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There are no children of a lesser god,  
For there is no lesser god  
And there are only children,  
And there is only God.

## Cast of Characters

DAWN/THE FIREBIRD, A mythological creature of enormous grace and beauty. She expresses herself exclusively through music and movement. ASL is required.

MICHAEL/THE DUKE (†), A not-very-mature, but heroic and handsome, young man.

ROBERT/THE HORSE (#\*), A wise, somewhat pedantic and self-important “councilor” to the Duke. Think of Polonius by way of Mr. Ed.

RON/THE KING (#), An old, rich, powerful and haughty monarch who is extremely self-absorbed and unsympathetic to anyone’s problems when his self-interests are at stake.

RALITSA/THE PRINCESS (†), A wise, feisty and beautiful young woman.

RICHARD/THE LOBSTER (‡\*), The Ruler of the Great Blue Sea. Much of what he “speaks” is sung.

STEPHANIE/THE NARRATOR (‡\*), The Storyteller.

\* This role may be played by either a male or female actor.

# As written, this role requires ASL. It may, however, be played by a non-signing actor.

† This role requires some familiarity with ASL.

‡ As written, this role includes sign and voice interpretation for the audience, and therefore requires knowledge of ASL.

NOTE: Though not mandatory, it’s suggested all cast members have at least a working knowledge of ASL. As written, the roles of Robert, Ralitsa, Richard and Stephanie require speech; the playwright will be glad to work with any producing company to make necessary adjustments to accommodate more or fewer speaking actors.

**Time**

Once upon a

**Place**

A faraway

**Production Notes**

The suggested set is, up center, a multi-tiered platform, the top level wide enough to serve as the King's throne and each descending level successively wider. Suggested costuming would include a highly dominant color for each character. Simple robe-like costumes that can be quickly slipped on and off are probably most practical, the more flowing, the better.

It is strongly suggested music and sound *not* be used except as indicated; and, particularly, that the dance sequences be performed without music.

**Author's Note**

*The Firebird* was developed at Chicago Dramatists Workshop, using a company of two deaf actors who were fluent in both ASL and spoken English, two deaf actors who were fluent in ASL, and three hearing actors who were fluent in both.

The Playwright would like to thank Dawn Alden, Stephanie Early, Ron Jiu, Ralitsa Popcheva, Robert Schleifer, Richard Sherman and Michael J. Stark, the members of the ensemble who helped develop the work, for their commitment and willingness to try any and everything, no matter what the risk; Dale Heinen for her patience; and Russ Tutterow and Robin Stanton of Chicago Dramatists Workshop for their support. *The Firebird* could not have been created without their constant encouragement, energy and desire to go beyond the supposed "limitations" that they refused to acknowledge, and therefore helped me to disregard. This play is for them.

The play is a variation on story-theatre technique. As such, the story-telling responsibility is shifted among actors at various times. When the ACTOR'S NAME appears in the text, it is s/he who is speaking. When the CHARACTER'S NAME appears, it is that character speaking whom the actor is playing. This shifting is used especially extensively at the top of the show in order to introduce the technique to the audience and to integrate it into the presentation.

The Firebird's signing, while identifiably ASL, should be both more florid and stylized—even movement- or dance-oriented—than the ASL used by the other (fundamentally) signing characters, to maintain the dramatic illusion that they cannot understand her, since they lack the Duke's Talisman or the Princess' knowledge of all languages.

The Firebird's theme can be any melody the actress is comfortable playing. The ideal would be a very brief passage from the Stravinsky suite.

## **Acknowledgments**

*The Firebird* was developed at Chicago Dramatists, Russ Tutterow, Artistic Director, with the participation of Dawn Alden, Stephanie Early, Ron Jiu, Ralitsa Popcheva, Robert Schleifer, Richard Sherman, Michael J. Stark; and Dale Heinen. It was first presented by Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Indiana, and directed by John Edward Kinzer.

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*The Firebird* was developed at Chicago Dramatists,  
Russ Tutterow, Artistic Director.

