

NIGHTINGAELSONG

by Maureen Brady Johnson

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NIGHTINGAELSONG

*A One Act Adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's
"The Nightingale"*

by **Maureen Brady Johnson**

SYNOPSIS: In the electronic kingdom somewhere in the future, an important lesson is learned in the battle of Technology vs. Nature. As two princesses venture into the forest (without the aid of technology) to learn a lesson from nature and bravely save their father from Death. A modern interpretation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Nightingale*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 female, 2 male, 6 either, 0-10 extras; gender flexible)

PRINCESS NATALIE (f).....	The oldest princess in the royal family not easily separated from her electronics. She is careful and obedient. <i>(51 lines)</i>
PRINCESS EMILY (f).....	The youngest princess who searches for something missing from her life. She is stubborn, headstrong and brave. <i>(48 lines)</i>
KING (m).....	A widower. A tech-savvy ruler of the electronic kingdom. Knows family is the most important thing in the world. He is brave and wise. <i>(19 lines)</i>
NIGHTINGALE (f).....	Played by an actress/dancer with accompanying song. <i>(21 lines)</i>
MESSSENGER (m/f).....	Knight assistant to the King who is efficient and proper. <i>(3 lines)</i>
PORCUPINE 1 (f).....	Guards entrance path to the Pine Forest. Steadfast and true, loyal to the King. <i>(16 lines)</i>
PORCUPINE 2 (f).....	Guards entrance path to the Pine Forest. Steadfast and true, loyal to the King. <i>(14 lines)</i>

- PORCUPINE 3 (f) Guards entrance path to the Pine Forest. Steadfast and true, loyal to the King. *(13 lines)*
- DEATH (m) A solemn, stealthy character. Lines delivered in an ominous voice. *(9 lines)*
- MISTRESS OF THE FOREST (f) A magical member of the forest clan who has little use for all things electrical and works to preserve the silent, wondrous forest by the sea. *(14 lines)*
- TOWNSPERSON 1 (m/f) *(1 line)*
- TOWNSPERSON 2 (m/f) *(1 line)*
- CHIEF (m/f) The leader of the Gang of Squirrels. A problem solver and a bit pushy. *(12 lines)*
- CHATTER (m/f) Loyal member of the Gang of Squirrels. Loyal to Chief and the Mistress of the Forest. *(5 lines)*
- CHUNK (m/f) Chipmunk who wants to be a squirrel. He is a follower who is loyal to Chief, Chatter, and the Mistress of the Forest. *(7 lines)*
- EXTRAS:**
- TOWNSPEOPLE (m/f) 0-10, optional townspeople. *(Non-Speaking)*

DURATION: 25 minutes.

SETTING: In an electronic kingdom.

TIME: The not so distant future.

SET

Bench and tree in the palace garden Down Stage Left. The rest of the play takes place in the Pine Forest with “rocks/blocks” to sit on. Set can be extremely simple or complex.

PROPS

- Cellphones (Princess Natalie, Townspeople)
- Headphones (Townspeople)
- Large staff/branches for fighting the crows
- Ball (Princess Emily)
- Robotic Bird Prop: This bird is a technical piece made out of cardboard
- Sword (King)

COSTUMES

Costuming could be a lot of fun, merging futuristic and medieval costumes. Or you could choose one or the other time periods. The king and princess could be wearing futuristic crowns. The mistress of the forest could have an awesome staff covered with flowers, shells, seaglass etc. A crown with the same decorations. Or it could be very simple if you have a limited budget. Townspeople wear headphones and pay attention to only their cell phones. You could even made them out of recycled or repurposed materials!

SPECIAL EFFECTS

- Tech and electronic noise
- Explosion
- Robotic bird song
- The Nightingaelsong (*possibly classical flute music*)
- Crows cawing

THE MURDER OF CROWS: This is done with Sound effects. A flock of Crows who work for Death. They brutishly guard against electronic devices which are banned from the forest dispatching violators to their overseer, Death.

LIGHTING EFFECTS: could set the mood for the technologically bright kingdom of the future and the shadows of the natural forest.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Depending on your budget, this play, with its sound effects and simple set pieces, could be as big or as economical as you wish. The main idea of the clash between technology and nature should be emphasized throughout the play.

The original Fairy tale *The Nightingale* which inspired this play, could be read after a performance and the theme discussed. Where are we going with our technology today? What must we do to preserve and save our humanity?

