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Puss in Boots

*A Short Comedy Adapted for the Stage and
Based on the Story by Charles Perrault*

by

Gwen Adams

Bardstreet.com

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Based on the Story by Charles Perrault*

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BACKGROUND

For centuries, fictional servant characters have dazzled readers and audiences by their wit, courage, and (sometimes self-interested) fidelity. From Shakespeare's Kent, Puck, and Ariel, to Sam Weller in *The Pickwick Papers*, from P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves to Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings* and Mrs. Hughes in *Downton Abbey*, a plucky servant can captivate us. In the genre of animal stories, this archetype has no better example than the clever cat of Charles Perrault's epic tale *Puss in Boots*.

I first adapted *Puss in Boots* for a 2019 youth theater camp. I produced the play at Holy Angels Academy, Louisville, Kentucky on August 3, 2019 with a cast and crew of forty-one. A number of people who helped make the first production possible deserve my thanks, including former Headmaster Joseph Norton, Administrative Assistant Judith Kramer, and Terri Glotzbach, teacher and Assistant Head of School at Holy Angels Academy. I am also grateful to the adult volunteers: my sister Stephanie Moeller, as well as Christa Broaddus, Sarah Harris, Drina Erb, Kelly and Robby Osting, and Emily Eidem. I thank Vince Heuser and Jennifer Dillman of Holy Family Radio WLCR AM-1040 for promoting the camp. I gratefully remember those students who first brought my adaptation of *Puss in Boots* to life. As good actors, they introduced their own creative energy and interpretations to the tone, pacing, and action of the play. They transformed the characterization of key roles. Their laughter and interest taught me which parts of the play worked and which still needed revision. Finally, I would like to thank the John and Katie Schafer family and their children for giving me an idea for a key scene.

Puss in Boots is technically a one-act play with a running time of 65–75 minutes. The running time can be reduced or lengthened depending on the time given to executing business, and incorporating music and dance at the suggested times or as needed. When I first directed the play, I presented it with a short intermission. Whether writing a full-length multiple-act play or a shorter “one-act” play, I always provide for an optional intermission, dividing all plays, even “one-act” plays, into two rough halves. As a director, I find the intermission indispensable. As the period where a theater group can most hope to sell refreshments or swag, intermissions can be key for recouping production expenses. Intermissions also accommodate the need for a quick break, especially with youth or family audiences. And personally, I always want an intermission so I can check in with and encourage the cast and crew before going on to the second part of the play and the big finale.

Charles Perrault's *Puss in Boots* was published in 1697 as part of his collection *Tales of Mother Goose*. The tale of the loyal feline trickster servant is even older, featuring in the seventeenth century *Pentamerone* of Giambattista Basile and the sixteenth century *Facetious Nights* by Giovanni Francesco Straparola. The cat has remained popular, inspiring numerous illustrated versions and adaptations for stage and animated film.

Ultimately, my desire to expand Perrault's original story with classic elements from the wider fairytale tradition is rooted in my admiration for Puss. Puss is too great a character to limit to a single story. In this adaptation I have preserved the magic of Perrault's version, while giving Puss wider scope for action. This is an excellent play for professional/community theater, touring groups, college/university, high-school, and middle-school drama groups, to be played before youth and/or family audiences.

SYNOPSIS

Young Tom finds himself alone in the world: no home, no work, nothing left but a cat. But this turns out to be no ordinary feline. “I’ll serve you faithfully,” says Puss. “All I ask is a pair of boots. Your success will be my success.” Nothing is too difficult for Puss in Boots! Tom goes from rags to riches, becomes the Marquis of Carabas, and wins the heart of Princess Rose. But soon after Tom and the princess become engaged, circumstances lead Princess Rose to believe Tom is really an ogre in disguise. To give herself time to find a way out, she requires Tom to pass three impossible tests. Puss is on it! First, Puss has to help Tom bake the finest cake in the world. Next, Puss has to help Tom solve a complex riddle. Finally, Puss faces the greatest challenge yet: to help Tom win the Annual Race of the Flying Balloons. Will this prove too great a task?

CHARACTERS, TIME, PLACE, RUNNING TIME

Characters: (1 m; 3 w; 14 m/w; extras). With doubling/tripling: (8 overall plus extras: 1 m; 2–3 w; 4–5 m/w; extras). See the *Stage Guide*, Section 1 for doubling/tripling (available from Bardstreet.com).

In Order of Appearance:

NARRATOR (m/w): Any age, a mysterious narrator who relates the epic tale of the clever cat.

LAWYER (m/w): 30–65 years, an attorney who divides a poor miller's property among his heirs.

ELDEST CHILD (m/w): 26–30 years, the eldest child of a poor miller.

MIDDLE CHILD (m/w): 22–27 years, the second child of a poor miller.

TOM (m): 18–25 years, the youngest son of a poor miller.

PUSS (m/w): Any age, TOM's cat.

RABBIT (m/w): Any age, a luckless rabbit captured by PUSS as a gift for the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE.

GUARD 1 (m/w): 30–40 years, a guard at the Royal Palace.

GUARD 2 (m/w): 30–40 years, a guard at the Royal Palace.

PRINCESS ROSE (w): 18–22 years, full of fun, heir to the throne and the most beautiful princess in all the world.

QUEEN (w): 40–65 years, ruler of the land and mother of PRINCESS ROSE.

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (w): Any age, Queen of the Birds and almost a gift for the Royal Palace.

LOCAL PEASANT (m/w): Any age, a local peasant bribed by PUSS to identify TOM as the Marquis of Carabas.

MR. GRAVEL OGRE (m/w): Any age, a terrible ogre with a fine castle and magical shape-shifting powers. He typically goes by "Mr. Gravel."

HEAD BAKER (m/w): 40–65 years, the greatest baker in the world and proprietor of Parisol, a bakery in Paris, France.

BAKERS (m/w): Any age, bakers of Parisol.

MICE (m/w): Any age, mice plaguing the bakers of Parisol.

PALACE MOUSE (m/w): Any age, a mouse at the Royal Palace who helps PUSS.