# THE FIREBIRD

by Evan Guilford-Blake

SUGGESTED BY THE CLASSIC RUSSIAN FOLK TALES

*(At rise: The stage is dim. The Song of the Firebird is heard, played on a recorder.)*

*(The lights rise to discover DAWN, kneeling downstage center, playing the recorder. The balance of the company is discovered in a tight semi-circle. From right: RICHARD, ROBERT, MICHAEL, RALITSA, RON and STEPHANIE.)*

*(Note: Where two names are connected by an “and” as the speaking characters in the dialogue, the first is the voice, the second is the sign. Otherwise, the person[s] speaking signs and speaks, unless otherwise indicated.)*

**RALITSA and MICHAEL.** Once upon a time

**ROBERT and RON.** A long time ago

**STEPHANIE and RICHARD.** In a faraway land called Robindale

*(Company, except DAWN, begins to move to playing positions.)*

**RICHARD and STEPHANIE.** *(Spot up on DAWN.)* There lived a wonderful bird, whose beautiful song

*(Brief pause, as DAWN plays: Firebird’s theme.)*

and graceful flight

*(DAWN begins movement.)*

were prized by everyone.

**STEPHANIE and RICHARD.** And—*she* was beautiful as well, with a body of brilliant red and wings of golden fire...

**RICHARD and RALITSA.** In the same land, there lived a young and very handsome Duke, known as the Duke of Robindale.

*(Spot up on MICHAEL.)*

**RALITSA and STEPHANIE.** Who, aided by his remarkable horse,

*(Spot up on ROBERT.)*

**STEPHANIE and RICHARD.** Served under Robindale's haughty and powerful King.

*(Spot up on RON.)*

**STEPHANIE.** Now, it happened that, one day, the Duke of Robindale and his horse were hunting in the forest, when...

*(The Firebird's song is played, offstage. Then she appears, in stylized movement.)*

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Look!

**HORSE.** *(Aloof:)* What?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** It's the Firebird! Is she not wonderful.

**HORSE.** *(Yawns.)* Yes, I suppose she is. But I'm more wonderful.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* You?

**HORSE.** My mane may not be made of fire, but you must admit I am far more clever.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And her song, the things she sings of!

**HORSE.** *(Yawns.)* It is, really, quite ordinary, Master.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Ordinary?!

**HORSE.** Quite. Someday perhaps *I* shall sing for you; you have never heard *true* tonic talent until you have heard a horse sing.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Still—if I could capture *her*, the King would offer a grand reward. Come; I have a plan.

**HORSE.** *You* have a plan?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Um—sort of a plan; listen:

*(DUKE "whispers" to the HORSE, who nods.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so...

*(A movement sequence ensues in which the DUKE and the HORSE try to ensnare the FIREBIRD who, ultimately, escapes. As she does, a feather drops from her wing. The DUKE picks it up.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** A feather from the Firebird! They say her feathers possess great magical powers. What treasure!

**HORSE.** Leave the feather where it fell. If you take it you will be sorry.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Sorry? Because of a feather? What possible problem could arise from a feather?

**HORSE.** (*Rhetorically:*) Now—Master—which of us is the elder?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is more experienced in worldly matters?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And which of us, therefore, is the wiser?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** (*Beat.*) You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master. So leave the feather and let's go back to the castle. It's time for my dinner.

*(The HORSE starts out.)*

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) All right.

*(Secretively, the DUKE slips the feather into his shirt, then exits. The FIREBIRD appears, playing, crosses the stage and exits. [This device will be used throughout to indicate a change of scene.] While she moves, the KING enters to his throne, and the DUKE re-enters, from the opposite side.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so, the Duke and his horse returned to Robin-dale, where the Duke went before the King.

*(A fanfare is played.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** (*Bowing deeply.*) Your Majesty.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Ah, the Duke. Welcome. I trust you had a good hunt. What have you brought me?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** It was a very good hunt. And I have brought you this.

(DUKE gives the KING the feather.)

**STEPHANIE and KING.** A feather? You have dared to bring *me*, the King, a feather!? What insolence! I shall have your head.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But, Your Majesty! This is a feather from the wing of the Firebird!

**KING.** (*Signs only.*) The Firebird!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Indeed, Your Highness. I found her in the forest and almost captured the bird herself.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Indeed. Well, you are a most resourceful young man. I'm sure, with a little more effort, you can achieve that.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Sire?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** If you have managed to bring me a *feather* of the Firebird, I have no doubt you *can* bring me the bird itself. A feather! That isn't a fit gift to bring the King. Bring me the Firebird, or by my sword, I promise your head shall—vanish from between your shoulders.

