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For Jennie

Cast of Characters

QUEEN, monarch of winter, ageless

NELL, an elf, young

NICK, a troll, middle aged

KAI, a boy, 12

GERDA, a girl, 12

Setting

Our world and another, during winter.

Acknowledgments

The Snow Queen was originally presented as part of the Playwright's Workshop at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, on July 24, 1995. David Allan Kuester directed the production.

This version of the play was first produced by Xavier University Players in Cincinnati, Ohio, on December 6, 2007. The production was directed by Irina Niculescu, with a set by Tamara Honesty, and featured the following cast:

THE SNOW QUEEN.....	Sarah Wienten
NELL.....	Lisa Margevicius
NICK.....	Mike Sause
KAI.....	Michael Gunter
GERDA.....	Jennifer Roehm

THE SNOW QUEEN

by Jonathan Graham

FROM THE STORY BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

(As the lights rise, all enter, one by one singing "Carol of the Bells." They gather at center stage as the music swells and then concludes. They speak following prologue in direct address, with the lines divided among the actors.)

QUEEN. Come sit, my friends and hear a tale
Of wind and snow and sleet and hail

NELL. A boy, a girl, a troll, an elf
An evil queen all by herself

KAI. The boy decides to run away
Takes a ride on the Queen's sleigh

GERDA. The girl tries to find her friend
Troll and elf have help to lend

NICK. But first they play some wicked tricks
And get her lost out in the sticks

NELL. The Queen, meanwhile, crowns the boy
Is he a prince, or just a toy?

KAI. You'll know soon, that is our play
The ending we'll not give away

QUEEN. I'll be the Queen, the evil one
I'll crown my heir before we're done

KAI. And I'm the kid out for adventure
I want some freedom, get the picture?

GERDA. I'm the girl who risks it all
And these two drive me up the wall

NICK. Will Gerda rescue her best friend?
Will the troll be the hero in the end?

NELL. What about me, Nell the Elf?
Do I care about anyone but myself?
This and more you soon will see
In a Christmas play without a tree

(Lights up to reveal KAI, asleep and dreaming. THE SNOW QUEEN to KAI. They play together. Then they drift apart. KAI is back in bed. THE SNOW QUEEN waves her wand and it begins to snow. Now KAI and his friend, GERDA are playing outside.)

GERDA. It's like white bees swarming.

KAI. Looks like snow to me. Falling.

GERDA. But they're swirling...following one another. Like they have a leader.

KAI. A queen.

GERDA. Yes! The queen of the snow bees. Which one's her?

KAI. She's not there.

GERDA. How do you know? You didn't even look.

KAI. I've seen her before.

GERDA. You're lying.

KAI. I saw her last night.

GERDA. In a dream?

KAI. Outside my window.

GERDA. No—

KAI. She was painting the windows with frost.

GERDA. Jack Frost does that.

KAI. I watched. She wore a crown of icicles, a fur coat, and... When she saw me watching her, I was scared, but she smiled.

GERDA. Was she beautiful?

KAI. Yeah, and she waved me towards the window.

GERDA. Did you go?

KAI. Before I knew it, I was outside with her in the snow.

GERDA. In your pajamas?

KAI. She waved her wand, and I wasn't even cold!

GERDA. You're telling stories.

KAI. It was the most perfect day of the winter. The most perfect day ever. But then it was over.

GERDA. Just like that?

KAI. In a flash. Then I was home, in bed, shivering.

GERDA. You were cold?

KAI. I was scared.

GERDA. You were *definitely* dreaming.

KAI. I don't know. But I know I want to see her again.

GERDA. I thought she scared you?

KAI. It was a good kind of scary. Like a roller coaster...once it's over, you wanna ride again. I want to ride again. You should come with me.

GERDA. Where are we going?

KAI. To the north!

GERDA. I'm not dressed to go hiking.

KAI. I got you something to keep you warm.

(From a hiding place, he retrieves a wrapped present.)

GERDA. It's not Christmas, yet.

KAI. Everybody opens something early.

GERDA. Just on Christmas Eve.

KAI. What's the matter, you afraid Santa will see you and just bring coal?

GERDA. No.

KAI. Then open it. Nobody has to know.

GERDA. Okay.

(She opens the box. It is a scarf, decorated with roses.)

It's beautiful.

KAI. It's to remind you of those summers in the garden.

GERDA. Thank you, Kai.

(They hug.)

KAI. Come with me.

GERDA. Let me tell Gramma.

KAI. She won't even notice you're gone. Besides, we'll watch out for each other, right?