OGRETON (m/w): Any age, an ogre, MR. GRAVEL's greedy cousin.

ANNOUNCER (m/w): 30–45 years, official announcer at the Annual Race of the Flying Balloons.

PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w): Any age, men, women, dukes, duchesses, visitors, and local people, all eager to see the outcome of the race.

BALLOONISTS (m/w): Any age, contestants in the Annual Race of the Flying Balloons.

BIRDS (m/w): Any age, birds of the air and subjects of the QUEEN OF THE BIRDS.

Time: A short time or a long time ago.

Place: In a faraway kingdom for most of the play, outdoors, in, and around the Royal Palace, and at MR. GRAVEL's castle. Act II, Scene 1 takes place at Parisol, a bakery in Paris, France.

Running Time: 65–75 minutes. An intermission can be held between Act I and II.

THE PLAY

ACT I

Scene 1: Outdoors Near the LAWYER's Office

(A spotlight illuminates the NARRATOR who stands SL next to a big box. The box is covering PUSS. The stage is otherwise empty. The NARRATOR pushes the box C—Scooch! Scooch! Scooch! When the box is C, the NARRATOR walks DCS. The NARRATOR carries a baton and taps it against an imaginary music stand. Five taps are heard.)

NARRATOR

Once in a faraway kingdom, a long time ago or a short time,
Lived a poor miller, a father, whose children worked hard in the business.
After he died and his debts had been paid, there was little to nothing
Leftover. Tom was the youngest. How dismal his future, his prospects.
How could he know what the future would bring? Of his trustworthy servant?
Muse, I beseech you, come fire my words! Sing of the cleverest feline!
This is the story of Puss, the great servant. Cunning and booted
Loyal and crafty, the cat helped his master to true love and glory!

(Music. Lights up. Dancing and business by actors or stagehands as the stage is prepared and the NARRATOR dances and conducts the set into life. Actors or stagehands reveal the backdrop and set a chair for the LAWYER next to the box. Ideally, the set is constructed as a giant pop-up book which actors or stagehands drag in and open. When the book opens, a set pops up with a village or outdoor scene.

As the stage preparation comes to an end, the NARRATOR moves DSR. The LAWYER enters SL and sits on the chair, with briefcase nearby. The ELDEST CHILD, the MIDDLE CHILD, and TOM enter and stand SR, near the LAWYER. The MIDDLE CHILD manifests a desire to ingratiate himself with the ELDEST CHILD for the sake of financial gain in case the will proves unsatisfactory. The LAWYER consults a paper. While the NARRATOR speaks, the LAWYER hands the ELDEST CHILD an envelope. The ELDEST CHILD opens the envelope, holds up the key, and rejoices. The MIDDLE CHILD and TOM join in the merriment.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

After the fun'ral, the lawyer and children arranged for a meeting.
First-born, the oldest got business and home with the garden and woodshed.

(The LAWYER hands an envelope to the MIDDLE CHILD. The MIDDLE CHILD opens the envelope, reads it and rejoices. TOM joins in the merriment. The MIDDLE CHILD drops some of his obsequiousness toward the ELDEST CHILD.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Then to the middle one, next child, the miller bequeathed an old donkey.
And to the youngest son Tom? He was left with the family . . . cat.

(The LAWYER lifts the box covering PUSS. PUSS is seen grooming. The ELDEST CHILD and the MIDDLE CHILD stare, scoff, and begin to exit SL, rejoicing in their own good fortune. The ELDEST CHILD stops to reject both MIDDLE CHILD and TOM before exiting SL. After a pause, the MIDDLE CHILD hurries SL after the ELDEST CHILD. At a loss, TOM turns back to the LAWYER. The LAWYER begins to extend his card. Then, looking at TOM's poverty, the LAWYER thinks better of it, and pockets his card. He won't be doing any work for this client! The LAWYER exits SL.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

'Lone in the world with nothing to help him. Only a jacket
The clothes he was wearing, a handful of pennies, a cat, and a sandwich.

TOM

I'm on my own: no home, no work. I'll have to seek my fortune.

(to PUSS)

Wish I could take you with me.

(TOM takes a sandwich from his pocket, unwraps it, and munches, thinking. Then TOM splits the sandwich and gives the larger portion to PUSS. PUSS contemplates the sandwich.)

PUSS

(aside)

You were always kind to me.

(to the audience)

His family treated me like dirt! But not Tom. He was a good master.

(louder, to TOM)

I won't abandon you.

(TOM gasps and stares.)

PUSS (cont.)

Don't worry, master! I'll serve you faithfully!

TOM

You're a cat!

PUSS

That's an advantage: cleverness, cunning—

TOM

Puss, I can't afford a servant—

PUSS

All I ask is a pair of boots. I'll need them to make your fortune. Your success will be my success.

TOM

Boots? I don't have the money—

PUSS

I have an idea. Lots and lots of ideas! Leave everything to me!

(Music. PUSS pulls TOM offstage SL. The NARRATOR remains onstage. Lights down. If possible, the NARRATOR astounds the audience by directing another dramatic musical switch to the set for the Throne Room of the Royal Palace. When the set is ready, the NARRATOR exits SR.)

End of Scene 1

Scene 2: Near and in the Royal Palace, Same Day

(Lights up, illuminating only DS. The QUEEN sits in shadow USR. The throne for PRINCESS ROSE is empty. The GUARDS stand CS, also in shadow. Lights up. PUSS lies on the ground DSC near a bag. TOM enters DSL with boots and a cavalier hat.)

TOM

There you are, my friend. It worked! And they threw in a hat.

(PUSS jumps up and begins to put on the clothing enthusiastically. TOM stares moodily in the direction of the Royal Palace.)

TOM (cont.)

Why are we meeting by the Royal Palace?

PUSS

You'll see. What's the problem? The queen? Is she your enemy?

TOM

(gesturing in the negative)

She's wise and good. Everybody loves the queen—

PUSS

The princess? By the end, your enemies will be begging—

TOM

Princess Rose doesn't even know who I am.

PUSS

(whistling or crowing)

Is she . . . beautiful?

