

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

LOOSELY BASED ON THE GRIMM BROTHERS'
FOLKTALE, *THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES*

By **Claudia Haas**

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SYNOPSIS: King Oakley returns from a summit meeting to find that conditions in his castle have grown lax. With the assistance of his new diabolical servant, Fiorello, King Oakley devises a strict regimen for his daughters and no longer lets them leave the castle grounds. In an effort to break from these harsh rules, the princesses fall prey to the desires of the King's faithful servant - Fiorello - who means to claim the castle as his own. Thrown in the mix is a gardener and a magical nanny, Fern. Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake is turned into a place of longing and wishes for the princesses as they journey to the Land of the Muses where they hope to have their dreams come true.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(14 female, 6 male)

KING OAKLEY (m)	40ish. (88 lines)
QUEEN MOSS (f)	40ish. (47 lines)
FERN (f)	The Queen's ageless cousin; magical, sort of. (60 lines)
FIORIELLO (m)	Short diabolical man; 20ish. (55 lines)
SWEET WILLIAM (m).....	Gardener, very sweet; age 18-20. (15 lines)
PEAT (m).....	All around funny-guy, commoner; age 12-16. (18 lines)
HAPLESS (m)	Downtrodden, put-upon servant; age 12-16. (32 lines)
PRINCE DECIDUOUS (m).....	High and mighty, very obnoxious Prince; age 14-18. (23 lines)

THE PRINCESSES

CAMELIA (f)	Eldest Princess to the manor-born; age 18. (42 lines)
IVY (f)	Persnickety-perfect twin; age 16. (14 lines)
IRIS (f).....	Dramatic twin, not perfect; age 16. (14 lines)

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- JESSAMINE (f)..... Triplet, just VERY 14, giggly and high-spirited. (15 lines)
- JUNIPER (f)..... Triplet, also VERY 14, giggly and high-spirited. (18 lines)
- JONQUIL (f)..... Triplet, again VERY 14, giggly and high-spirited. (13 lines)
- LILLIE (f)..... Triplet, open, go-getter; age 12. (8 lines)
- LARKSPUR (f)..... Triplet, people-pleaser; age 12. (7 lines)
- LAUREL (f)..... Triplet, an “original,” thinks outside the box; age 12. (11 lines)
- VIOLA (f)..... Twin, high and mighty, bossy; age 10. (11 lines)
- VILETTA (f)..... Twin, pessimist, determined to be miserable; age 10. (13 lines)
- PERIWINKLE (f)..... A little adult; age 8-9. (24 lines)

Below are characters in the EXTENDED version. Lines and notes have been added in the script for the EXTENDED VERSION.

EXTRA PRINCES AND PRINCESSES (EXTENDED VERSION)

(5 female, 1 male)

- All can be a variety of ages -

- PRINCE CRABBE (m)..... Yep!—crabby. (7 lines)
- PRINCESS ANISE (f)..... A very princessy princess. (5 lines)
- PRINCESS LOVAGE (f)..... A “what’s in it for me?” princess. (4 lines)
- PRINCESS DILLY (f)..... A silly young girl. (8 lines)
- PRINCESS SAGE (f)..... A princess who believes herself very smart. (5 lines)
- EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE (f)..... A wicked Queen. (10 lines)

SET

Simple interior of one level - set up center, with two thrones. Suggestions of garden areas should surround the castle. The throne area should be able to be pushed away for SCENE 9: LAND OF THE MUSES. Going off stage right would be to the bedrooms and stage left would be to the rest of the castle (dungeon, dining, etc.).

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PLACE

The two places noted will be “Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake” and “Land of the Muses.” The perimeter of the stage would suffice for the short scenes outside the castle walls.

TIME: Once upon a time, a long time ago.

RUNNING TIME: About 55 minutes; Extended version is approximately 65 minutes.

NOTE

The play is designed to end during the season you are presenting it. If this is a spring show, you may start three seasons before spring (autumn) and adjust the lines accordingly. Rather than ending on the New Year, you will end celebrating the Spring Solstice or any holiday you wish. (Celebrations could be any seasonal solstice: Valentine’s Day, New Year’s, Harvest Moon, etc.) Music selection is up to the director. Music between scenes is a nice touch; Celtic music and/or seasonal music works well. Be creative and have fun!

PROLOGUE

The prologue should be set to music. It is spring and once upon a time.

AT RISE: *Twelve disheveled princesses play as QUEEN MOSS watches them. CAMELIA picks some flowers. IVY and IRIS are flirting with dancing. JESSAMINE, JUNIPER and JONQUIL are flirting with PEAT, amid giggles and squeals. LILLIE, LARKSPUR and LAUREL are being chased by their nanny, FERN. FERN could have a little mouse Velcro-ed to her shoulder. They make a circle around their mother and run off. VIOLA and VILETTA hide behind their mother as PERIWINKLE comes in trying to find them. There is much laughter and noise which builds. PERIWINKLE discovers VIOLA and VILETTA and tags them. They fall to the floor squealing. Suddenly, FIORELLO enters followed by KING OAKLEY. LILLIE, LARKSPUR and LAUREL run on again almost knocking FIORELLO and KING OAKLEY down. KING OAKLEY'S eyes widen as he witnesses the pandemonium in his home. (There could be "extras" as townspeople in the montage.)*

FIORELLO: Make-a way for the King! I have-a come to announce the safe return of King Oakley to his-a castle in Whisperwood-Lake.

MOSS: Oh my.

FERN: Oh dear!

CAMELIA: Who is he?

All action comes to a screeching halt. Music stops. All look at FIORELLO.

OAKLEY: What manner of behavior is this? What has gone on in my absence?

PRINCESSES: Father?

OAKLEY: YES!