(Lights fade on GERDA and KAI and simultaneously rises on the antechamber of the Snow Queen's palace. NICK—a troll—and NELL—an elf—are discovered. NELL is holding a mirror while NICK primps.)

NICK. I look horrible!

NELL. Told ya.

NICK. It's startling. Frightening, really.

NELL. It accentuates the negative.

NICK. The curl of my snout the beadiness of my eyes...

NELL. And all that's good just fades away.

NICK. It's enough to make an old troll cry.

NELL. Let me see.

NICK. In a minute.

(NICK *does a turn like a runway model.*)

I am magnificent.

NELL. You're a hog.

NICK. You had your turn.

NELL. I deserve another. I did all the work.

NICK. You elves are good with your hands.

NELL. And trolls are good at sitting on their—

NICK. Supervision is my job. I delegate.

NELL. The fine art of buck-passing.

NICK. This is a stroke of a genius. She'll be too distracted to look for an heir. Wonderful work, Nell.

NELL. I hope you'll remember to tell Her Majesty *whose* work it is.

NICK. Of course. And once she sees how marvelously it compliments my design for the Hall of Ice, my promotion is assured.

NELL. Speaking of promotions—

NICK. There's no time for talk, now. She'll be passing by any moment, and we must draw her attention to the mirror straightway. Nell, stand in the corner there, and angle the mirror toward me.

NELL. So *I* have to hold this thing?

NICK. Who else? I mean...as designer, surely you wouldn't trust your work to the hands of some oafish minotaur.

NELL. No.

NICK. It's settled then. Look sharp, now; I feel an icy draft.

(The SNOW QUEEN appears. Without noticing NICK or NELL, she catches sight of herself in the mirror and is transfixed. NICK and NELL bow.)

QUEEN. Sculpted from a block of frozen unholy water by the hands of the Devil's Michelangelo. I am truly perfect...

(Suddenly, to the genuflecting NICK.)

Troll!

NICK. *(Snapping to:)* At your service.

QUEEN. Am I particularly radiant today?

NICK. Of course.

QUEEN. I'm not fishing for compliments.

NICK. Of course not, your Majesty.

QUEEN. *(Indicating mirror:)* Is this new?

NICK. Yes.

QUEEN. Where did it come from?

NICK. I...supervised...its construction. For your Majesty's pleasure.

QUEEN. Really?

(She moves closer to examine it.)

It's quite fine.

NICK. Thank you. I hoped it would bring you pleasure.

QUEEN. *(Noticing NELL's hands:)* Explain the elfin fingers clasping the edge.

NELL. They're mind, my Queen.

QUEEN. I see.

NELL. It was I—Nell, the elf—who designed and built this mirror, your Majesty.

(Moving quickly, NELL hands the mirror to NICK.)

NICK. *(Sotto voce:)* Hush!

NELL. If it please your Majesty, I'll explain some features of its construction.

QUEEN. Please.

NELL. I built it long and narrow to emphasize your Majesty's fine features.

NICK. *(Poking his head out:)* And to meet the guidelines I set out—

QUEEN. Hold the mirror steady, Troll, and let the young elf speak.

NELL. I fashioned the reflective surface from the magic sands from the shores of the great ice lake.

QUEEN. How lovely! I loved to play in those sands when I was a girl.

NELL. The wizard told me that cups made from those same sands make wine taste twice as sour and honey half as sweet.

NICK. We decided that the substance might have the same effect on sight.

NELL. Nick didn't believe it at first, to tell the truth, but as you see—

NICK. As soon as I saw it, I knew it was the perfect thing for Her Majesty's Great Hall of Ice.

QUEEN. This? In the Ice Hall?

NICK. Yes, if it please you. I think it would be perfect at the very end, catching the reflection of everything within the room.

QUEEN. NO.

NELL. The mirror is lightweight and easily portable. It can be placed wherever her Majesty sees fit. In the Throne Room perhaps...or your personal chambers.

QUEEN. We cannot keep this in the Palace.

NICK. If it doesn't please you Majesty, Nell could easily redesign—

QUEEN. No! It pleases me. It is perfection.

NELL. Thank you, my Queen!

QUEEN. But something this perfect must be shared.

NICK. Shared?

QUEEN. (*To NELL.*) With the humans.

NELL. But your Majesty, this is a very powerful mirror. It makes good things look bad, and bad things worse!

QUEEN. Isn't that grand?

NELL. With all due respect, your Majesty, this wasn't meant for normal people. I created it especially for you.