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Nightingalsong was chosen with a special purpose in mind. I wanted a unique title for a unique play, inspired by, *The Nightingale*. The Celtic spelling reflects my own heritage and the Gael's were deeply connected to the forest and its creatures and trees, all of which figure into this play. It seemed the best choice for the thread that unites the play. Also, if the director and designer wish to incorporate Celtic design into the production, it would be exciting and quite beautiful.

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *In the future, in the garden of the Electronic Castle. A big wall in the background. There is a bench and a tree with a Robotic Bird perched on one of the branches. TOWNSPEOPLE walk across the stage just paying attention to their cell phones, with head phones on. PRINCESS NATALIE enters texting and walking. She stops and laughs and continues crossing to the bench and sits. She laughs again. PRINCESS EMILY, tossing a ball, enters. She has to avoid colliding with TOWNSPEOPLE as she throws the ball into the air and catches it. She does not have a phone. SFX: Throughout this scene there is a constant hum of a variety of electronic sounds in the background... the noise grows softer with the beginning of the dialogue but continues throughout.*

PRINCESS EMILY: *(Almost running into a TOWNSPERSON.)* Look out! *(Another near collision.)* Whoa! *(Spins around and almost runs into another TOWNSPERSON.)* Heads up! Wow. It's dangerous to play ball or take a walk in this Kingdom. No wonder there aren't any animals around. They would get run over.

PRINCESS NATALIE laughs.

PRINCESS EMILY: What's so funny, Sister??

PRINCESS NATALIE: *(Stands up.)* Good morning, Princess Emily. Berta, just sent a meme that made me laugh. She is so funny! She is definitely one of my best friends!

PRINCESS EMILY: *(Tossing the ball in the air.)* Have you ever met Berta face to face?

PRINCESS NATALIE: No. Why?

PRINCESS EMILY: I was just wondering, how do you know she is real?

PRINCESS NATALIE: Oh, little sister, you are so naive! Of course, she is real. She's on the ultra-net.

PRINCESS EMILY: *(Puts the ball down.)* Have you ever wanted to leave the castle and meet Berta, face to face?

PRINCESS NATALIE: Why should I? I can peep to her on Peeper, I can Face to Face and Click Talk to all my hundreds of friends. I can

log in to Juggler, Pinch and Post it. I don't ever have to leave the palace. Everything I need is here.

PRINCESS EMILY: *(Sits on bench and sighs.)* Not everything I need is here... I want to go out there. I think I might be happier living in the Pine Forest next to the sea. I could explore and discover things I have never seen before. Like real birds and animals. They never come close to the castle. Too much clicking and beeping. I want the quiet of a long walk along the shore of the lake!

PRINCESS NATALIE: Father has forbidden it. He says there are dangers in the forest. We must not disobey him.

PRINCESS EMILY: *(Big sigh of disappointment.)* There are dangers right here if a person wants to take a walk without crashing into someone on their cell phone.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Emily, you need to cheer up. Would you like to hear the new electronic bird sing? That might make you happy. Remember when I was sick and the electronic bird sang and its song cured me? If that bird can do that for me, it can certainly cure a bad mood!

PRINCESS EMILY: Wouldn't you like to hear some real birds? I know I would. I've heard that their songs can transport you to places you have never been... places of imagining. Their birdsong doesn't just heal your body. It heals your soul! I'm not afraid of the dangers in the forest. I WANT to go there. The first chance I get to escape this palace, I WILL go to the forest.

PRINCESS NATALIE: No, no, no. I am the oldest and you must listen to me. No Pine Forest! We must obey our Father, the King. He knows what is best for us. Let's listen to the new mechanical bird that our father bought for us. He says that the robotic bird has the power to soothe your soul. And heal your body. *(To the Robotic bird.)* I command you to sing for the Princess. Clap On! *(Claps her hands.)*

SFX: Robotic Bird sings a plain, simple song.

PRINCESS EMILY: Turn it off!

PRINCESS NATALIE: Clap Off! *(Claps hands.)*

SFX: Robotic Bird song stops.

KING: (*Enters.*) Princess Natalie, why did you turn the bird off?

PRINCESS NATALIE: Father! Princess Emily needed cheering up and I thought that the mechanical bird would do it.

KING: And why does my youngest daughter need cheering up this morning? I just bought you two the most advanced mechanical bird in the world to keep you company. Is something wrong with it?