TOM

The most beautiful princess in the world, that's all.

PUSS

And heir to the throne!

TOM

Even if she wasn't the heir . . . I have no chance. At least I used to work at the mill. Now I'm a tramp.

PUSS

Master, the world is full of possibilities! Now hide over there.

(PUSS returns to the bag, plumps it up, and replaces the bag on the ground DSC. PUSS lies down near it as if dead. TOM hides SL. The RABBIT enters DSR, hopping toward the bag. The RABBIT sniffs the contents of the bag and begins to nibble. PUSS pounces on the RABBIT. For the rest of the scene, the RABBIT takes every opportunity to flee.)

PUSS (cont.)

How easy was that? Go home and I'll—

TOM

We don't have a home. Remember? Father gave the mill to—

PUSS

Your siblings will let you stay the night!

(TOM gestures in the negative.)

PUSS (cont.)

Just ask! I'm taking this rabbit to the palace. One look at these boots: they'll let me see the queen.

(Amazed, TOM gestures at the Royal Palace as if thinking, "If you're brave enough to try that . . .")

TOM

I guess I can talk to my siblings.

(TOM exits SL. Lights up CS, illuminating the GUARDS but not the QUEEN. PRINCESS ROSE enters SR and watches PUSS and the RABBIT. PUSS and the RABBIT approach the GUARDS and try to pass. A GUARD puts out his hand to stop PUSS.)

GUARD 2

Not so fast.

PUSS
(sticking out a boot)

Do you see these boots?

GUARDS

Wow . . .

(The GUARDS bow deeply to PUSS, who returns the bow. PRINCESS ROSE approaches. Unseen by PUSS, the GUARDS bow deeply to PRINCESS ROSE. The RABBIT struggles, breaks away from PUSS, and rushes to PRINCESS ROSE. PRINCESS ROSE lets the RABBIT shield behind her. During the following exchange PUSS mistakes PRINCESS ROSE for a servant. The GUARDS are dismayed. PRINCESS ROSE signs to them not to give her away because she thinks the mix-up is amusing.)

PRINCESS ROSE
(to the RABBIT)

Poor thing, where are your parents?

PUSS

Sorry, miss! I'm in charge of that rabbit!

(angry, to the RABBIT)

Stop bothering this maid! She has work do!

(The RABBIT clings tightly to PRINCESS ROSE.)

PRINCESS ROSE

Young squire, tell me your business!

PUSS

I'd rather tell it to the queen and the princess. You look important. Are you a lady's maid? If you help me . . .

(conspiratorial)

I'll make it worth your while.

(PRINCESS ROSE makes a conspiratorial gesture which suggests assent.)

PUSS (cont.)

I need to present that rabbit on behalf of my master.

PRINCESS ROSE

Who is that?

PUSS
(reaching for the RABBIT unsuccessfully)

The Marquis of Carabas!

PRINCESS ROSE

Why does he not come in person?

PUSS

That's a secret.

PRINCESS ROSE

How mysterious!

PUSS

I can tell *you*. He loves the princess. Can I please have my rabbit?

PRINCESS ROSE

Have they met?

PUSS
(reaching again for the RABBIT unsuccessfully)

Not yet. We're paving the way with presents. Or trying to! Now can I have my rabbit?

PRINCESS ROSE
(shaking head in the negative)

This poor bunny needs a home.

PUSS

Where's your honor? You said you'd help! Out of my way, scullery wench. You're no lady's maid!

PRINCESS ROSE
(giggling)

That is true! Come. Let us find the queen.

(Lights illuminate the QUEEN USR. PUSS, PRINCESS ROSE, and the RABBIT approach. PUSS sees the QUEEN and the empty throne next to the QUEEN. PUSS is disappointed that PRINCESS ROSE appears to be absent.)

PRINCESS ROSE (cont.)

Your majesty, an emissary with a gift.

PUSS

His lordship, the Marquis of Carabas sends you this rabbit.

QUEEN

We are not familiar with his name. The Marquis of Carabas?

PUSS

His lordship is a newcomer, lately settled in your realm.

QUEEN

Bid his lordship welcome. We are pleased with his kind gift.

PUSS

(gesturing to the empty throne)

To her royal highness, Princess Rose, my lord also sends his compliments.

(The QUEEN glances at PRINCESS ROSE. PRINCESS ROSE inclines her head in acknowledgement, then takes her throne beside the QUEEN. The RABBIT hovers near PRINCESS ROSE, happy in his good fortune. PUSS is aghast at his mistake.)

PUSS (cont.)

Your royal highness!

PRINCESS ROSE

How were you to know?

(to the QUEEN)

There was a misunderstanding. I should have undeceived this good servant.

(full of fun, she smiles on PUSS)

Forgive me!

(PUSS bows his head.)

QUEEN

Pray tell his lordship that we return his compliments. Send also our greeting to her ladyship, the marchioness.

PUSS

The marchioness is no longer with us.

PRINCESS ROSE

The marquis is a widower?

PUSS

He is an orphan! The late marquis and marchioness left their son a massive fortune . . . small consolation. Their young and handsome son is quite alone in the world.

(The QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE exchange a glance.)

QUEEN

(rising)

Well do we know what it is to incur such a loss. We shall endeavor to make the young marquis feel welcome.

(PRINCESS ROSE also rises and nods with a smile. PUSS bows and exits DSL. Lights down. Exit all.)

End of Scene 2

Scene 3: Outdoors, One Day Later

(As lights go down in the previous scene, the NARRATOR enters SR and conducts a musical transition. The entire set can be transformed. Alternately, actors or stagehands can introduce a few elements DS to signify an outdoor scene. In this case, US is left in darkness and only DS illuminated. Lights up. While the NARRATOR begins to speak, PUSS enters SL, places the bag on the ground CS, then hides SL.)

NARRATOR

Puss took the bag and he went to the wood, a wood full of birdsong.
Leaving the bag full of savory birdseed, he went into hiding.

(The QUEEN OF THE BIRDS enters SR, looking about timidly and approaching the bag. She begins to eat the seeds. PUSS pounces, grabbing hold of the QUEEN OF THE BIRDS and trying to pull her SL. She struggles.)