QUEEN. It's settled then, give the mirror to me.

NICK. If it please your Majesty, let me be guardian of this treasure.

QUEEN. I have already said what is my pleasure. Now hand it over so that I may send it shattering to the earth.

NICK. Shattering?

QUEEN. Can you imagine how much fun this will be? We mustn't keep that to ourselves.

NELL. Please, your Majesty...this thing I've made was designed to function as one piece, not to spread across the land in a crash of glass.

QUEEN. What is lovely once, is so much more lovely when it's multiplied.

NELL. But, your Majesty, the Wizard warned me *not* to shatter it—

QUEEN. Silence! I will shatter this mirror, and each shard will freeze a person's heart. They will be so cold and numb inside, we'll finally have Winter all year 'round!

NICK. Your Majesty—

QUEEN. My mind is made up.

NELL. Please, don't!

QUEEN. Relinquish the mirror or relinquish your lives.

(NICK gives QUEEN the mirror. With a crash, the lights fall to black. Immediately, KAI and GERDA are discovered as before, but this time, a reflective shard of mirror is visible above his heart. He has just been knocked to the ground.)

GERDA. Are you okay?

KAI. What do you think?

GERDA. You slipped.

KAI. Really? Or maybe you pushed me?

GERDA. No!

KAI. You were walking behind me.

GERDA. I didn't.

KAI. You could've.

GERDA. You fell backwards. I tried to catch you.

KAI. But you didn't.

(Rubbing his chest where the shard is, clearly not realizing it's there.)

My chest hurts.

GERDA. Got the wind knocked out of you.

KAI. You tripped me, didn't you?

GERDA. No! Here. Let me help you up.

KAI. I can get up by myself.

(He does so.)

I'm going sledding.

GERDA. But we're supposed to wrap presents at my Grandma's, remember?

KAI. And I wonder what she got you this year? Let me guess: another stupid, scratchy sweater, with a picture of a kitty-cat.

GERDA. But you promised!

KAI. Sorry, I just remembered...I'm not a baby anymore.

(He starts to leave.)

I'm going now.

GERDA. Let me ask—

KAI. It's boring going sledding with you, anyway. You're too scared to go down the big hill.

GERDA. I can make a snowman. Like I did last time.

KAI. I'm going.

(He exits.)

GERDA. Kai?

(No response.)

Kai!

(Lights on KAI, who stands alone, examining the Queen's sled. He is tentative at first, walking slowly around it, at a distance. Then he summons the courage to climb up onto the front seat. After a moment, the QUEEN appears. She watched KAI in silence for a moment before she speaks.)

QUEEN. What do you think?

KAI. I wasn't doing anything, honest.

QUEEN. That's not what I asked you.

(KAI sees her now and recognizes her from his dream. He is dumbstruck.)

QUEEN. Do you like it?

(He nods.)

You look comfortable up there. In the driver's seat. I bet you drive sleds all the time.

KAI. Yes, but not a big one like this.

QUEEN. Would you like to try? It goes quite fast.

KAI. It looks like it.

QUEEN. The first time I drove, I went too fast. I tried to land on someone's house, and knocked the satellite dish right off their roof.

KAI. Cool! Did you get in trouble?

QUEEN. No. But I had something few children have.

KAI. What's that?

QUEEN. A gift. I could teach you—

KAI. Yeah—

QUEEN. You'll have to come along with me, of course.

KAI. Okay... Um, I have this friend—

QUEEN. Unfortunately, I can only support one apprentice at a time. I have a staff sorcerer, but he's so old and stuffy. Caught up with penny-ante spells and old fashioned hocus-pocus. With his salary, though, I can only afford one assistant...someone who can start today.

KAI. Oh. My parents—

QUEEN. Parents! How very quaint. With their rules and discipline. If you come with me, I must admit you'll miss all that.

KAI. Really?

QUEEN. Sad, but true. For the magic to work we need to make up our own rules, and there's never any time to be grounded.

KAI. I see.

QUEEN. It's a rough business. And dangerous, with all that magic ...so, if you're easily scared...

KAI. Not me!

QUEEN. Good. The come along. And you can even drive.

(They climb aboard the sled. in a flash, they disappear. NICK and NELL are discovered, in the palace.)

NELL. You mean to tell me she's put the boy in power?

NICK. And he can rule at whim. A twelve year old! She already dispatched Harold, the old Jester, and why? Because the young Master found him unfunny.

NELL. That what it's come to; a kingdom run by a child.

NICK. What happens if you should displease him? Or me?