PRINCESSES: Uh oh.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 1
THE NEW ORDER

AT RISE: KING OAKLEY is holding court with QUEEN MOSS; FIORELLO remains at the side. It is later in the evening. FIORELLO inspects the throne room (may even have a duster!) as the KING and QUEEN get reacquainted.

OAKLEY: Well, my dear Queen, this is a far-cry from the “Welcome-Home” banquet I was expecting.

MOSS: Perhaps, dear King - if we had some notice and actually knew you were on your way home - something could have been prepared. But probably not.

OAKLEY: I have journeyed far and have been meeting with heads of state and what do I find upon my arrival home?

MOSS: Is that a rhetorical question?

OAKLEY: No greeting. No servants.

MOSS: Yes - - the servants - - I should explain -

OAKLEY: Is it not true that I came home to find my home in total pandemonium?

MOSS: Yes, dear. You did. Now, about the servants -

OAKLEY: I find my children running wild - -

MOSS: Indeed they do, Oakley. Would you like to hear about the servants?

OAKLEY: My children were consorting with commoners - -

MOSS: Well, they need playmates, dear. All children do.

OAKLEY: There are twelve princesses! Surely they can find playmates among themselves!

MOSS: Yes, dear - - but please bear in mind that sisters do not always get along. Now, I do need to discuss the servant situation with you -

OAKLEY: They must get along! I am King and I command it!

MOSS: I shall make a note of that.

OAKLEY: They've grown.

MOSS: It's something children do, dear.

OAKLEY: I have been away too long.

MOSS: Six months, one week and two days, dear. I have been caring for the princesses by myself for six months, one week and two days. I counted.

OAKLEY: I left you with help.

MOSS: Ah yes. The help. There was the nanny, of course. She left. After one day.

OAKLEY: Surely you could find another.

MOSS: Of course. And then she left. After one hour. And I continued to run-through nannies at an appalling rate until by some lucky happenstance - Cousin Fern came to visit.

OAKLEY: Not that flittery, far-flung cousin of yours whom you appointed godmother to all of our daughters!

MOSS: Yes, that would be the one.

OAKLEY: I certainly hope she does not still dabble in magic.

MOSS: It's neither here nor there if she does, King Oakley - - for she never gets it right.

OAKLEY: What qualifications does she have to care for our daughters?

MOSS: She's still here.

FERN enters in a hurry and stops short as she spies FIORELLO.

FERN: Ohhhh! Do you feel it? Magic! There is magic in this room -

MOSS: Now Fern - - you promised -

FERN: Oh it's not any of *my* magic - - I can assure you of that.

MOSS: Good. Please continue Fern.

FERN: Yes. I came in because - Queen Moss - we are ready for you!

OAKLEY: What sort of entrance is that? You are speaking to your King and Queen!

FIORELLO: And the King's-a faithful servant, Fiorello!

OAKLEY: Yes! And the King's-a faithful servant, Fiorello!

FERN: *(At a loss as to what to do. She has never been formal before.)* Would you - like a little ceremony then?

OAKLEY: Respect would be appropriate.

FIORELLO: More respect-a for the King!

FERN: Yes, respect-a for the King! Who are you?

FIORELLO: Why, I am the - -

FERN AND FIORELLO: King's-a faithful servant, Fiorello!

FERN: Yes! I certainly would like to be respectful - I would like to - what am I doing?

OAKLEY: Announcing the princesses!

FERN: Correct, sir! I am announcing the princesses! Princess Camelia!

CAMELIA enters very grandly.

OAKLEY: Camelia. You have the look of a queen about you now - - I am - - impressed?

CAMELIA: Of course, Father. Welcome home. I hope your journey was pleasant.

OAKLEY: Very. Thank-you.

FIORIELLO: NEXT!

FERN: My! Nice set of lungs. The first set of twins - Princesses Ivy and Iris!

IVY and IRIS enter. IVY enters as perfectly as CAMELIA whereas IRIS attempts a melodramatic entrance - very grand and many curtsies and throwing kisses. IVY is disgusted with her twin.

IVY: Good afternoon, Father. *(She bows and drags IRIS with her.)*

IRIS: Yes, it is, isn't it? One can wax poetical about the state of the light during early spring and the smell of the -

IVY: Stop going on and on, Ivy. You'd bore the horn off a unicorn with your chattering.

FIORIELLO: NEXT!

They quickly move to the side. The following is done quickly.

FERN: The first set of triplets: Princess Jessamine! *(Jessamine quickly enters, curtsies and moves to the side.)* Princess Juniper! *(JUNIPER does the same.)* And Princess Jonquil! *(JONQUIL also does the same.)*

OAKLEY: Very well done! You behave as true princesses indeed!

JESSAMINE/JUNIPER/JONQUIL: Thank-you, Father. *(They squeal together and run to their place in line.)*

FIORIELLO: NEXT!

FERN: The second set of triplets: Princess Lillie, Princess Larkspur and Princess Laurel!

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LILLIE and LARKSPUR make a lovely dancing entrance and bow before OAKLEY.

OAKLEY: Lovely - -

LILLIE: Thank-you, Father. See, we can behave as perfect little princesses - -

LARKSPUR: If you make it worth our while - -

LILLIE grabs LARKSPUR and pulls her to the side.

OAKLEY: Yes, well done. I think. Isn't there one more? Didn't we have two sets of triplets, dear?

MOSS: Yes, well. Laurel has always been different. She will be along - - eventually.

FIORIELLO: NEXT!

FERN: You don't have to yell. NEXT!

VIOLA: *(Entering quite irate and speaking to FERN with great authority.)* Cousin Fern, please announce us properly. We do not respond well to "NEXT!"

The PRINCESSES roll their eyes. They are tired of bossy VIOLA.

