

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF A LIFE

By Thomas Hischak

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CHARACTERS

(5-14 women; 4-8 men)

*The Director	of the company
*The Stage Manager	of the company
Matilda	the sister of Hansel and Gretel
Shorty	the eighth dwarf
Josephina	Cinderella's third stepsister
*Nicky	the fourth little pig
Nocturna	Sleeping Beauty's sister
Jasper	the not-so-little bear
Actors	in the company

Characters in the fairy tales, to be played by the above characters:

Cinderella	*Wolf	Hansel
Mama Pig	Snow White	Mama Bear
Sleeping Beauty	Prince's	Old Lady
Stepmother #1	Minister	Gretel
*3 Pigs	Papa	*Baby Bear
Prince	Bear	Stepmother #2
2 Ugly Stepsisters	*7 Dwarfs	Goldilocks

*may be played by a male or female

Suggested Doubling Plans

The casting of the play is very flexible and can utilize a very large or fairly small number of performers. Here are two plans using the minimum number of actors.

Plan A: 16 Performers. Keeping the six characters separate (9-12 women, 4-7 men)

Director
Stage Manager
Matilda
Shorty
Josephina
Nicky
Nocturna
Jasper
Cinderella, Mama Pig, Dwarf
Stepsister #1, Sleeping Beauty, Dwarf
Stepsister #2, Snow White, Baby Bear

Stepmother #1, Goldilocks, Pig, Dwarf
Prince's Minister, Papa Bear, Prince, Dwarf
Hansel, Wolf, Dwarf
Gretel, Mama Bear, Pig, Dwarf
Stepmother #2, Old Lady, Pig, Dwarf

Plan B: 10 Performers. Using the six characters as additional actors in the stories (5-8 women, 3-5 men)

Director
Stage Manager
Matilda, Stepsister #1, Stepmother #2, Pig, Mama Bear, Dwarf
Shorty, Papa Bear, Prince's Minister, Dwarf
Josephina, Mama Pig, Sleeping Beauty, Dwarf
Nicky, Pig, Baby Bear, Dwarf
Nocturna, Stepsister #2, Snow White
Jasper, Wolf, Prince, Dwarf
Stepmother #1, Pig, Goldilocks, Dwarf
Cinderella, Old Lady, Dwarf

PRODUCTION NOTES

The actors playing the six characters (Matilda, Shorty, Josephina, Nicky, Nocturna and Jasper) can join the actors of the company to act out the fairy tale scenes. The Director, Stage Manager and the actors of the company wear modern rehearsal clothes. The six characters are costumed appropriate to their fairy tale. An open acting area works best, with a few rehearsal chairs and a table on stage which can be used to make various scenic pieces. When Hansel and Gretel are behind bars, this may be mimed, or a couple of large boxes with slits cut out may be used. The bars should be painted red and white to resemble peppermint sticks.

TIME

The present.

SETTING

The bare stage of a theatre with some rehearsal furniture and perhaps some scenery flats leaning against the back wall or by the proscenium. A rehearsal of the Centerville Children's Theatre Company.

PROPS

All of the props within the fairy tales are pantomimed by the actors. There is no glass slipper or poison apple or spinning wheel. These are all left to the audience's imagination. The only real props are those found at a rehearsal. Suggested props:

- 1 table (strong enough for actors to sit or stand on)
- 5 metal folding chairs
- 1 bench
- 1 stage manager's prompt book
- 1 stage manager's clipboard
- 1 director's script
- scripts for actors at the rehearsal
- 1 decorative book (Grimm's Fairy Tales)

COSTUMES

The DIRECTOR, STAGE MANAGER and ACTORS in the company wear contemporary rehearsal clothes. The six "characters" are costumed as in their fairy tales. Some costume suggestions:

- MATILDA: a traditional German folk dress, colorful, festive; with her hair in braids
- SHORTY: knee breeches, simple jacket, boots, pointed hat
- JOSEPHINA: medieval dress, not too elaborate; skirt with blouse, jacket, and bonnet
- NICKY: beige pants and beige sweatshirt (or T-shirt) and a plastic pig nose fastened with an elastic strap
- NOCTURNA: a long flowing nightgown, slippers.
- JASPER: black pants, white T-shirt, black jacket, black boots; with a furry cap and maybe a bear nose.

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AT RISE: *The ACTORS of the company are on stage before the play begins, talking to each other or looking over their scripts. The DIRECTOR enters from the wings with a script, followed by the STAGE MANAGER who has a prompt book and a clipboard.*

DIRECTOR: Attention, everyone!

STAGE MANAGER: Quiet down!

DIRECTOR: Time to start rehearsal. Everyone sit down, please.

STAGE MANAGER: Quiet!