NELL. We'll know soon enough. She'll be here any minute.

NICK. Whatever she asks of us, we agree.

NELL. *(Checks to be sure no one can hear.)* To tell the truth, I'd rather bolt.

NICK. And work where?

NELL. I'd try Santa's toyshop.

NICK. It's a sweatshop.

NELL. I'll take my chances.

NICK. That's fine and good if she sends you off. But if you desert, good luck!

NELL. Why?

NICK. Magic. (*Impatiently, as if speaking to a child:*) Black magic. Surely you realize she's a witch.

NELL. No!

NICK. She lives in a castle made of ice, has a court of gnomes, goblins, elves, and trolls, and she never grows old.

NELL. I've been all around the castle, and I've never once seen a cauldron of brew, a flying broomstick, or a pointy black hat.

NICK. But what about this boy? He's under a spell for sure. Children fall under spells easier than you or I, of course.

NELL. They're not so wise

NICK. They simply have no interest in disbelief. That's why she chose this boy. He must believe in her completely.

NELL. That's why she froze his heart.

NICK. Exactly. If she can have a prince, she'll be twice as powerful. And when she finally dies, he will be her heir.

NELL. What happens if his heart thaws?

NICK. Never gonna happen!

NELL. Come on, Nick! Dream a little.

NICK. Well...legend says, it would be like the end of an ice age. Glaciers would be replaced by green fields. Mountain ranges would be gently rolling hills. Everything would be completely different.

NELL. And what about her?

NICK. If somebody managed to thaw his heart, that means she'd be defeated. Overpowered. She'd be a normal person, I suppose, but dressed funny. And we'd be out of work.

NELL. We'd be free!

NICK. Be careful what you wish for. Freedom is more expensive than you think!

NELL. Uh-oh! I feel a breeze.

NICK. Look sharp, then.

(QUEEN appears.)

QUEEN. Nick and Nell, make haste. I have an urgent mission for you. You must return to whence you've come.

NICK. Earth again? You Majesty—

QUEEN. Silence! This is a matter of the first importance. There is a rival for the affections of my Prince.

NELL. Who is it, your Majesty?

QUEEN. My foe is but a girl.

(She makes a grand gesture, and in another area of the stage, GERDA appears.)

But her foul soul has the strength of a nation, and she'll spare nothing to reach her goal and take my Kai away. Her name is Gerda and you'll find her in the park where you found my Kai.

NICK. As you wish, your Majesty.

QUEEN. Just one more thing: I choose you for this duty for good reason. Your gentle elfin and troll-like magic is the perfect tonic to seduce this girl. Do not harm her. Simply make her drunk on your jovial diversions.

NELL. We shall, my Queen.

QUEEN. Be careful. For she should slip past you and reach this castle and steal the heart of my boy...neither of you shall ever cross my threshold again. Thereafter you shall live on earth forever, an elf and troll on the margin of human society. You understand?

NICK. Surely.

QUEEN. Then get thee gone.

(GERDA enters, looking forlorn. NICK and NELL are disguised as a flower merchant and boutique, blowing in the breeze. GERDA spots them and looks them over suspiciously.)

NICK. Are you lost, little girl?

GERDA. No. I think my friend might be, though. Have you seen a boy come by this way?

NICK. A boy?

NELL. Describe him.

GERDA. He's taller than me and has dark hair and eyes.

NELL. Hmm...

NICK. I haven't seen him, but maybe I can help you.

GERDA. How?

NELL. With magic, of course.

GERDA. Magic?

NICK. Of course! This is magical garden where magical things happen. And I have a magical potion that will let you see whatever you desire. *(Proffering a small bottle:)* Here, young lady, have a sip.

GERDA. My grandmother told me never to eat or drink anything a stranger gives me.

NICK. I'll bet she told you never to talk to strangers, too.

GERDA. That's true.

NICK. Yet here you are, talking to me.

(GERDA quickly turns and walks away.)

NELL. You've got her in the palm of your hand.

NICK. Wait!

(He catches up to GERDA.)

This is a *magical* garden, and those wild old adages, like “look both ways” and “never eat yellow snow” don’t apply here. So you need not be afraid.

GERDA. So that potion will really help me find my friend?

NICK. Only if you really and truly believe.

NELL. *(Sotto voce:)* Jeez...

GERDA. All right. I’ll do it.

(He hands her the potion.)

NELL. Nick—

NICK. Shhh! The magic requires silence.

(GERDA takes the potion in her mouth, then spits it at NICK.)