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

Mercy! I pray you, listen!

PUSS

Can't! I must take you to the palace!

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

You do not know who I am!

PUSS

And I do not care! I must help my good master! Every gift brings him closer to Princess Rose.

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

If your master was good, he should want you to hear me!

(PUSS stops and stands as if to say, "Okay, impress me.")

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (cont.)

I am the Queen of the Birds. For the sake of my people: release me!

(PUSS makes a disbelieving exclamation or gesture and resumes pulling the QUEEN OF THE BIRDS SL.)

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (cont.)

Honorable cat, give me back my freedom! I promise to repay you.

PUSS

Ask the queen to release you! She's just and merciful. You go free; I still present a gift.

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

I may not see the queen—

PUSS

That's not my—

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

Imagine! Say I do address the queen. Say I beg for the mercy which your master would not show. How will he then appear?

(PUSS pauses as if to say, "Good point.")

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (cont.)

Hear something else! Her majesty the queen is an old friend. She will not take my imprisonment kindly. If you would serve your master, set me free.

PUSS

Are you really the Queen of the Birds?

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

Your good master would take my word for it. Also: cats are shrewd judges of character.

(PUSS looks hard at the QUEEN OF THE BIRDS and then releases her, somewhat unwillingly.)

PUSS

Off you go!

(The QUEEN OF THE BIRDS flits SR.)

QUEEN OF THE BIRDS

Most excellent cat, thank you! I shall not forget my promise! I will repay you!

(The QUEEN OF THE BIRDS exits SR.)

PUSS

Puss, old friend, you are getting soft! Queen of the Birds! I'll never see her again. Now what can I take the queen?

(PUSS resettles the bag on the ground CS, then hides SL. Lights down. PUSS exits SL. The NARRATOR remains onstage.)

End of Scene 3

Scene 4: Outdoors, a Few Months Later

(A spotlight illuminates the NARRATOR still standing SR.)

NARRATOR

Day after day, with his arms full of presents, the cat paid a visit.
Honoring queen and her daughter as if he'd been sent by his master.
One day the cat learned the queen was intending a drive near the river.
She would be bringing her daughter, the princess his master admired:
Rose, who was heir to the throne! So Puss made a deal with a peasant.
Then the cat hurried to find his good master. Puss was a trickster!

(Spotlight down. The NARRATOR exits SR. Lights up. TOM and PUSS enter SL. TOM has a bag full of props. PUSS rummages through the bag. PUSS fishes out an assortment of items, such as a baker's hat, aviator hat, a bucket, a postcard from the Parisol Bakery, and two toy guns. TOM handles or tries things on.)

TOM

There wasn't much left after they sold the mill. They let me pick through the leftovers.

(As PUSS pulls out items, the postcard falls out. TOM snatches up the postcard.)

TOM (cont.)

Parisol! That's a bakery. We tried to sell them flour. I always wanted father to get me one of their cakes. . . . Too expensive.

(PUSS removes the two toy guns. TOM grabs one and aims it at PUSS.)

TOM (cont.)

Give me all your money! Oh, wait, we don't have any!

PUSS

(disappointed)

There aren't any clothes!

TOM

(shrugging and looking at the toy guns)

Father gave me these. We used to play battles.

PUSS

I'll play battles with you, master. . . . But not now! We have things to do.

TOM

(indicating the bag)

Why'd you want to see all this?

(PUSS looks at TOM's rags, then hurriedly offstage SR in the direction of the Royal Palace. From here until the royal carriage arrives, PUSS bustles TOM.)

PUSS

I was hoping for better clothes.

(gesturing as if to say "Never mind")

Today, master, if you do as I say, your fortune is made.

TOM

Now? How long is this going to take?

PUSS

The rest of your life?

TOM

That's too long. I have a job interview.

PUSS

Where?

TOM

The lawyers who divided father's property: they need an errand boy.

(PUSS scoffs and pulls TOM's arm DS.)

TOM (cont.)

It's a big firm. They work with everybody, even Mr. Gravel!

PUSS

The ogre? That's no recommendation!

TOM

Steady money?

PUSS

Listen, master, this won't take long. All you have to do is jump in the river.

(TOM stares in disbelief and makes a gesture, as if to say, "Have you gone crazy?" TOM starts to walk away SL. PUSS runs after him and drags on his arm.)

PUSS (cont.)

What's a little mud?

TOM

There's no time to dry my clothes. Any other day, I wouldn't care. But I need to look present—

PUSS

Leave your clothes on the bank. They'll be safe.

TOM

We're right by the road!

PUSS

(lying)

Nobody's coming. I'll stand guard. Trust me, master!

(With a sigh, TOM removes his ragged vest and sandals/shoes and plunges into the river. PUSS picks up TOM's ragged vest and sandals/shoes, shoves them into the bag, and hides the bag USL. PUSS then waits DSL. Music and fanfare. The QUEEN enters SR in a carriage with PRINCESS ROSE and the GUARDS. PUSS waves his arms and runs in front of the carriage.)

PUSS (cont.)

Help! The Marquis of Carabas is drowning!

QUEEN

Save that man!

(The GUARDS plunge into the river to rescue TOM.)

PUSS

Thieves have stolen my lord's fine clothing!

TOM

(overhearing)

What!

QUEEN

We have spare clothing. Guards, your kit! We are happy to do something for his lordship.

(The GUARDS lead TOM to shore and drape a cloak about him. The QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE rummage in the GUARDS' kit and produce fine clothes: boots/shoes and socks, nicer vest, narrow sash. PUSS brings the clothes to TOM. The GUARDS continue to hold up the cloak so TOM can dress.)

PUSS

(aside to TOM, pointing with excitement)

The royal carriage! The princess!

TOM

(mortified)

I will never forgive you.

(Meanwhile PRINCESS ROSE takes a good look at TOM. PRINCESS ROSE and the QUEEN speak in an aside. PUSS pretends not to hear them.)

QUEEN

Robbery in the middle of the day? Just when I think we have secured peace and order . . . That poor boy!

