

GRETEL: It's pointless.

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

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

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

HANSEL: Yes!

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

CLEVER HANS takes a deep breath as if to respond.

Desino.

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

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

SNOW WHITE: Hey, wait just a minute—

WITCH snaps fingers, all but AVERY unfreeze, groaning.

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

Lights out.

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