NICK. Hey!

GERDA. What did you do to Kai?

NICK. Pardon?

GERDA. You know something. Now, out with it.

NICK. I—

GERDA. I’m not stupid, y’know. That was sleeping potion, right?

NELL. *(To NICK:)* Gotcha.

GERDA. And what’s with the silly costumes? I’m from a new generation, mister. So you’re gonna have to do a little better than that.

NELL. Little girl, one. Nick? Zero.

GERDA. *(To NELL:)* And what about you? Do you know something about my friend?

NELL. Uh... Well...

(NICK produces a lasso and loops GERDA. She shrieks.)

NICK. It's a little late for a girl like you to be out, don't ya think?

GERDA. Lemme go!

NICK. Oh, no. We've got a special place for children who stay out after dark. Who knows? Maybe you'll find your little friend there.

GERDA. Please let me go home. My grandmother will be worried sick if I'm not home soon.

NICK. If she's the one who taught you to spit at your elders, it serves her right to worry.

(He ties up GERDA. To NELL:)

I believe this ties the score.

(Lights down on the garden, and in a moment, up on the throne room of the Queen's palace. KAI and the QUEEN are discovered sitting on thrones.)

KAI. All of it?

QUEEN. Everything you see, dear Kai.

KAI. What do I have to do?

QUEEN. You must simply stay with me. Soon the thaw will come, and we will close ourselves off against the terrible heat of summer. Once you've spent the thaw with me, you'll be mi— *(Catching herself:)* You'll be my heir.

KAI. I thought you were going to teach me magic.

QUEEN. If you're my heir, no one will have to teach you anything.

KAI. Oh. Well...

QUEEN. I know. You're homesick. A castle and a kingdom are nothing beside the comforts of home. Besides, compared to Gerda, I must seem rather boring.

KAI. How do you know about Gerda?

QUEEN. Oh, I'm sorry. I haven't shown you my crystal ball yet, have I? I apologize. Sometimes I forget that people do get along without

magic, still. Oh, I watched you play together many times this winter. Building snowmen. Skating on the lake. You must miss her.

KAI. A little.

QUEEN. When you're my heir, you won't have to miss anyone.

(QUEEN casts a spell, GERDA appears, carrying a football.)

GERDA. Hey Kai, go out for a long one!

KAI. Gerda? *(To the QUEEN:)* How did you do that?

QUEEN. It's easy for me.

GERDA. Catch, Kai!

(She throws him a surprisingly good pass.)

KAI. Nice throw.

QUEEN. Now it's your turn.

(She hands KAI a magic wand.)

KAI. What do I do?

QUEEN. Just tell her to do something and wave the wand.

KAI. Do your dance from the recital.

(GERDA does a few steps, whatever is most comfortable for the actress.)

Sing "O Holy Night."

(GERDA sings.)

Wow, this is great.

QUEEN. You have her in your power, you know. She'll do whatever you say.

KAI. Make a snow angel!

(She does.)

A face-down snow angel!

(She does.)

Suck your thumb!

(She does.)

Act like a gorilla!

(She does.)

QUEEN. You are such a silly little boy. Someone gives you amazing powers and you throw it away on schoolyard pranks? You claim you're so mature, but you act like you should be back in the nursery.

KAI. *(Scowls at SNOW QUEEN, then to GERDA.)* Kiss my butt!

(GERDA begins to do so.)

QUEEN. Gerda stop!

(Takes the wand away from him.)

KAI. Hey!

QUEEN. These are serious powers, Kai. They are meant to be used for things of consequence.

KAI. Like what?

QUEEN. Gerda, walk over that ledge and throw yourself off it.

(GERDA walks to the edge of the stage and prepares to jump, and the last second, KAI calls out.)

KAI. No! Gerda, stop!

(She does. QUEEN casts a spell and GERDA disappears.)

QUEEN. That's more like it.

KAI. What's your problem? I was just having some fun.

QUEEN. Silence! You were not brought here to complain.

(KAI looks down, embarrassed.)

KAI. I'm sorry.

QUEEN. Bow down before me!

(He does.)

And thank the Gods I did not strike you down the very moment you opened those churlish lips.

(She reclines again, she speaks again, now softer.)

Kai? Come sit here.

(He moves toward her tentatively.)

I frightened you. You're shaking. You won't run away, will you?

KAI. No.

QUEEN. All of us have within us dark powers. And you and I have more than most. But we must use these carefully...wisely...and to our greatest advantage. It is no good to rage in every moment. We must wait until some calm clear day and strike like black lightning against the sea of blandness.