PRINCESS ROSE

He took no hurt. Look at him!

(The QUEEN holds up her hand to shield PRINCESS ROSE's eyes)

QUEEN

Rose, avert your eyes! Where is your modesty?

PRINCESS ROSE

Mother! I can only see his head! So *that* is the young marquis!

(PUSS approaches the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE.)

PUSS

Your majesty! Where would my lord be if you had not come?

QUEEN

If only we could offer something finer than a guard's uniform—

PUSS

Certainly, he is used to finer clothing, but you have saved his life!

QUEEN

How did his lordship fall in the river?

PUSS

A man as wealthy as my lord should not walk unattended. But he fears nothing.

QUEEN

He went out without guard or servant?

(PUSS spreads his hands apologetically.)

PRINCESS ROSE

I like the boldness.

PUSS

As do his tenants and staff! We could not have a better master!

QUEEN

Finish your story. He went out and—?

PUSS

Thieves attacked him for his money and fine garments. They pushed him into the waters. I came rushing up, but I cannot swim!

QUEEN

We will catch those thieves. In what direction did they fly?

(PUSS puts his hands on his hips and looks about as if trying to remember: “East? Could of been east. Then again, could of been west.”)

QUEEN (cont.)

Can you give a description?

PUSS

It all happened so fast.

QUEEN

It may be impossible to bring those thieves to justice.

(PUSS feigns resignation. When TOM is finished dressing, he approaches the carriage. PUSS emphasizes the words “Marquis of Carabas” for TOM, since this is the first time TOM has heard himself called by that title.)

PUSS

The Marquis of Carabas is most grateful to your august majesty for saving his life.

(TOM bows to the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE. PRINCESS ROSE gives TOM a winning smile and speaks to the QUEEN in a very audible aside.)

PRINCESS ROSE

Ask the marquis to join us.

QUEEN

Your lordship, may I present her royal highness, Princess Rose. Would you care to take a drive? We should be honored!

(TOM looks at PUSS for direction. PUSS gestures to TOM as if to say: "Forget the job interview! Get in the carriage!") TOM enters the carriage. PUSS mounts the back bringing the bag full of TOM's clothes and toys. Music and fanfare. TOM and PRINCESS ROSE and the QUEEN appear to have a delightful conversation. A beat. The LOCAL PEASANT enters SL and approaches the carriage.)

PRINCESS ROSE

Then your servant realized I was not a scullery maid!

TOM

What a story! I'm so happy to meet you at last!

(hastily including the QUEEN)

Both of you!

PRINCESS ROSE

Me as well? It's not only you, your majesty. His lordship is glad to meet me!

(With a little gesture, half-affection, half-correction, to PRINCESS ROSE, the QUEEN addresses TOM.)

QUEEN

Her royal highness is teasing you. Bear with her.

(TOM stammers, tongue-tied but happy, as if to say, "I'm enjoying it!")

PRINCESS ROSE

Look, here comes a local peasant. Let us ask him [or her].

(The QUEEN signals to halt the carriage. PUSS prompts the LOCAL PEASANT to answer according to plan. The LOCAL PEASANT curtsies or bows. The QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE incline their heads in greeting.)

LOCAL PEASANT

Your majesty! Your royal highness!

(to TOM with a wink at PUSS)

M'lord.

QUEEN

Good afternoon! Her royal highness was admiring the view! Tell us, who is lord here?

LOCAL PEASANT

Ma'am, that'd be the Marquis of Carabas. I work on his land.

PRINCESS ROSE

Over there: those green woods. To whom do those belong?

LOCAL PEASANT

Them woods? The Marquis of Carabas owns'em. They give him plenty of deer!

QUEEN

(aside)

This marquis is quite a fellow!

PRINCESS ROSE

(to TOM)

You mentioned nothing of this!

PUSS

My lord is not one to boast.

QUEEN

(to LOCAL PEASANT)

Can you direct us toward a place of refreshment?

LOCAL PEASANT

The village of Carabas is down the road.

(The QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE stare at TOM.)

LOCAL PEASANT (cont.)

We renamed the village in his honor. Such a good, kind, and generous lord you never did see! We can't wait till his marriage!

PRINCESS ROSE

You are engaged?

(TOM looks at PUSS for some direction. PUSS is waving his arms, "No!")

TOM

I don't think so. . . . No!

QUEEN

(aside to PRINCESS ROSE)

The marquis is an eligible bachelor, as I said before!

LOCAL PEASANT

What a catch! So brave, young, and handsome!

(Squirming with embarrassment, TOM attempts to change the subject.)

TOM

Who owns the castle?

LOCAL PEASANT

That?

PUSS
(gesturing to TOM)

He owns it!

LOCAL PEASANT

It belongs to the shapeshifter, the ogre—

PUSS

Not anymore! Remember?

(to the QUEEN)

The castle belongs to the Marquis of Carabas! Would you like to stop there? I could order the staff to prepare dinner.

(Chorus of approval from the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE. TOM looks nervous.)

PUSS (cont.)

Give us one hour and we'll be ready to receive you at the castle.

(The carriage exits with the others SL. Music and fanfare. PUSS hurriedly pays out a bribe to the LOCAL PEASANT, who exits SR. PUSS exits SL with the bag full of TOM's clothes and toys. Lights down. If possible, the NARRATOR enters SL or SR and conducts a musical transition to MR. GRAVEL's castle. Otherwise, the set for the Throne Room of the Royal Palace can serve as the same set for MR. GRAVEL's castle. The NARRATOR exits SR.)

End of Scene 4

Scene 5: MR. GRAVEL's Castle, Same Day

(Lights up. MR. GRAVEL is seated CS, at table. There is a large bone in front of the table, and more on the table. More bones are piled next to a table in the "Powder Room" DSR. PUSS enters SL with the bag full of TOM's clothes and toys.)

PUSS

Anybody home? Mr. Gravel? You *are* home! Greetings!

MR. GRAVEL

I'm home most afternoons. I do my rampaging at night.

PUSS

Couldn't pass your castle without paying my respects.