FERN: Of course. The Princess Viola - -

VIOLA turns from dictator-like to all sweetness, curtsies and then yells.

VIOLA: Better. Better get a move on, Viletta!

VILETTA: Oh hush, Viola! I have not been announced yet!

FERN: And Princess Viletta -

VILETTA: *(Entering.)* It's about time. I've been waiting forever!

VILLETTA also curtsies and moves to the side. PERIWINKLE enters.

FIORIELLO: Scusi! Have you been announced yet?

PERIWINKLE: Oh really! I am all that is left. I know my cue.

FIORIELLO: But still - -

PERIWINKLE: (*PERIWINKLE goes over to FIORELLO.*) NEXT! (*She runs over to FERN.*) The Princes Periwinkle! (*She runs over to OAKLEY and curtsies.*) Just thought I'd save us some time, Father!

OAKLEY: Of course. Now that we are gathered - -

LAUREL enters still a bit topsy-turvy. She is putting on her shoes.

LAUREL: My, haven't we gotten formal!

FIORELLO: She needs to be presented.

MOSS: Well, that does seem a bit silly. I mean she is our daughter. We all know who she is.

FIORELLO: King Oakley, if we are to get this kingdom in-a shape, your familia must learn to behave as royals.

OAKLEY: Yes, Fern - - do present her.

FERN: (*In a non-chalant manner.*) Very well. The Princess Laurel. How was that?

FIORELLO: Not so good. Now curtsy, Princess. (*LAUREL curtsies sullenly joins her sister.*) Are you-a sure you are one of the triplets? You do not look alike.

LAUREL: I am a changeling's child. The real Laurel was spirited away by fairies and I was left in its place.

FIORELLO: You don't-a say?

LILLIE: She's joking. It's a joke. (*Aside to LAUREL.*) I wouldn't joke around him Laurel. The man has no sense of humor.

LAUREL: Who is he anyway?

FIORELLO: I am-a the King's-a faithful servant, Fiorello. It is time, sir. Time to address the changes around here.

OAKLEY: Of course. You know I have been away for months meeting with heads of kingdoms.

PERIWINKLE: Six months, one week and two days, Father. We counted.

OAKLEY: Precisely. I like precision and that is exactly how we will now be running the castle. Upon my return home, I found my children running around like heathens. Not appropriate. And so, after having spoken with your mother -

MOSS: What's that? Was I consulted? Why don't I remember?

OAKLEY: - - and with Fiorello, my faithful servant, we - - I mean - - I -
- have decided that changes must happen. Fiorello and I have
arranged for your education to be heightened. Fiorello has worked
in many kingdoms and understands the studies necessary for
those born of noble rank. And furthermore, there will be no mixing
with the townspeople!

CAMELIA: But some of them have been lifelong friends!

FIORIELLO: It is not seemly princesses to be seen with people of low-
rank. You will lose-a respect-

CAMELIA: But -

FIORIELLO: Silenzio! Your father is speaking!

CAMELIA: Actually it is you that is speaking. Are you higher ranked
than us?

FIORIELLO: Of course not. I am-a merely assisting the King so he
may-a speak!

OAKLEY: As I was saying, there will be changes. Tomorrow you will
begin proper lessons. Etiquette! Embroidery! Mathematics!

PRINCESSES: What? Mathematics?

OAKLEY: You will confine yourself to the grounds of the castle. And
you will at all times conduct yourselves as those of noble
parentage. Am I understood?

PRINCESSES: Yes, Father.

OAKLEY: Good. Now, please prepare yourselves for dinner. And
dear Queen, have the servants prepare a delectable welcome
home feast - for tonight we celebrate!

MOSS: Dear - about the servants - (*MOSS grabs OAKLEY and pulls
him aside.*) - we don't have any!

OAKLEY: But - we did - I'm sure I left the castle properly equipped
with servants six months ago.

MOSS: That was then and this is now. The maids quit when Laurel,
Lillie and Larkspur started dancing in the rain and tracking mud
inside the castle; then the cooks quit when Ivy became a
vegetarian. She cries whenever she sees meat. We have her eat
in another room, now. Viletta became addicted to some pasta and
cheese concoction. Then of course - -

OAKLEY: Enough! I cannot listen anymore. Does that mean there is
nobody to prepare our supper?

JESSAMINE: Why of course there is father -

JUNIPER: He is right under our noses -

OAKLEY: Pray tell, who?

JONQUIL: Why, the king's-a faithful servant, Fiorello!

FIGURELLO: But - - I - - no - - it is silly, no?

PRINCESSES: No!

OAKLEY: An excellent idea. Thank you for volunteering, Fiorello.

Dinner will be at 8 p.m. And please, no less than 12 courses!

One for each princess!

FIGURELLO: But-a - Your Majesty - -

PRINCESSES: (*Curtseying and in their sweetest voices.*) Thank you, Mr. Fiorello!

LARKSPUR: We would love to help you of course. But we must get properly dressed for dinner. We are princesses after all. Wouldn't do to mix it up in the kitchen now, would it?

PERIWINKLE: Certainly not. That is not the proper place for those as high-born as us!

LILLIE: I rather fancy a dance this evening, don't you? Fiorello, if you could also prepare the ballroom. We will have our dessert there.

JESSAMINE: And make sure you have warmed mugs for the hot chocolate ready. Mother makes the most divine chocolate before bedtime.

VIOLA: That will be all, Fiorello. If you will excuse us, we will take our leave. Princesses need time to get ready!

And as perfect little princesses, they take their exit.

FERN: Come, King's "faithful servant," I will show you the kitchen.

FIGURELLO: But -

FERN: You *can* cook now, correct?

FIGURELLO: Of course! I am Italian!

FERN and FIGURELLO enter.