(Pause.)

We strike from out of nowhere and leave a crater deep as an ocean in our wake.

(Beat.)

This is a gift, Kai. Do not squander it.

(Lights down on the throne room and up on the dungeon of a southern castle. GERDA lies asleep tied as she was before. NICK and NELL have removed their flower costumes. NICK is in street clothes, but NELL is well disguised as a guard.)

NELL. You should untie her.

NICK. Oh, no.

NELL. It's bad for the circulation.

NICK. So?

NELL. Her Majesty said “do no harm.”

NICK. She also said “don’t let her get away.”

NELL. She’s fast asleep. The potion did the trick; I told you to mix it with a Coke. Besides, I’ll watch her.

NICK. You better. She’s a slick one.

NELL. But no match for us, I’m sure.

NICK. Or me, at least.

NELL. Trust me. Shouldn’t you be getting into costume, your Highness?

NICK. I suppose.

NELL. You better wear a beard or something this time. She saw right through the flower gig.

NICK. I’ve got it under control. You just keep her under control.

(He exits. NELL unties the rope, careful not to rouse GERDA. But as soon as the last knot is undone, GERDA springs to her feet and runs off. NELL looks after her, bored. A rattling chain is heard.)

NELL. Locked.

(GERDA enters.)

GERDA. I noticed.

NELL. Besides, it’s a two-story drop from here. No stairs. And the moat is still frozen; not a pleasant swim.

GERDA. Where am I?

NELL. You are being detained—

GERDA. I wanna make a phone call.

NELL. There’s no phone here, honey.

GERDA. I have a right to make a call.

NELL. Sorry.

GERDA. It's one of my Miranda rights. Everyone knows that.

NELL. You're in the palace of King Nicolas. You only have the rights His Majesty decrees.

GERDA. Wasn't I brought here by some gnome in a flower suit?

NELL. Must have been a nightmare, kid.

GERDA. No!

NELL. At attention, please. His Majesty approaches.

(GERDA is surprised to see NICK enter in a crown and purple robe. He is shaped very much like a giant pear, and wears a long, white beard.)

NICK. Who demands our audience, Captain?

NELL. It is this girl, your Highness. One of the sentries found her sleeping in the courtyard.

NICK. We see. *(Addressing GERDA:)* What brings you to our hospitality, young waif?

GERDA. I must have fallen asleep, your Majesty. I was in the garden, walking with the flowers...

NICK. *(To NELL:)* Has she a fever?

GERDA. No! Please forgive me, King, but I am not sick. I am simply sad because my best friend is missing, and I am afraid he may be in trouble.

NICK. And you think I am imprisoning this wayward boy?

GERDA. I don't know what to think, your Majesty. I was in the park, talking to the flowers, and the next thing I knew, I was here. Is this a prison for delinquent children?

NICK. This is my castle!

NELL. And prisons are not palaces, regardless of what you've heard.

NICK. (*To NELL:*) Dispatch a deputy to return this poor urchin home.

GERDA. No!

NICK. Or, if her family cannot be located, to an orphanage.

GERDA. Please, your Majesty—

NICK. But wherever you take her, be certain to keep under lock and key. It's not right for a child to be wandering so.

NELL. (*Bowing:*) Your wish is my command.

GERDA. Wait! With all due respect, your Majesty, please listen to me.

NICK. What say you, my pixie?

GERDA. I can't return home without my friend. Yesterday, he went wandering, and he didn't come back. If I go home now, grandmother will never let me out again. Not with Kai already missing. She'll say that the search is a job for adults, but you know how adults are. They search all the dumbest places, like the toy stores and the pond. They don't understand that Kai was searching for something he had never had before.

NICK. What was that?

GERDA. Adventure. He told me himself.

NICK. Adventure? And where would one find that?

GERDA. The north.

NICK. Or perhaps the south?

GERDA. No. Kai loves the winter. And with spring coming, I know he'd head for snow.

NELL. And you expect to find him simply by heading north?

NICK. Sounds like searching for a sugar cube in a snowdrift.

GERDA. I was hoping your Majesty might help me with a map.

NICK. A map? Wouldn't you rather have a cup of your grandma's hot chocolate?

GERDA. Please? I have to find Kai before it's too late. Help me.

NICK. I don't know...

GERDA. How about this? I hide, and you try to find me. If you do, I'll go back home. But if you don't, I get to continue on.

NELL. I don't think—

NICK. Excellent!