(MR. GRAVEL munches a bone and extends bones toward PUSS.)

MR. GRAVEL

Have a seat. Bones?

(PUSS sits down and gestures a polite refusal.)

PUSS

I see you look like an ogre today!

(MR. GRAVEL gestures in confusion, as if to say, "What else?")

PUSS (cont.)

I hear you can change yourself into different creatures.

MR. GRAVEL
(enlightened)

That's true! All my family are shapeshifters.

PUSS

Can you turn into anything? A lion? An elephant? I've heard only your cousin Ogreton can become a great creature.

MR. GRAVEL
(disgusted)

I've got that power, too! Ogreton! . . . My cousin isn't so great.

PUSS

They say you're limited to simple shapes: cats, dogs—

MR. GRAVEL

Slander! I'll sue!

PUSS

It's only a rumor—

MR. GRAVEL

Let me tell you. My family has the best legal team in the country. Even the queen would think twice before crossing us! Who's spreading these lies? Is it Ogreton?

PUSS

Nobody will hold it against you if you lack the power—

MR. GRAVEL

Hold on! Now I become a lion!

(MR. GRAVEL transforms himself into a lion, chasing PUSS and roaring. MR. GRAVEL finally stops and resumes his seat. PUSS also sits down, shakily. A beat while MR. GRAVEL moodily examines a bone.)

PUSS

I'll admit it. I'm impressed. . . . Your cousin Ogregon can also turn into the smallest of creatures. For example, a rat or a mouse. That's probably beyond you—

MR. GRAVEL

(pounding the table)

Watch this!

(MR. GRAVEL transforms into a mouse and runs about squeaking. PUSS promptly chases MR. GRAVEL offstage SR. Then PUSS re-enters SR, dusting his hands and wiping his mouth.)

PUSS

I've always been a good mouser.

(PUSS approaches the table for a napkin and sees the bones. PUSS hurriedly gathers up the bones. While he is doing so, he is interrupted by a noise. With his arms full of bones, PUSS dashes to look offstage or out a "window.")

PUSS (cont.)

They're almost here! Where can I hide these bones?

(PUSS hides the bones offstage SR. PUSS quickly arranges the table, rushing on and off SR to set out glasses, bottle, platters of food, and everything for a feast. PUSS places some items on a table DSL. PUSS fails to see the large bone in front of the table. PUSS may go DSR to tidy the "Powder Room" but also fails to see and remove the bones there. PUSS places the bag full of TOM's clothes and toys near the table DSL. Music and fanfare. The QUEEN, PRINCESS ROSE, and TOM enter SL, followed by the GUARDS.)

PUSS (cont.)

Your majesty, your royal highness: welcome! My lord, as always, the staff are glad to have you back.

(More music. The GUARDS stand SL. The QUEEN, PRINCESS ROSE, and TOM all sit at the table and begin to eat and converse. PUSS waits on them with a napkin over his arm and a platter in the other.)

QUEEN

We are pleased to have you in our kingdom. If we can do anything to help . . . what do you think, your royal highness?

PRINCESS ROSE

Is there anyone to whom you would like an introduction? The marquis might do well to meet Lord and Lady Oliver.

(PUSS taps TOM's shoulder. Excusing himself, TOM hurriedly follows PUSS to the table DSL. Meanwhile, the QUEEN quickly takes the opportunity for a private conversation with PRINCESS ROSE.)

QUEEN

The marquis has paid you marked attention. Do you like him?

PRINCESS ROSE

Quite a lot!

QUEEN

I think he intends to propose.

(The QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE continue their conversation in low voices. Meanwhile, TOM and PUSS speak.)

TOM

What are we doing?

PUSS

Here's a diamond ring!

TOM

Is this real? What's this for?

PUSS

You're doing great!

TOM

Were there really thieves? My clothes! Did they take the other—

(PUSS pulls a toy gun from the bag, pretends to shoot TOM, then hastily hides it back in the bag. PUSS begins to fuss with a bottle.)

TOM (cont.)

You! But my job interview!

PUSS

Forget that! You're a marquis!

TOM

Whose castle—

PUSS

The ogre!

TOM

Mr. Gravel? Where did he go?

PUSS

I ate him!

TOM

Don't eat ogres and steal their castles!

PUSS

He was a mouse. I'm a cat—

TOM

I still don't like it . . . Never again, okay?

(PUSS nods and tucks the diamond ring into TOM's pocket.)

PUSS

So. The princess!

TOM

When do I stop pretending to be a marquis?

(PUSS makes a puzzled gesture as if to say, "Stop? Who said anything about stopping?")

PUSS

Stop? . . . Princess Rose: what do you think?

TOM

Wonderful! Too bad she's a princess.

PUSS

(scornful, as if to say, "That doesn't matter!")

Ask her to marry you.

TOM

The queen would never permit—

PUSS

The queen thinks you're a marquis.

(PUSS finishes opening the bottle, puts it in TOM's hands and pushes him back to the table. PUSS carries a platter.)

TOM

Princess Rose could marry anyone. She's not interested in me—

PUSS

She's been flirting with you the whole time! Can't hurt to ask . . .

TOM

She's a bit out of my league!

PUSS

(protesting, louder as they approach the table)

Applesauce!

(Startled, the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE cut short their conversation. The QUEEN looks at the platter which PUSS is holding and waves the platter away, helping herself to some other item on the table. TOM sets the bottle on the table and sits.)

QUEEN

Oh. . . No, thank you! But I will have more of this. You are quite a gracious host, my lord.

(glancing at PRINCESS ROSE)

Happy the young lady who accepts your hand in marriage.

PUSS

(mimicking TOM's voice)

There's only one lady for me!

QUEEN

Pardon?

(Behind the QUEEN's back, PUSS encourages TOM to speak. TOM jumps up.)

TOM

Your royal highness, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?

PRINCESS ROSE

You are a quick one! . . . Yes. My answer is yes!

(With a laugh, TOM collapses into his chair. Suddenly remembering, he jumps up again. Apologizing with embarrassment, he offers the diamond ring to PRINCESS ROSE.)

TOM

I've never done this before!