(The ACTORS stop talking and sit on the stage floor or on pieces of rehearsal furniture. STAGE MANAGER hands the DIRECTOR the clipboard.)

DIRECTOR: That's better. I have some announcements to make before we start. *(referring to sheets on clipboard)* There are some reminders here from Mrs. Forbisher, the artistic director of the Centerville Children's Theatre Company. Please do not park in front of the dumpster. During Tuesday's rehearsal, someone blocked the way and the garbage truck couldn't get to the dumpster. Consequently we still have all the leftover pizza and wings in the dumpster from Saturday's cast party and it's starting to smell pretty rancid out there.

STAGE MANAGER: I'll say.

DIRECTOR: Secondly, please close the stage door to the parking lot tightly behind you. It's been left open several times and somehow we've got all these flies inside the theatre.

STAGE MANAGER: That's certainly no mystery.

DIRECTOR: Third on Mrs. Forbisher's memo: whoever borrowed the witch's caldron from the prop room, please return it. It's been missing since late October and we need it for the haunted castle scene in Act Two. *(checks the list)* I think that's everything. *(turning to the STAGE MANAGER)* Can you think of anything else?

STAGE MANAGER: Yeah. No more "calling for line" after Thursday. Everyone off book. And that goes for the elves and mushrooms too.

DIRECTOR: Very good. Now today at rehearsal I'd like to run the enchanted forest scene. If you recall, Millie Plover had to have her wisdom tooth removed last Monday and had a . . .

STAGE MANAGER: Complications.

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DIRECTOR: Yes. Complications. So she wasn't here. And the forest scene just doesn't work without the talking squirrel. So we'll start with that and then we'll run the—

(There is some kind of commotion backstage: weird noises or odd music or even a puff of smoke if possible. The lights flicker then go out. When they come on again the six characters stand together on the stage.)

(MATILDA wears a traditional German folk dress with her hair in braids. SHORTY the dwarf is actually a deep-voiced, normal-sized person with a beard and pointed hat. JOSEPHINA is an attractive woman in medieval clothes. NICKY wears nondescript clothes and a plastic pig nose fastened with an elastic strap. NOCTURNA has long hair and wears a long flowing nightgown. JASPER is dressed like a punk teenager but with a furry cap and maybe a bear nose. All six characters look around at the stage and the audience with curiosity.)

DIRECTOR: What is going on here? Who are you people?

STAGE MANAGER: This is a closed rehearsal!

NOCTURNA: Look! A real theatre!

SHORTY: With a stage and everything!

JASPER: Sah—weet!

DIRECTOR: I'm afraid you can't come in here. We are rehearsing and—

JOSEPHINA: Are you a director?

DIRECTOR: Yes, I am, but—!

NICKY: And are those actors?

STAGE MANAGER: They ain't props. *(moves towards the six characters)* Now out you go! I don't want to have to get rough or anything but—!

MATILDA: And you are the wicked frog in the play!

STAGE MANAGER: No. I'm the stage manager. Now come along, sister—! *(starts to pull her to the wings)*

JOSEPHINA: Wait a minute! Don't you want to know why we've come here?

STAGE MANAGER: Wearing those outfits you're either from the looney bin or you're actors! In either case we don't need any.

DIRECTOR: Auditions were last month. Perhaps you read the notice wrong.

NOCTURNA: We're not actors, silly! *(laughs; the other five characters join in)*

STAGE MANAGER: What's so funny?

DIRECTOR: If you're not actors, who are you?

JOSEPHINA: We're characters! *(all six nod and bow to the rest)*

STAGE MANAGER: Just like I thought: straight from the looney bin!

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MATILDA: (to STAGE MANAGER) You sure you're not the wicked frog?

JOSEPHINA: You are theatre people. Certainly you all understand what a character is.

DIRECTOR: Of course we know what a character is. But you need an actor to play a character so you must be actors after all.

SHORTY: Me, an actor? (bashful) Go on . . . !

NOCTURNA: I couldn't act my way out of a paper bag! Whatever that means.

MATILDA: I could never be an actor. I can't memorize lines. I have short term memory.

NICKY: Acting sounds like too much work. Not for me!

JOSEPHINA: (to DIRECTOR) What you say is true: you need an actor to play a character.

JASPER: That's the problem, dude!

JOSEPHINA: Precisely.

DIRECTOR: I don't understand.

STAGE MANAGER: Should I call the cops or just order some straight jackets?

MATILDA: You're awful fresh for a frog!

STAGE MANAGER: If you call me a frog one more time– !

DIRECTOR: I don't don't understand your problem. What do you all want?

JASPER: Actors, man! And a director! Scenery and props would be cool. We've already got the costumes.