GERDA. Good. Now both of you must close your eyes and count to one hundred.

NICK. Fine. *(Covering his eyes:)* One, two, three, four, five—

(GERDA slips out of the room. NELL looks around, worried.)

NELL. Nick?

NICK. We're supposed to be counting—six, seven, eight...

NELL. Did you lock the door when you came in?

NICK. What?

NELL. The door.

(NICK's face falls.)

Nick!

(They race off. After a moment, GERDA tiptoes in, glances around, and exits the same way they did. The stage is empty for several moments. Then NELL enters, in a rage, dressed as she was at the beginning of the play, followed by NICK, still dressed as a faux royal.)

NELL. It's my turn, Nick. You've had two chances, and you've wasted them.

NICK. How was I supposed to know that the door didn't lock from the inside?

(NELL begins dressing in her robber girl outfit.)

NELL. I don't know, Nick. You are the one who rented this place, and you would think that lockable doors would be included in a dungeon.

NICK. Well, excuse me...

NELL. This is my career you're playing around with, y'know.

NICK. Your career? I've been working here since you were a...a... help me out here. What'dya call a little elf?

NELL. Complacency. That's your problem.

NICK. No. Abject fear is my problem. Who hires a middle-aged troll?

NELL. Well, while you're busy wallowing in self-pity, I'm going to catch up to this kid. Build a fire in Cracked Rock Cave. I'll bring her there.

(Lights go down on the dungeon and up on a wide place in the road GERDA is traveling. GERDA is discovered crossing the space; NELL appears dressed as a robber girl. After a moment, NELL jumps GERDA from behind, holding a knife to GERDA's throat.)

NELL. All right, missy. All you gotta do is cooperate, and nobody gets hurt.

GERDA. O.K.

NELL. I want all your jewels and gold and credit cards in this here bag.

(In the other hand than the knife, NELL holds a bag. GERDA drops some coins, an apple, and a biscuit into the bag.)

GERDA. I'm sorry I don't have more.

NELL. *(Catches a hold of a lanyard around GERDA's neck:)* Hey! What's this?

GERDA. It's my grandmother's compass. She'll never forgive me if I lose it.

NELL. *(Cutting the cord:)* Cheap sentimentality.

GERDA. It's just a cheap thing.

NELL. Then whatcha crying about?

GERDA. Why do you and your friend keep picking on me? What did I ever do to you?

NELL. *(Turning away:)* Nothing...

GERDA. Then why don't you help me? Because to tell you the truth, I'm desperate. Like you, maybe. I've always thought that people who end up being mean probably tried a bunch of other things first. But eventually, they'll do anything. Thanks how I am. I have no food, no compass...and I've lost my best friend. I'd do anything—

NELL. Anything?

GERDA. You need a helper? To torment some other little girl?

NELL. You? No way! You're one of those sugar-n-spice girls.

GERDA. If you help me find Kai and bring him back home, I'll do whatever you tell me.

(Pause.)

NELL. I guess you are desperate.

GERDA. I am. See, people are always thinking Kai's older than he is. And Kai likes it, so he never tells the truth. I think he could get hurt that way.

NELL. Don't sweat it. He'll learn.

GERDA. But that's just it. He hasn't learned.

(Pause.)

One time at the park some older kids asked him to play football. They said, “Your little sister can hold your coat.”

NELL. Don’t you hate that? Nick’s buddies pull that all the time.

GERDA. So I was watching, holding his coat, and the first time Kai caught the ball, two boys tackled him hard, and three others jumped on top. They were all laughing, but Kai didn’t move. I ran out on the field and told them to leave him alone, so they laughed some more. Kai got up and told me to get lost.

NELL. Men are all the same, always the tough guy.

GERDA. As I was walking away, one of the boys said, “is that your little sister or your mom?” And I turned around and said, “I’m his friend and you better be careful ’cause he’s only twelve years old.” Kai was mad at me for that, but I told him he should be more careful. I said, “People will hurt you if you give them the chance.”

NELL. Isn’t that the truth.

GERDA. That’s why I have to find him. Before anyone has the chance.

NELL. Listen...you’re gonna hate me.

GERDA. What?

NELL. I know where your friend is.

GERDA. I knew it! That lady kidnapped him, didn’t she?

NELL. The Snow Queen.

GERDA. We’ve got to rescue him.

NELL. I’m afraid it’s not that easy.

GERDA. What’s so hard about it?

NELL. Well...to start with, it’s my job to make sure nobody rescues him. Especially you.