(PRINCESS ROSE laughs and lets TOM put the ring on. The GUARDS are elated. It seems they have been having a wager about the likelihood of this marriage. The QUEEN embraces PRINCESS ROSE.)

QUEEN

My blessing on you children! If only your father could have seen this day! We must hold a banquet to celebrate!

TOM

This is beyond my wildest dreams. I propose a toast: to your royal highness.

PRINCESS ROSE

And to the future!

(The group settles down and PUSS refills glasses or brings more food to the table.)

QUEEN

Tomorrow, we should discuss a date and make plans. For now, let us enjoy this happy occasion.

PRINCESS ROSE

Tell us about your travels.

TOM

I've come a long way!

QUEEN

Where did you live before you came here?

TOM

Here and there. I can tell you where I would like to go! I have never stayed at the Royal Palace!

PRINCESS ROSE

If you had, I should have remembered you.

TOM

I remember you.

(PRINCESS ROSE gestures, as if to say, "But we have never met!")

TOM (cont.)

I saw your picture a long time ago. I've never forgotten how beautiful you are.

(TOM reaches for PRINCESS ROSE's hand. She laughs and pulls her hand away. As she does so, she knocks something off the table. TOM jumps up.)

PRINCESS ROSE

How clumsy!

TOM

Let me!

QUEEN

My lord, you are quite the flirt!

PRINCESS ROSE

I can reach it!

(As PRINCESS ROSE stoops, she sees the bone, picks it up and gets a shock.)

TOM

Is it your fork?

(TOM goes DSL to the table to look for a fork and begins to send PUSS offstage. PRINCESS ROSE drops the bone, hides it under the table, retrieves what she dropped and sits up. She grows increasingly nervous over the rest of the scene. PRINCESS ROSE flourishes whatever she dropped.)

PRINCESS ROSE

No! It is nothing.

(TOM resumes his seat. PUSS goes back to serving.)

TOM

I should still like to come to Royal Palace.

QUEEN

So you shall, you young gallant!

PRINCESS ROSE

Your castle is lovely . . . How did you say you acquired it?

PUSS

His lordship bought it from Mr. Gravel.

QUEEN

The shapeshifter? Even in disguise, Mr. Gravel is a mean old sinner. I am surprised you reached an agreement.

PRINCESS ROSE

What kind of disguises does he take?

QUEEN

Animals, plants, lords, dukes. Ogres will take any form which suits their diabolical plans.

PRINCESS ROSE

Can I use your powder room?

(TOM points multiple directions, unsure about the location of the "Powder Room.")

TOM

Certainly. It's that way. Uh, that way.

*(PUSS directs PRINCESS ROSE. PRINCESS ROSE walks DSR to the "Powder Room."
QUEEN and TOM continue to converse in her absence.)*

PRINCESS ROSE

(aside)

If his lordship owns this castle, why are there still bones?

*(PRINCESS ROSE enters the "Powder Room" and thinks. She can pantomime splashing her face
or looking in an imaginary mirror over the table.)*

PRINCESS ROSE (cont.)

We never heard of this marquis until a few months ago.

(PRINCESS ROSE discovers the additional bones and suppresses a shriek.)

PRINCESS ROSE (cont.)

He did not buy this home from Mr. Gravel. He is Mr. Gravel! In disguise!

(lamenting)

I liked him so much!

(horrified)

I must tell mother. She has so many other concerns right now. . . .And we do not want to aggravate
a bone-crunching ogre. . . .

*(Gesturing as if she has a germ of an idea, PRINCESS ROSE hurries back to join the QUEEN
and TOM. The conversation she hears when she returns only adds to her anxiety. The QUEEN and
TOM are delighted to see PRINCESS ROSE, but she gestures for them to continue their
conversation.)*

QUEEN

(to PRINCESS ROSE)

We're discussing the ogre dilemma.

(to TOM)

Would that we *could* check the ogre faction.

TOM

What's stopping you?

QUEEN

It is difficult to bring the ogres to justice. They have excellent legal counsel.

TOM

Their lawyers are quite good.

QUEEN

You know the firm?

TOM

They did some work for my family.

QUEEN

Speaking of ogres! We have a story.

(to PRINCESS ROSE)

Tell his lordship about our winter gala!

PRINCESS ROSE

I have been thinking . . . I am fond of you, my lord, . . . but we only met today.

(A beat. TOM looks from one to the other. The QUEEN looks from one to the other. PUSS hovers nearby.)

QUEEN

There are no objections on my part.

PRINCESS ROSE

The marquis should pass the tests.

QUEEN

That is an old law.

PRINCESS ROSE

Let's not be hasty. I am the heir. Someday my consort and I shall rule the land. We should employ the tests.

QUEEN
(to TOM)

By law, one must pass three tests to wed the princess.

(looking at PRINCESS ROSE)

If you think it necessary . . .

(to TOM)

Here is the first test. A decree will go out. He who would marry the princess should make a fine cake. In three days' time, the cakes will be tasted, the winner chosen. The first test.

(A beat. TOM is confused and disappointed. PUSS fetches the Parisol postcard.)

TOM

I've never made a cake.

PRINCESS ROSE

What a shame.

QUEEN

Your household can assist—all your cooks and bakers working under you.

(Behind the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE, PUSS is wildly waving the postcard, gesturing, and winking at TOM to indicate that everything will work out. TOM looks at PUSS trying to understand PUSS's meaning. Then he realizes with embarrassment that the QUEEN and PRINCESS ROSE have been staring at him. Meanwhile, PUSS gives up on the pantomime and comes over to TOM.)

TOM

It will be an honor.

(Putting the postcard in TOM's hands, PUSS whispers in a loud aside.)

PUSS

Leave everything to me!

(Lights down. Exit all.)

End of Scene 5

End of ACT I

Optional Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Parisol, a Bakery in Paris, France, One Day Later

(A spotlight illuminates the NARRATOR who stands SL next to a table which has a large bowl. The NARRATOR is wearing an apron and a baker hat. The NARRATOR gives a big conspiratorial wink to the audience.)