PRINCESS EMILY: No, father. But I would like to hear a real bird. They don't come near the palace so... (*Pause, slowly.*) I want to go into the Pine Forest...

KING: (*Loudly and sternly.*) Emily, you must never go into the forest, is that clear? Ever since your mother died, haven't I given you two everything you want?

PRINCESS NATALIE and PRINCESS EMILY: Yes, father, you have.

KING: Everything you need is in the palace. Did I not give you your own Pitter Patter account?

PRINCESS NATALIE: Yes, father.

KING: You have mastered Click Talk, Peeper, Juggler and Pinch. You have thousands of online friends. You are such bright girls and you are the best of friends. You know a lot about many things... but you do not know about the dangers of the forest. It is filled with strange animals who will chase you... (*In fun, roars and chases after PRINCESS EMILY.*) There are insects who will sting you. (*Pretends to pinch PRINCESS EMILY.*) ...and there are monstrous bears who will grab you. (*Grabs PRINCESS EMILY who laughs.*)

PRINCESS EMILY: (*Stamping her foot.*) I am not afraid!

PRINCESS NATALIE: Well, you should be.

KING: Natalie, Stop texting and put some music on. Cheer your sister with a little dance. I have to check in with the Power Company and make sure that the storage cells are not overloading. There was a bit of trouble last night. (*Exits.*)

PRINCESS NATALIE: Clap On! (*Claps hands.*)

PRINCESS NATALIE begins to dance wildly trying to get PRINCESS EMILY to laugh. SFX: bird begins to sing its rhythmic, mechanical song. The noise builds for a minute, then a SFX: huge explosion, and then silence.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Clap On! Clap On!! Clap On!!! What's going on?

PRINCESS EMILY: The power seems to be out. What was that horrible noise?

PRINCESS NATALIE: Listen. No humming machines, no pinging, no mechanical birdsong.

SFX: The Nightingalsong.

PRINCESS NATALIE: What is that?

PRINCESS EMILY: I think it is a small brown bird.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Where? I can't see it.

PRINCESS EMILY: Look way up there, on the top branch. Can you see it?

PRINCESS NATALIE: O.M.G! It's a real bird. A real bird singing a real bird song! Run away, Emily. It might be dangerous!

SFX: The Nightingalsong stops. NIGHTINGALE enters and bows to the PRINCESS EMILY and PRINCESS NATALIE.

PRINCESS EMILY: Don't stop! Please don't stop! My ears have never heard anything like it before. What kind of song you are singing?

NIGHTINGALE: It is the song of healing. I am the Nightingale, Princess.

TOWNSPERSON 1 and 2 enter. Still looking at their phones. They come really close to running into the NIGHTINGALE.

TOWNSPERSON 1 and 2: Pardon me! Excuse me! (*To PRINCESS EMILY and PRINCESS NATALIE.*) A bird could get run over living here. Too dangerous! (*Continue to exit, still on their phones.*)

PRINCESS EMILY: Where do you live?

NIGHTINGALE: In the Pine Forest.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Your song is so beautiful. I command you to sing again.

NIGHTINGALE: You cannot command a real bird, your highness. We are not like your "Clap On / Clap Off" robotic birds. A nightingale is free. I sing to heal the world and keep the forest safe.

PRINCESS EMILY: Safe from what?

NIGHTINGALE: From death and destruction. My song is very powerful and can charm Death and make him change his mind.

PRINCESS EMILY: That is a wondrous power to have.

NIGHTINGALE: With great power comes great responsibility. I was flying by your palace and heard the explosion. I thought I should sing my healing song for all those injured, but now I must get back to the Pine Forest and my mistress who lives there. Good bye, sweet princesses.

PRINCESS EMILY: Wait. Who is the mistress in the Pine Forest? My father told me that there is danger in the forest. Is she dangerous?

NIGHTINGALE: No, my mistress is good and kind. And as long as you do not bring any electronics into the forest, you will be safe. I must go now.

PRINCESS EMILY: Good bye, sweet Nightingale.

MESENTER: (*Enters.*) Excuse me, Princesses. I have a message for you. There was an explosion at the solar power company. Your father has been injured.

PRINCESS EMILY and PRINCESS NATALIE: What happened? Is he ok?

MESENTER: The king was bandaged up and seemed to be getting better until just a short while ago when he slipped into a coma. The doctors are trying everything they can. They brought in the healing mechanical birds and set them singing, but without power, they could only work for so long.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Can we come with you?