MOSS: It will be interesting having you back home again, dear. Are you sure you want to change the way the household is run? It could upset the princesses.

OAKLEY: The princesses must make ready for the next stage in their lives. Some day they will be queens in their own castle. But while they are still home, it is my job to keep them safe.

MOSS: Are you sure keeping them locked up on the castle grounds is wise? How will they learn to rule if all they know is the castle?

OAKLEY: Rule? They will not rule. They will be married and live in other kingdoms thus consolidating our power. Fiorello has helped me to understand that daughters are a rich bargaining tool. He has already agreed to help me seek proper suitors for them. . Perhaps Camelia's husband will rule Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake one day - but certainly not our daughter. They are all sweet blooms - - a veritable bouquet of twelve roses and must be treated with delicacy.

MOSS: Roses have thorns for protection, dear Oakley. If you grip our daughters too tightly - - you may find they also have thorns.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2
FIORELLO

AT RISE: *We spy FIORELLO carrying an enormous platter filled with goodies to the dining hall. He puts it down and addresses the audience.*

FIORELLO: Is it a sad state of affairs, that I, Fiorello, "Newly-Assigned-Primo-Advisor" to the King is reduced to that of a waiter and cook, no? But I have patience. Si. Just as I can take-a some eggs, flour and water and devise 25 shapes of pasta, so may I take-a my talents and devise 25 uses for the King. The King, he will-a soon need me. Very much.

PRINCESSES: *(Offstage.)* Fiorello!

FIORELLO: I'm-a coming. For the King - he is weighed down with worries, no? You would worry, too, if you had-a twelve daughters. Daughters do not rule. Daughters do not inherit. But-a sons do. Capisce?

PRINCESSES: FIORELLO!

FIORIELLO: I'm-a coming! Don't-a look at me like that! Fiorello is nice, no? And Fiorello is a cook, for now. *(He indicates to the platter.)* And a waiter - - *(He picks up the platter.)* - - for now. Tomorrow, Fiorello is teacher of princesses - - for now. And now - it is spring. Come the New Year - who knows, eh? Fiorello may be your king! *(He smiles at the audience and exits.)*

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SCENE 3
LONGING

There is a light change and music comes on. The following is a montage of vignettes as time passes in the castle. WILLIAM is in the aisle tending to his flowers. CAMELIA watches him. She picks up a bouquet that sits nearby. PERIWINKLE suddenly enters.

PERIWINKLE: Shouldn't you be going to lessons?

CAMELIA: Look, Periwinkle! A bouquet. Isn't it lovely?

PERIWINKLE: Perfectly lovely. Now, leave it where you found it and come with me. Fiorello is waiting.

CAMELIA: And look over there. No, THERE! Isn't *he* lovely? Who is he?

PERIWINKLE: Hmm, looks like a gardener. He must be new! Fiorello must not want Peat around anymore. Let's go!

CAMELIA: *(Indicating bouquet.)* I think he left this for us. How sweet. We should thank him.

PERIWINKLE: I am on my way to lessons, Camelia. As you should be. I know what I am doing, do you?

PERIWINKLE exits. IVY and IRIS enter.

IVY: We're late! Camelia, what are you doing here? What's in your hand?

CAMELIA: It's nothing. Just some flowers.

IRIS: Ohhh! Wildflowers from outside the castle walls? How I miss them. In the castle, everything is tidy and manicured and nothing grows without a plan. Let me smell them! Let me touch them! How sad is this! Once the flowers were free and now they are arranged in a bouquet to wither away in the castle as we do!

IVY: Iris! It's not as bad as all of that! Really, you do go on! We have more than most people. We should be in class already. I hope you are prepared this time!

IRIS: Camelia, do you have your homework from yesterday? I mean - - really! Logarithms! Why ever does a princess need to learn logarithms? Nasty stuff.

CAMELIA: It is to keep our minds occupied, Iris. So we don't think about things beyond the castle. Come, sisters. Logarithms await us!

As CAMELIA, IVY and IRIS exit, JESSAMINE, JUNIPER and JONQUIL enter. They nervously peek around.

JESSAMINE: Are you sure this is okay, Juniper? Father's bound to hear from Fiorello that we stayed away from our lessons. Father has gotten very grouchy about these things.

JUNIPER: Look beyond the castle, Jessamine! It is a perfect summer day.

JONQUIL: We should be strolling by the river --

JESSAMINE: And visiting dressmakers to design our gowns for the Midsummer Ball --

JUNIPER: Which was cancelled. No more dancing. I miss that.

PEAT: Psst! Over here! (*PEAT makes an entrance from an unlikely place.*)

JESSAMINE/JUNIPER/JONQUIL: Peat! PEAT!

They run to him amid squeals of laughter.

PEAT: Gobs of fire! Must you squeal?

JESSAMINE: We haven't squealed in weeks! It feels good! Ready?

ALL squeal again as PEAT moves away.

PEAT: I have ears, you know. If you're going to screech at me, I'll forget about rescuing you. I can get screeched at by owls and bats! I surely don't need screeching princesses.

JONQUIL: Have you really come to rescue us and take us away?

PEAT: Of course. John and Elsie are waiting down by the river. We've concocted a raft and we're ready to set sail.

JESSAMINE: How do we get out of here without being seen?

PEAT: Why, the tunnels.

JESSAMINE/JONQUIL/JUNIPER: Tunnels?

PEAT: You three are such girls! You live in a castle! Of course, there are tunnels. You know - for escape from attacks and things like that.

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JUNIPER: Are you sure? I've never seen one.

PEAT: Of course I'm sure. We've been playing in them for years. Great cloudbursts! Castles are wasted on princesses. Now, I need to warn you - - they're a bit dark - -

JESSAMINE/JONQUIL/JUNIPER: Ohhhh!