NARRATOR

Come with me now to the city of light to a boulevard corner.
Gaze through the bakery windows at brioche, croissant, crusty baguette!
Parisol Bakery, matchless for macarons, madeleines, tortes, cakes.

(Then, using a whisk or spoon like a baton, the NARRATOR taps five times. Music begins as the NARRATOR “cooks up” an exquisite second act. Dancing and business by actors or stagehands as the stage is prepared for the set of Parisol. The NARRATOR exits SL. Lights up. Music continues, more faintly. The HEAD BAKER and the BAKERS are lamenting and waving their arms and/or cooking implements, while the MICE creep about.)

HEAD BAKER

How can one work in these conditions?

(PUSS enters SL. The MICE squeal and rush SR where they cower, watching. Music fades.)

PUSS

Even without your sign, I can tell by the lines out front. This is Parisol, the greatest bakery in the world! Am I addressing the greatest baker in the world?

(The HEAD BAKER simpers and makes a little self-deprecating bow.)

PUSS (cont.)

I’ve come a long way to ask for your help.

HEAD BAKER

You must take a number! As you can see, the mice impede our efforts. We can do no baking!

PUSS

I need something special: the finest cake you’ve ever made.

(Scattered wails by the HEAD BAKER and the BAKERS.)

HEAD BAKER

Then you will have to wait even longer! Since the mice overran the bakery, we have lost our flair!

(The BAKERS wail again.)

PUSS

If I were to solve your mouse problem . . . ?

(The BAKERS gather around excitedly.)

PUSS (cont.)

My master wants to marry a princess. He needs an exceptionally fine cake for a royal contest. Can you help and return with me in time to serve the cake?

(The BAKERS look willing and brandish cooking implements.)

PUSS (cont.)

Good! I will take care of the mice. And you can start your work.

(The BAKERS explode in euphoric cheers. Music. Business as PUSS chases the MICE and the BAKERS mix up the Great Cake. Lights down. Exit all.)

End of Scene 1

End of excerpt

Finish reading this script.

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CHARACTERS AND CASTING

Characters: (1 m; 3 w; 14 m/w; extras).

Alphabetical List

ANNOUNCER (m/w)
BAKERS (m/w)
BALLOONISTS (m/w)
BIRDS (m/w)
ELDEST CHILD (m/w)
GUARD 1 (m/w)
GUARD 2 (m/w)
HEAD BAKER (m/w)
LAWYER (m/w)
LOCAL PEASANT (m/w)
MICE (m/w)
MIDDLE CHILD (m/w)
MR. GRAVEL (m/w)
NARRATOR (m/w)
OGRETON (m/w)
PALACE MOUSE (m/w)
PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)
PRINCESS ROSE (w)
PUSS (m/w)
QUEEN (w)
QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (w)
RABBIT (m/w)
TOM (m)

In Order of Appearance

NARRATOR (m/w)
LAWYER (m/w)
ELDEST CHILD (m/w)
MIDDLE CHILD (m/w)
TOM (m)
PUSS (m/w)
RABBIT (m/w)
GUARD 1 (m/w)
GUARD 2 (m/w)
PRINCESS ROSE (w)
QUEEN (w)
QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (w)
LOCAL PEASANT (m/w)
MR. GRAVEL (m/w)
HEAD BAKER (m/w)
BAKERS (m/w)
MICE (m/w)
PALACE MOUSE (m/w)
PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)
OGRETON (m/w)
ANNOUNCER (m/w)
BALLOONISTS (m/w)
BIRDS (m/w)

*If needed, the LOCAL PEASANT can be divided into three characters, such as a farmer, woodcutter, and villager.

Male Roles

TOM (m)

Female Roles

PRINCESS ROSE (w)
QUEEN (w)
QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (w)

Roles which can be played by men or women

ANNOUNCER (m/w)
ELDEST CHILD (m/w)
GUARD 1 (m/w)
GUARD 2 (m/w)
HEAD BAKER (m/w)
LAWYER (m/w)
LOCAL PEASANT (m/w)
MIDDLE CHILD (m/w)
MR. GRAVEL (m/w)
NARRATOR (m/w)
OGRETON (m/w)
PALACE MOUSE (m/w)
PUSS (m/w)
RABBIT (m/w)

Extras

BAKERS (m/w)
BALLOONISTS (m/w)
BIRDS (m/w)
MICE (m/w)
PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)

Roles with Lines

ANNOUNCER (m/w)
GUARD 1 (m/w)
GUARD 2 (m/w)
HEAD BAKER (m/w)
LAWYER (m/w)
LOCAL PEASANT (m/w)
MR. GRAVEL (m/w)
NARRATOR (m/w)
OGRETON (m/w)
PALACE MOUSE (m/w)
PERSON AT THE RACE (m/w)
PRINCESS ROSE (w)
PUSS (m/w)
QUEEN (w)
QUEEN OF THE BIRDS (w)
TOM (m)

Roles without Lines

BAKERS (m/w)
BALLOONISTS (m/w)
BIRDS (m/w)
ELDEST CHILD (m/w)
MICE (m/w)
MIDDLE CHILD (m/w)
PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)
RABBIT (m/w)

With Doubling/Tripling: Minimum (8 overall plus extras: 1 m; 2–3 w; 4–5 m/w; extras)
NARRATOR, LOCAL PEASANT, HEAD BAKER, ANNOUNCER (m/w)
LAWYER, GUARD 2, EXTRA: MOUSE (m/w)
ELDEST CHILD, GUARD 1, MR. GRAVEL, OGRETON, EXTRA: MOUSE (m/w)
MIDDLE CHILD, RABBIT, QUEEN OF THE BIRDS, PALACE MOUSE, EXTRA: BAKER or
 MOUSE (w if playing QUEEN OF THE BIRDS, m/w if playing only some or all of the
 other possibilities)
TOM (m)
PUSS (m/w)
PRINCESS ROSE (w)
QUEEN (w)
EXTRAS: BAKERS, BIRDS or BALLOONISTS or PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)
EXTRAS: MICE, BIRDS or BALLOONISTS or PEOPLE AT THE RACE (m/w)