JOSEPHINA: We are characters. But, as you said, we can only come to life if there is a theatre with actors and–

DIRECTOR: You want to use our theatre?

STAGE MANAGER: It's booked! I got the contract to prove it.

NOCTURNA: What we really need is a castle and a cottage and–

SHORTY: And a forest–

MATILDA: And a house made of candy and–

JASPER: All sorts of stuff! Don't you see?

JOSEPHINA: But there is only one place you can find all those things: on a stage.

STAGE MANAGER: It's booked!

DIRECTOR: I'm still confused.

MATILDA: And I thought I was dumb!

NICKY: You are.

JOSEPHINA: Have you ever heard of Cinderella?

MATILDA: Of Hansel and Gretel?

JASPER: Of Goldilocks and the bears?

SHORTY: Or Snow White and the Dwarfs?

NOCTURNA: Or Sleeping Beauty?

NICKY: And the Little Pigs and the Wolf?

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DIRECTOR: Of course we have. I've directed every one of those plays.

We are, after all, a children's theatre company.

STAGE MANAGER: Been there, done that.

JOSEPHINA: But do you know the true stories? What really happened?

DIRECTOR: There are different versions, of course. Some have songs.

Some have altered names. Details differ. I'm sure your version would be somewhat different too.

NOCTURNA: We know the true story!

NICKY: What really happened!

JASPER: The real thing, dude!

STAGE MANAGER: Says you!

DIRECTOR: I don't see how you could unless you were there.

MATILDA: We were there!

SHORTY: We still are!

JOSEPHINA: Don't you see? Because we are the characters!

STAGE MANAGER: Right. I suppose you're Cinderella. Where's your pumpkin?

JOSEPHINA: I'm not Cinderella. And there was no pumpkin. Or mice or any of that nonsense.

DIRECTOR: Who are you then?

JOSEPHINA: Josephina. Cinderella's stepsister.

STAGE MANAGER: There were two stepsisters. Which one are you?

JOSEPHINA: No, there are three stepsisters. I'm the eldest.

STAGE MANAGER: You're not ugly enough to be a stepsister.

JOSEPHINA: Thank you.

DIRECTOR: Which one of you is Cinderella then? *(to MATILDA)* You?

MATILDA: Me! *(all six characters laugh)*

SHORTY: Cinderella's not with us.

NOCTURNA: Neither are the other two stepsisters.

STAGE MANAGER: Why not?

JOSEPHINA: Because they are characters who are always alive! Every time someone does a version of Cinderella, no matter how inaccurate, my sisters and Cinderella come to life once again!

DIRECTOR: But you don't?

JOSEPHINA: No. *(all six get very somber)* Never. Because no one knows who we are and what we did in the real story. That's why we never appear in the plays or movies or . . .

SHORTY: Nobody remembers us. . .

NOCTURNA: Forgotten. . .

NICKY: Left out of history. . .

MATILDA: Never in the Disney movies. . .

JASPER: Not even a lousy action figure or on a stinkin' T-shirt!

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DIRECTOR: You talk about the true story. But these are not true stories.
They were written by writers. (*all of the six characters look embarrassed*)

NICKY: Well. . . they were. I mean we were. Written down.

MATILDA: But. . .

JASPER: It's a big "but," man. . .

JOSEPHINA: In each of our cases the original author wrote us into the original story but. . .

JASPER: There's that "but" again.

JOSEPHINA: But somewhere along the line the writer changed his or her mind and. . .

SHORTY: We were erased. . .

NOCTURNA: Deleted. . .

JASPER: Left on the cutting room floor, ya know, man?

STAGE MANAGER: Then you don't exist! Ha! Knew it!

JOSEPHINA: But we do exist! We were created, given life, shaped with characteristics then. . .

SHORTY: Forgotten.

JOSEPHINE: That's why we're here. We need a theatre. We need to tell the original story so we can be alive again!

STAGE MANAGER: I've heard of a lot of hooey in my time but this beats the band!

SHORTY: (*to DIRECTOR*) Please. Can we use your stage. . . ?

NOCTURNA: And your actors. . . ?

MATILDA: You can even direct us if you want to! It's okay with me.
(*pause*)

DIRECTOR: Hmm. I'm interested.

STAGE MANAGER: (*to characters*) You heard the director. Get out of here— (*to DIRECTOR*) What?

DIRECTOR: I'm interested. We've done these stories so many times even the toddlers in the audience are reaching for their ipods. Maybe we need a fresh approach.

STAGE MANAGER: But. . .

JASPER: There's that "but" again.

STAGE MANAGER: What about our rehearsal?

DIRECTOR: We'll get back to it. But first, let's see what these. . . these. . .

NOCTURNA: Characters!

DIRECTOR: What these characters have to tell us.