PEAT: - - and of course there are a lot of bugs crawling around - -

JESSAMINE/JONQUIL/JUNIPER: Euuuh!

PEAT: But at least the bats are asleep - -

JUNIPER: That's enough! I am not wading through spiders and bats to go live on a raft in the river!

PEAT: I think it's a perfect solution. What waits for you here?

JESSAMINE: Math lessons. A marriage to some prince we never met. Actually, a raft on a river sounds quite inviting when you think about it.

JUNIPER: Remember the spiders - -

JONQUIL: - - and the bats - -

JESSAMINE: No! Don't waste your thoughts on that. Think of the dances. Remember the dances?

JUNIPER, JESSAMINE and JONQUIL do a small dance step together.

MUSIC wafts through the castle grounds and the four dance as if in a memory. LILLIE, LARSKPUR and LAUREL enter en route to lessons. They drop anything they may be holding and join the dance. VIOLA and VILETTA enter arguing and become hypnotized by the music. Soon, IVY and IRIS enter. They dance. PERIWINKLE and CAMELIA look on the scene and do a small step together. FIORELLO enters and hides himself as he watches the PRINCESSES. The music stops and the PRINCESSES hold hands and sigh. FIORELLO steps forward and breaks the moment.

FIORIELLO: Come, princesses. Your lessons await! (*The PRINCESSES crumple and exit clearly miserable. Periwinkle is the last to go and stomps on FIORELLO'S foot. FIORELLO may do the dialogue below with a bit of a limp.*) So, the princesses - they want-a bit of dancing in their life, si? It was-a just what I was waiting for. Fiorello can arrange that. Fiorello can arrange anything. You are learning, that, no? Don't-a look at me like that! I only want what the princesses want. But the princesses - - they should-a be careful what they wish for - - no?

FIORIELLO exits as there is a light change. The PRINCESSES enter. A bouquet lies by the edge of the castle. CAMELIA picks it up. She brings on the other princesses with a wave. They creep around the Throne Room and hide themselves outside all over - behind the throne - in the audience. OAKLEY, FIORELLO and MOSS enter. OAKLEY is going over some papers with FIORELLO. MOSS is engrossed in a book. There is a scream off stage and FERN enters in her usual hurry. She holds a tattered dancing slipper.

FERN: Haunted! We are haunted!

OAKLEY: You really must work on your entrances, Fern.

FERN: Sorry, sir, Majestic Oak - - look! (*She holds out the worn dancing slippers.*)

OAKLEY: It must be time for new shoes.

FERN: But they are new - - I just received them yesterday. And already worn. They are bewitched, for the princesses have only worn them once. I can attest to that.

OAKLEY: Are you sure you have not been practicing your peculiar brand of magic?

FERN: Of course not! If I had been practicing magic, the shoes would have been turned into newts. You know I never can get it right. Fiorello, do you know anything about this? You spend as much time with the princesses as I do!

FIORIELLO: Fiorello can-a cook! Fiorello can-a teach! Fiorello can-a go over strategic planning with the King, but Fiorello, he cannot dance!

OAKLEY: We must call the princesses in right away, don't you think so dear?

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

MOSS: What's that Oakley? Do you actually want *my* input on something? After all, you and Fiorello have been managing the castle for months now. All is in shambles but never mind.

OAKLEY: What's that?

MOSS: Nothing dear. I'm just commenting on the latest plot in the book. It's called *Lock Up Your Daughters* and they've just gotten to the rebellion. (*The PRINCESSES behind the throne peek out.*) I have gotten quite a lot of reading done these past few months... now that nobody seems to need me for anything.

OAKLEY: Fern, bring the princesses here. Let's see what they have to say. (*The PRINCESSES immediately appear. CAMELIA has her bouquet.*) Remarkably efficient, Fern. I am surprised.

FERN: Remarkably efficient, my boddlekings! The little darlings were spying on us!

PERIWINKLE: Did you want us for something, Father?

OAKLEY: I have brought you here to ask you about your shoes - -

JESSAMINE: Shoes? What shoes? Oh - - those shoes.

FERN: They are worn out!

JUNIPER: Yes, they are. I'm afraid it is time for another pair.

JONQUIL: If you could arrange it, Father. We would be most grateful. Another gown would be nice.

VIOLA: With some lace trim and ribbons -

VILETTA: Not lace, Viola! It's itchy. Now, velvet would be nice - -

VIOLA: Really, Viletta! You have no sense of style!

CAMELIA: Please, stop your incessant arguing. We're probably not going to get anything anyway. Even though we haven't had anything new in months.

MOSS: Camelia! What a lovely bouquet.

CAMELIA: It is, isn't it? It reminds me of the flowers we had for the Harvest Moon Ball. Remember what a beautiful dance that was? Must get it into water right away, Mother. Bouquets wither and die so quickly without sustenance, don't they?

The PRINCESSES quickly exit.

OAKLEY: They tire me.

MOSS: Yes. I have also been fatigued lately. Dear? Do you remember the dances? The Midsummer Eve Ball and the Harvest Moon Ball? (*MOSS and OAKLEY do a dance step together as they remember the dances. FERN could take the mouse off her shoulder and dance with him.*) One every season. Wouldn't it be fun to bring some of that happiness back into the castle? Let's arrange the Snowflake Ball.

OAKLEY: It appears the castle is experiencing some financial difficulty. I am afraid we cannot afford it right now.

MOSS: Well, it was just a thought. You and Fiorello have been working very hard the last few months. Isn't it interesting Fiorello - you seem to know as much about running the castle as my husband does.

FIGIORELLO: It is-a the only way I can properly serve the King!

MOSS: Of course. Come, my King. Let us visit the garden and relax. You deserve a respite.

FERN: Sir! The shoes!