(The lights fade on the palace and rise on Cracked Rock Cave. NICK and NELL are discovered here.)

NICK. Is the room secure?

NELL. She's fast asleep.

NICK. I've heard that one before.

NELL. All she needs tonight is food and rest.

NICK. And an opportunity to escape. You go on to bed; I'll keep watch.

NELL. I didn't bring her here to put her in prison.

NICK. So you two are friends now? Is that it?

NELL. Well—

NICK. Just remember that the day after tomorrow, we go back to the castle, li'l Gerda's not invited.

NELL. I know.

NICK. If it had been me, I would have left her out there. If she wants to try and find her little friend, let her try. That's the only way she'll learn it takes more than wanting to get things done.

(Pause.)

NELL. I think we should help her.

NICK. What?

NELL. You heard me.

NICK. You've lost it. That's all. One day with the humans, and you've lost your marbles!

NELL. She's got a good heart.

NICK. And for that, you'll throw away your career and mine too... and risk the wrath of a black magic priestess. You've certainly thought this one through.

NELL. Haven't you ever wanted to sacrifice? To give something up?

NICK. Why?

NELL. To gain something more.

NICK. You've lost me.

NELL. Do you like this job?

NICK. This is my career. Three decades.

NELL. But don't you think—

NICK. Experience, Nell. Hours on the clock. Full pension, and a 401k plan.

NELL. She uses magic to disseminate unpleasantness. She kidnaps a kid, and fills his heart with evil.

NICK. Troll heaven, baby. Retirement to a cool dark place.

NELL. Gerda would to do anything to bring her friend back.

NICK. Suppose he doesn't want to come back?

NELL. Suppose we let her try?

NICK. Fine. We bet our whole careers on the chance that some twelve-year-old kid can defeat the Snow Queen.

NELL. Tomorrow's spring.

NICK. Don't start that.

NELL. Her powers are diminished.

NICK. She'll still have the power to banish us to earth.

NELL. That might not be so bad.

NICK. Easy for you to say. Your species hasn't been turned into a fetishized collector's item.

NELL. Listen, Nick. We can help Gerda and win Kai back. And if the queen has no heir, she'll have no powers.

NICK. And we'll be out of work.

NELL. The way I see it you can either keep your comfy little almost-the-boss-job, or you can turn against her and risk doing something great. Maybe the girl can unfreeze the poor boys heart, and if she does, Snow Queen will be finished! Winter will no longer be in her control, and we'll be free.

NICK. What if it doesn't work?

NELL. What matters is, it could work.

(Pause.)

I know what my choice is, but yours is up to you.

(The lights fall on the cave and rise on the great hall of the Queen's palace. KAI stands before the QUEEN. She holds a crown similar to the one he wears.)

QUEEN. I could tell from the first moment I saw you that you had the potential for magic. You were born to be my Prince. So now I take you as my heir just as the King of Ice took me as his heir one-hundred years ago. Your time has come, Kai. Come and kneel here before me.

(He kneels. She crowns him.)

And now, you are mine forever!

(She makes a grand gesture and the lights fade to black. After a moment, they rise on a far Northern road, where NELL and GERDA are discovered.)

NELL. It's not much farther, now.

GERDA. Can we rest a second?

(GERDA plops down, exhausted.)

NELL. Honey, I know you're tired. But you've come too far to give up now. Think of Kai.

GERDA. Yes.

NELL. You have to be strong. Otherwise, he'll have to stay with the Snow Queen forever.

GERDA. I know. I just need to rest. For a minute.

(Pause. Finally GERDA stands. They begin walking. Pause. NICK enters suddenly, dressed as a reindeer.)

NICK. Hey! Need a lift?

NELL. Nick!

GERDA. I know you.

NICK. Oh really?

GERDA. And you're not a reindeer.

NICK. That's true. But I am your ride, so you'll have to forgive me.

GERDA. All right. But you've got to go fast!

NICK. Kids!

(She hops on his back. The lights fall on the road and rise on the palace's Great Hall. KAI is discovered wearing a crown. The shard of glass is visible over his heart. GERDA runs to KAI.)

GERDA. Kai!

(He does not respond.)

Kai, it's me!

(She looks back to NICK and NELL for help.)

NICK. Watch out for the Queen. She'll kill you without thinking twice.

NELL. Don't listen to him. You have to find a way to melt Kai's heart. You can do it!

(GERDA approaches KAI tentatively. She catches his eye and they regard one another without speaking. She throws her arms around him, but he does not respond.)

GERDA. You're so cold. Here, take my scarf.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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