MATILDA: You won't regret it! (*to others*) We are going to come to life again! (*all the characters cheer*)

NICKY: How do we start?

SHORTY: Yeah. Which story first?

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DIRECTOR: This Cinderella version intrigues me. *(to JOSEPHINA)* You say you're Cinderella's stepsister?

JOSEPHINA: That's right. Josephina.

DIRECTOR: But not one of the ugly stepsisters?

JOSEPHINA: I should say not. Two pug ugly siblings is more than enough for one story. I'm the eldest. And not at all vain and conceited like those two. I actually liked Cinderella. And tried to help her. Let me show you. *(calls)* Cinderella! Cinderella!

(One of the actresses in the company comes forward and plays CINDERELLA.)

CINDERELLA: Josephina! Here I am.

JOSEPHINA: They're coming! Quick! Put more cinders on your face and scrub the floor. They'll be in here any second.

CINDERELLA: But Josephina, you're the one who's been working so hard. You did the front hall and the kitchen and—

JOSEPHINA: None of that. If they find out I gave you the morning off, they'll treat you worse than ever! Cinders! Scrub!

CINDERELLA: Right! *(drops to her knees and scrubs)*

(STEPMOTHER and two ugly STEPSISTERS enter.)

STEPMOTHER: Cinderella!

STEPSISTERS: Cinderella!

STEPMOTHER: Haven't you finished the floors yet?

CINDERELLA: Almost, Stepmother.

STEPMOTHER: Lazy ingrate.

STEPSISTERS: Lazy ingrate!

STEPMOTHER: Ah, Josephina! Here you are. Did you have a nice rest this morning, dear?

JOSEPHINA: Yes, Mother.

STEPMOTHER: Good. Because I have some exciting news for you. Guess who is giving a ball?

JOSEPHINA: The prince.

STEPSISTERS: How did she know that? Who told you?

JOSEPHINA: Who else in the kingdom ever gives a ball? The butcher? The tax collector? The weatherman?

STEPMOTHER: Isn't it wonderful? All the fair young ladies are invited and—

JOSEPHINA: And he'll probably pick one of them to be his wife.

STEPSISTERS: Who told you? How did you know that?

JOSEPHINA: Why else would the prince give a ball? He hates dancing and he hates wearing that stuffy uniform.

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STEPMOTHER: Where did you learn all this?

JOSEPHINE: I read People magazine. He's got to marry someone so his parents have resorted to the old "let's give a ball for all the fair young ladies of the kingdom" routine. How medieval!

STEPMOTHER: No matter how medieval, my three girls are going to be dazzling at the ball and one of you will surely win his heart.

JOSEPHINA: Three? What about Cinderella?

CINDERELLA: *(still on the floor scrubbing)* Me?

STEPSISTERS: You! *(laugh)* Ha ha ha ha! Wait till the prince gets a look at her! Ha ha ha!

STEPMOTHER: I don't think Cinderella wants to go to the ball in any case. Besides, there's only room for three in the carriage with me.

JOSEPHINA: Well, Cinderella can take my place because I'm not going.

STEPSISTERS: What!

STEPMOTHER: Josephina! What are you saying?

JOSEPHINA: I hate dancing and getting dressed up and I don't want to marry any silly old prince so I'm not going.

STEPMOTHER: Quick! Girls! My smelling salts! *(fainting)* I feel faint! *(STEPSISTERS carry her off)* I can't believe my ears! Not want to go to the ball. . . !

CINDERELLA: Is it true, Josephina?

JOSEPHINA: Of course it's true. I don't say what I don't mean. But you want to go, don't you?

CINDERELLA: More than anything in the world!

JOSEPHINA: I thought as much. Well, we'll figure something out. I've got a dress that, with a little altering, might look good on you. And we can do up your hair—

CINDERELLA: Oh, Josephina! You'll help me?

JOSEPHINA: Of course I will. Who else in this house is going to lift a finger to help you? The mice? Come on. Let's go up and look through my closet. *(starts to exit with CINDERELLA)*

STAGE MANAGER: Wait a minute! This is all wrong.

JOSEPHINA: There's nothing wrong. It's the way it happened.

STAGE MANAGER: But where's the fairy Godmother?

JOSEPHINA: There was no fairy Godmother. And there was no pumpkin either. I got Cinderella all dolled up and we called a cab so Mother and my sisters wouldn't know she was going.

DIRECTOR: This is interesting. Go on.

JOSEPHINA: Well, on the night of the ball I gave Cinderella careful instructions. *(to CINDERELLA)* When you dance with the Prince, let him lead. He's a lousy dancer and you won't get stepped on too much if you follow him. Then at midnight you suddenly break off and say you have to go.

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