OAKLEY: Unless you have a magical way of fixing them, Fern - - I suggest you order some more.

FERN: As you desire, Sire.

MOSS, OAKLEY and FERN exit.

FIGIORELLO: All is going fantastico, no? The princesses - - they are getting their wish and dancing. Of course, they think they're dancing in their dreams, but they don't-a have to know everything, do they? The New Year is-a coming and Fiorello is ready to take over the castle. That makes-a me happy. You'd be happy too, no? If you were about to claim a castle?

FIGIORELLO exits as CAMELIA and PERIWINKLE enter.

PERIWINKLE: Are we alone?

CAMELIA: Yes. I just saw Fiorello take his leave. Now what is so urgent that you cannot speak in front of your sisters?

PERIWINKLE: Don't you think it strange Camelia, that we wake up in the morning to find our shoes are worn out? How could that happen ... unless ...

CAMELIA: Unless - - what?

PERIWINKLE: Unless we truly are dancing through the night. Isn't it odd that we all have the same dream? Of dancing in a forest?

CAMELIA: I don't think so. Think about it. We are twelve sisters who have been cooped up together for months. We all long to get out of the castle and we do so when we sleep.

PERIWINKLE: If you ask me, something strange is going on around here. I wish I could figure it out.

CAMELIA: Things are very different now. But I can't think - - I'm too tired. We should join the others. They will be missing us.

There is a light change as CAMELIA and PERIWINKLE exit. KING OAKLEY, QUEEN MOSS and FIORELLO enter. KING OAKLEY is at his throne with ever faithful FIORELLO by his side reading some bills. QUEEN MOSS is reading.

OAKLEY: I do not understand it. All these bills - - for shoes. The princesses must be sneaking out of the castle. I will not allow it! I - -

MOSS: Easy, Oakley. You know you tire easily these days..

OAKLEY: Yes - - but these bills - - they will bankrupt us.

MOSS: Why, you simply must stop replacing the shoes. In this book *Princesses and the Myth of Happily Ever After* there is mention of giving daughters an allowance and teaching them finances by making them purchase their own clothing. Surely, they must be getting financial advice from Fiorello in his classes - -

FIORELLO: But of course! Fiorello teach everything a princess should know.

MOSS: You must speak with your daughters, Oakley.

OAKLEY: They are also your daughters, my Queen.

MOSS: Of course they are! But I do not understand all these new rules and regulations regarding "proper princess behavior." By the by, their gowns are looking a bit shabby. They've worn the same one all year. Think of ordering new ones as a New Year's gift. The New Year is only one month away. I'll leave you now so you may work. *(MOSS exits.)*

OAKLEY: I do not understand these finances, Fiorello. Except for constant payments to the cobbler for shoes, we have not been spending much. Yet, I see that we are close to being bankrupt.

FIORIELLO: Your subjects are experiencing - - some sort of-a - - recession, Your Majesty. It makes-a things tight for now, but it will probably right itself by spring. Don't-a worry. Leave all to your faithful servant, Fiorello. I will-a worry for you. Why don't you rest and let-a me handle things?

OAKLEY: Thank-you, Fiorello. I think I will take your advice. I cannot imagine how I ever did all of this without you. (*OAKLEY exits.*)

FIORIELLO: This is-a good, no? Prego! Why are you a-looking at me like that! Wouldn't you like to have a kingdom? It's-a nice, no? The peasants - - oh - - they like-a Fiorello very much - - for now. I lowered their taxes, so they are very happy. Of course, there is less money in the kingdom - - for now. Meanwhile, the princesses go out-a dancing every night . Of course they are bewitched, so they don't-a know it. That was-a smart of me, no? And by the New Year, the Princesses will not-a live here anymore. They will-a live -I don't-a want to tell you too much. The castle - - it has ears. The King and Queen are tired. It's-a nothing really. An herbal potion that makes you crave sleep. I'm-a looking forward to the New Year. It's a most wonderful time of year, no?

FIORIELLO exits as the PRINCESSES burst in with decorations. IRIS is attempts to put a garland around the throne. The decorations are according to whatever season you are currently in. Flowers garlands for spring and summer, autumn leaves for fall and evergreens for winter.

IVY: Look at what you are doing Iris! It's messy. It doesn't look good at all!

IRIS: Don't start in on me, Miss Perfect! If you don't like what I am doing - - do it yourself! I'm exhausted! I need to lie down!

PERIWINKLE: Enough with the dramatics! Does every line out of your mouth have to be filled with emotion?

IRIS: I cannot help it if I feel things more strongly than all of you.

CAMELIA: Oh really, Iris! Save it for when you are on the stage. Isn't life miserable enough without your added drama? We are all - - tired it seems these days.

LAUREL: Don't you find it interesting that the only happiness we have these days is when we are asleep and dreaming?

THE TWELVE DANCING PRINCESSES

VILETTA: If you ask me, putting up holiday decorations is a waste.

There is no holiday.

VIOLA: Well, nobody is asking you - -

VILETTA: I have a right to my opinion!

LARKSPUR: If nothing else, we could be kinder to each other during this difficult time.

LILLIE: Oh, be reasonable, please! We have been together for so long without a break, we are getting on each others' nerves!

JESSAMINE: You know - - it wouldn't take much to make me happy.
A new gown - -

JONQUIL: A trip outside the castle - -

JUNIPER: Seeing Peat!

They squeal as FERN rushes in.

FERN: Princesses! Your father approaches! Make yourself ready.

IORELLO: (*Entering.*) I am-a pleased to announce, King Oakley!

KING OAKLEY enters with QUEEN MOSS behind him. QUEEN MOSS is reading a book.

PRINCESSES: Father! (*And they quickly line up.*)

OAKLEY: Good day, my daughters. Are you my daughters? Are you my good, obedient daughters?