MESENTER: No. The doctors will text you as soon as the King wakes up. Stay here together. You are safe here. Goodbye, Your Majesties. (*Exits.*)

PRINCESS NATALIE: Oh, Emily what can we do? I'm so scared. Father could die and we can't do anything to help him.

PRINCESS EMILY: We can do something, sister.

PRINCESS NATALIE: And what is that?

PRINCESS EMILY: We can find a real bird to sing him awake... a bird that has healing powers. To frighten Death, we can go into the Pine Forest.

PRINCESS NATALIE: No, no, no! It's dangerous.

PRINCESS EMILY: The Nightingale said we have nothing to fear if we leave our electronics here.

PRINCESS NATALIE: How will we call for help if we need it? How will we see in the black of night without our phones?

PRINCESS EMILY: We can do it... together! We must be brave and save our father from Death. The Nightingale will help us.

PRINCESS NATALIE: You just met this bird! How do you know she will help us? How do you know she is not dangerous?

PRINCESS EMILY: She is not big enough to be dangerous. And she stopped to heal those hurt in the explosion. I know she is kind and we need to find her. Let's go. We don't have much time. *(Exits.)*

PRINCESS NATALIE: *(To herself, as she turns off the phone and puts it into her pocket.)* I'm taking my phone. I'll turn it off but I am not going without it. They won't even know I have it. *(Exits.)*

SCENE 2

AT START: *The Pine Forest. PORCUPINE 1, 2, and 3 block PRINCESS NATALIE and PRINCESS EMILY'S path.*

PORCUPINE 1: Halt—

PORCUPINE 2: —who goes there?

PORCUPINE 3: Halt!

PRINCESS NATALIE: Princess Emily, did you say something?

PRINCESS EMILY: No. I think those porcupines are yelling at us. Are you speaking to us?

PORCUPINE 1: No one—

PORCUPINE 2: —can pass.

PORCUPINE 3: Someone—

PORCUPINE 1: —has electronics.

PORCUPINE 2: It is—

PORCUPINE 3: —forbidden.

PRINCESS NATALIE: How does one address a Porcupine?

PORCUPINE 1, 2, and 3: Politely.

PORCUPINE 1: Put your electronics—

PORCUPINE 2: —on the ground.

PORCUPINE 3: Then we might let you pass.

PRINCESS EMILY: I don't have my cell phone with me... Princess Natalie?

PRINCESS NATALIE: I won't let you have it. I need it to call for help! You might chase us or sting us or grab us. My mother is dead, father is dying, and I must protect my little sister.

PORCUPINE 1: We didn't—

PORCUPINE 2: —make the rules,—

PORCUPINE 3: —your Highness.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Then I will change them. I will not, repeat, will not abandon my sister or my cell phone.

PORCUPINE 1: Suit yourself.

PORCUPINE 2: The crows will come after you.

PORCUPINE 3: As long as you only use it to call for help.

PORCUPINE 1, 2, and 3: You may pass.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Thank you for helping us save your King.

PORCUPINE 1: He's not my King.

PORCUPINE 2: Nor mine...

PORCUPINE 3: Nope. Not mine either.

PRINCESS NATALIE: But surely you must have a father and would do anything to save his life.

PORCUPINE 1: We did have a father but he was displaced by construction in this forest years ago—

PORCUPINE 2: —by your father.

PRINCESS EMILY: What? That can't be the truth.

PORCUPINE 1: Sorry to say, it is the truth.

PORCUPINE 2: Many animals were uprooted when technology came to the Pine Forest.

PORCUPINE 3: But the Mistress made quick work of that and we are under her protection now.

PRINCESS EMILY: Then we must talk to this woman and explain, in person, face to face. If she is a kind and good person, she will listen to us.

PORCUPINE 1: She is kind... and good...

PORCUPINE 2: ...but also fair and just.

PORCUPINE 3: I am not sure she is ready to forgive your father for all the destruction in the name of technology.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Technology can help keep us safe.

PORCUPINE 1: ...or hurt us.

PRINCESS NATALIE: Please we must pass now. I promise, I will not turn my phone on unless I need to call for help. We must find the Nightingale to help us heal our father.

PORCUPINE 1: All right. All right. But keep your phone turned off or you will really be in mortal danger. The crows are the minions of DEATH. They hate what the king has done in the past. They will come for both of you and your father.

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