PRINCESSES: Of course, Father.

OAKLEY: Good. Then I need to know you are wearing out your shoes. Night after night - -

LARKSPUR: Why, we just - - we would like to tell you - - really - - but -

CAMELIA: We don't know.

OAKLEY: Do you defy me? Answer me!

PERIWINKLE: Really Father. You asked us for an answer and we gave you one. We cannot help it if it is not the answer you want. Would you rather we lie and make up a place?

OAKLEY: You are all up to something and as such have left me with no choice. I have decided that until you let me know where you dancing - you shall be locked up.

MOSS: You've already done that, dear. The girls cannot leave the castle.

OAKLEY: They are to remain here. With only their bed chamber and Throne Room allowed to them. Your meals will be brought to you. (*The PRINCESSES gasp.*) You will not be allowed out of these rooms until I have knowledge of where you dance the night away. Who knows what evil surrounds you during your great adventure. Furthermore, I have issued a proclamation to go out immediately. Read it to my daughters, Fiorello.

FIORIELLO: Of-a course, Sire. "Hear-ye! Hear-ye! Let it be known far and wide that Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake has announced a "testing" for all the men in the land. He who figures out the mystery surrounding the twelve dancing princesses and their worn out slippers shall receive one of my daughter's hand in marriage - (*The PRINCESSES are astonished.*) And shall inherit the Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake - when the King - retires." Don't-a you mean when you die, Sire?

OAKLEY: Yes. Well, didn't want to specifically state that. It is rather unpleasant from my point of view. Please continue.

FIORIELLO: "Furthermore, those who undertake this challenge and fail, shall waste away in the dungeons below the castle. They will-a be served only bread and water and the only face they will see for the remainder of their pathetic life will-a be the King's-a faithful servant, Fiorello." So - - I just-a want to be clear - - Fiorello's face is now punishment?

The PRINCESSES barely suppress laughter while FERN and MOSS laugh out loud until FIORIELLO silences them with his look.

OAKLEY: The proclamation is to go out immediately!

FIORIELLO: But of course! (*FIORIELLO exits.*)

MOSS: Locking twelve young women up in two rooms cannot be healthy for them, dear. Why - - I was just reading the other day in *How Not to Have Your Children Live with Your Forever* that in order for children to become independent they must be given responsibilities - -

OAKLEY: Great bubbling cauldrons! Do not quote to me from any of your infernal self-help, propaganda books!

MOSS: Very well, dear. Although you could take a page from this book if you want to keep your family intact. You might find the book *Disastrous Royal Marriages* intriguing.

OAKLEY: What?

MOSS: Nothing dear. I shall quietly take my books into a corner and be quiet as befits my status.

CAMELIA: Father? You do not mean to keep us locked up for the New Year, do you? Why, it is a time of celebration and new beginnings! It has always been a joyous time!

OAKLEY: Then tell me where you go to wear out your slippers and I shall withdraw the edict.

IRIS: We do not know! We have dreams but we never leave our bed!

OAKLEY: Do not tell me you wear out your slipper dancing in your dreams! I am not a fool!

LAUREL: If you ask me - - we don't go anywhere. Something strange is going on in the castle.

LILLIE: Maybe - we are all under a spell! Only, who could be working magic in the castle?

OAKLEY: MAGIC? Of course there is magic. I am beginning to understand. This all stems from Cousin Fern, doesn't it? Since you have been back in the castle - - all has gone wrong. The kingdom is financially bankrupt, my daughters, disobedient - - it is your doing! I hereby order another proclamation which is that as of this day you are hereby banished from the castle!

The PRINCESSES and MOSS protest and gather around FERN.

FERN: But Sire, I have done nothing but love them.

OAKLEY: It is I who truly love them. One day you will realize that. I am done with all of you for now. (*OAKLEY exits.*)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 4
THE ESCAPE

NOTE: *This scene of the PRINCESSES leaving to dance, FIORELLO'S speech and the PRINCESSES return can be omitted, but it is sweet.*

With the lights dim and haunting music in the background, FIORELLO enters and beckons to the PRINCESSES to follow. In an orderly line, set to music, the PRINCESSES enter and go into a closet or tunnel or up the aisle - staring ahead as if hypnotized, they exit.

FIORELLO: Pretty, no? They are off to the Land of the Muses where they will dance out their dreams. See, I told you Fiorello was nice. It was the King who locked the princesses up, not Fiorello. If it was not for me, the Princesses would never get to leave the castle. They would have no dancing in their life. That would be sad, no? Don't-a give me those looks! Watch now. See the princesses return from their nightly dancing. Note how happy they are. I have helped them live out their dreams. That is a very good thing, no?

FIORELLO exits as the PRINCESSES return from their dancing. This interlude should be set to the same music as that used above. Some should carry their slippers. They are still hypnotized but smiling now, happy. Some twirl, some sway to the music. They are enchanted.

BLACKOUT.

If the EXTENDED version is used, add the following dialogue:

As the PRINCESSES exit into the LAND OF THE MUSES, EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE appears. She speaks to FIORELLO.

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: All is in place for the New Year?

FIORELLO: But – of course!

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: The princesses *will* be here when the clock tolls midnight?

FIORIELLO: I-m-a telling you, Fiorello does not disappoint.

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: That is good. Because I have ways of dealing with those who disappoint me. And they are quite, quite unpleasant.

FIORIELLO: And Empress Nightshade, when they are delivered to you – you will keep-a your promise – the Castle-on-Whisperwood-Lake is mine? It is-a all mine, no?

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: Of course I will keep-a – KEEP – my promise! I am the Empress of the Night! After tonight, I all the kingdoms will belong to me! TO ME! You dare to question my sincerity, you impudent nobody!

FIORIELLO: No! No! I was-a just asking a question. I'm-a looking forward to ruling a castle!

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: I rule the castles! I rule ALL the castles. Is that clear?

FIORIELLO: Si. But – I still get-a to live there, no? And boss the peasants around? And sit on the throne?

EMPRESS NIGHTSHADE: Yes, you may play. But you will listen to me, capisce?

FIORIELLO: *(With a gulp.)* Capsico.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 5
THE TEST

AT RISE: *We are in front of the castle. It is two weeks later.*

FIORIELLO: So - - all is-a going well, no? Why do you keep-a looking at me like that? What did Fiorello ever do to you? Is it so bad that I want-a my own castle? Wouldn't you like-a one? As of today, we have-a many princes already locked up in the dungeons. They all think they can outwit Fiorello and solve the riddle! And now - - they must look at Fiorello for the rest of their lives! Life is good, no? In truth, I did not think about the dancing slippers. That was a close one. I thought nobody would ever notice that the Princesses danced the night away - - until - - well - - I'm-a not going to tell you anymore. I'm-a beginning to not trust you.

PRINCE DECIDUOUS enters. He is an arrogant, haughty PRINCE. He is accompanied by HAPLESS, his much put-upon servant carrying many sacks.

HAPLESS: Make way for the Prince! Prince Deciduous entering!
Make way! Make way!

FIORIELLO: You! Calm-a down! There is nobody here you need to impress!

DECIDUOUS: (*Eyeing FIORELLO up and down.*) That is an accurate statement. (*To HAPLESS.*) Prince Deciduous would like to be announced to the King!

HAPLESS: He would like to be announced to the King.

FIORIELLO: Is he here to solve the mystery of the twelve dancing princesses?

HAPLESS: Are you here to solve the mystery of the twelve dancing princesses!

DECIDUOUS: I am.

HAPLESS: He is.

FIORIELLO: Can he look me in the eye and speak to me?

DECIDUOUS: I cannot.

HAPLESS: He cannot.

FIORIELLO: Very well. Have it your way. I will announce you. (*Aside.*) So, the high and mighty Prince cannot-a look at Fiorello, sí? I wonder what he will do when he finds out Fiorello is soon to be his King! He will look at me then!

FIORIELLO exits as FERN approaches. She is a bit more tattered since she was banished. She carries a small covered basket. She takes on the persona of an old crone. She could be cloaked. HAPLESS will run back and forth between FERN and DECIDUOUS.

FERN: Good day, to you.

DECIDUOUS: Hapless, please ask that woman not to speak to me.

HAPLESS: Please don't speak to him.

FERN: May I speak to you, then?

HAPLESS: (*Thrilled to be addressed.*) Speak to me? Nobody speaks to me! Unless of course they are speaking to him! Can she speak to me?

DECIDUOUS: Of course not.

HAPLESS: Oh. I'm sorry. He said "of course not."

FERN: I heard. I was just wondering - - I have fallen on hard times, sir. You wouldn't have anything in that sack that could feed a poor woman like me, would you? My basket is empty and I have not eaten for days.

HAPLESS: Uhh, you wouldn't have anything in that sack that could feed a poor woman like her, would you? What else did you say? I can't remember.

FERN: My basket is empty - -

HAPLESS: Yes! Her basket is empty -

DECIDUOUS: Prince Deciduous heard that awful woman! Prince Deciduous is not deaf.

HAPLESS: Of course not, sir.

FERN: Well?

HAPLESS: Well?

DECIDUOUS: My sack is laden with good drink and wholesome food. As befits my status as Prince Deciduous. Of course I have drinks and food to spare.

FERN: Oh, thank you Sire! You won't forget this! I promise you! I will help - -

DECIDUOUS: Hapless, please inform this misguided woman that Prince Deciduous has no intention of sharing anything with her at any time. How would that look?

HAPLESS: Prince Deciduous has carefully weighed his options and has decided that as he is of noble birth - -

FERN: (*Quickly dropping the "old crone" act and turning back into FERN.*) Really! I heard what he said!

HAPLESS: She heard what you said, Sire.

DECIDUOUS: How nice for her.

FIORIELLO enters; FERN quickly gets out of the way.

FIORIELLO: The King-a will see you, now. (*DECIDUOUS does not move.*) I said, the King-a will see you now!

DECIDUOUS: What's that, Hapless? Is that horrid man speaking to me?

HAPLESS: He is, Sire.

DECIDUOUS: And what did he say?

HAPLESS: He said the King-a will see you now.

DECIDUOUS: Finally! Have him show me the way.

HAPLESS: Please show him the way.

FIORELLO: Prego, follow me. (*DECIDUOUS motions for HAPLESS to pick up the sack which he does.*) Your servant may not enter, Sire. Only those willing to undergo “the test” may come to the castle.

HAPLESS: (*Throwing the sack into DECIDUOUS'S stomach.*)

I may not enter, Sire.

DECIDUOUS: I HEARD HIM! (*Irritated and with much difficulty DECIDUOUS follows FIORELLO into the castle.*)

FERN: You're free now.

HAPLESS: Oh no! Prince Deciduous will hunt me down and punish me. I've tried to escape. He always finds me.

FERN: Your Prince will never be back. No one who enters the castle for the test ever returns.

HAPLESS: I will wait.

FERN: As you wish. Would you like some food and drink?

HAPLESS: But I thought - you had none. Your basket was empty.

FERN: Oh that! It is my own little test. Wait one second. “Skeedadle me far; skeedadle me near; Bring turkey for us and lay it right here!” (*They peer into the basket.*)

HAPLESS: (*Bringing a pathetic, limp frog leg out of basket.*) I don't know - - I've never eaten frogs legs before.

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