(*Haughtily, the KING flings the feather to the floor; he exits.*)

**DUKE.** (*Signs only; glumly.*) Yes, Your Majesty.

(*The DUKE picks up the feather and exits.*)

**STEPHANIE.** (*The FIREBIRD flies across the stage. The HORSE enters and "eats" straw. Then, the DUKE enters, weeping.*) Unhappily, the Duke left the King and went to his stable, where his Horse was eating contentedly...

**HORSE.** Master. Have some straw. It's excellent; perfectly aged, with just a hint of grass and oats.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) No. Thank you.

**HORSE.** My Lord, why do you weep? What's the matter?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** The King—because I brought him this one feather, he has ordered me to bring him the Firebird herself. No man on earth can do that.

**HORSE.** I told you you would be sorry. Well, don't weep. I have a plan: Go to the King; ask him to have thousands of kernels of corn scattered for one hundred yards in every direction from the tall tree that stands in the center of the largest open field.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Corn?

**HORSE.** Corn.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* But, why?

**HORSE.** Master—which of us is the sage?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is the more astute in our planning?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And, therefore, which of us is conversant with why there must be thousands of kernels of corn scattered, in order that *you* catch the Firebird as the King ordered?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(Beat.)* You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** All right; I'll go and ask the King.

**STEPHANIE and RALITSA.** *(As STEPHANIE speaks, she and RICHARD scatter the corn. The KING "supervises.")* And so the King's servants began at the tall tree, and they scattered kernels of corn for one hundred yards in every direction. They worked hour after hour, all day, all night, making sure that every spot, every nook, every cranny was covered

*(The KING points out an empty spot.)*

until, finally, just as dawn broke, the field was a sea of yellow kernels, broken only by the single tall tree that stood in its center.

**RALITSA and STEPHANIE.** And, behind that tree, waited the Duke and his Horse.

*(DUKE and HORSE "hide" behind the platform.)*

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Well, it's done. You're certain that with this, you'll capture the Firebird.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(With a look at the HORSE.)* Oh, um, absolutely, Your Majesty.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** *(Yawns.)* Well, *I'm* going to bed. Bring the bird to me this evening. And if you don't, it's...

*(KING indicates: Off with your head.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(With a gulp.)* Yes, Your Highness.

*(KING exits.)*

**STEPHANIE.** Hours passed, and the Duke and the Horse waited patiently. And then, as evening neared...

*(The Song of the Firebird is played, and she appears [ideally from behind and above the platforms]. She descends, perhaps playing, surveys the field a moment; then begins to eat the scattered corn, first away from the platforms, then drawing closer to them.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(Sotto voce:)* You're brilliant.

**HORSE.** *(Sotto neigh-ce:)* I know.

*(The FIREBIRD draws closer to the platforms. Suddenly, the DUKE and the HORSE race forth and, in a stylized pursuit, capture her.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** We've got her! We've got her.

**HORSE.** Naturally.

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

No. Please; let me go.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* What?

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

Please; let me go. My home is the air, the wind, I am only fire and music and cannot live in the silence and a cage.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I'm sorry, but if I don't return you to my King, he will

*(DUKE indicates: Cut off my head.)*

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

Brave Duke: If you will grant me my freedom I will help you gain yours, and your fortune as well.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Really?

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

It shall be greater than anything you have ever imagined...

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And when shall I receive it?

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

When you have set me free.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only; rubs his hands together with glee.)* What do you think?

**HORSE.** Her tongue is as golden as her wings, Master. How do we know she is telling the truth?

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* A good point.

*(To FIREBIRD:)*

How?

**STEPHANIE.** *(As the voice of the FIREBIRD.)*

*(FIREBIRD plays.)*

*My language is my special song, and it is my greatest joy. Until I have fulfilled my promise, I will surrender it to you and remain in silence.*

*(FIREBIRD offers the recorder. The DUKE takes it.)*

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Well?

**HORSE.** Special song! Why, *anyone* can speak *her* language, with this.

*(Blows on the recorder; the sound is unpracticed.)*

With, of course, a little practice. ...But without this how will she communicate to us?

**FIREBIRD.** (*She gives the DUKE an amulet and signs only.*) I will speak to you with my wings. This will enable you to understand.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) I see.

**HORSE.** What's that? What did she say?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** She says she will speak to me with her wings, and that with this, I will understand her.

**HORSE.** Speaking with wings! Master, really!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But I *do* understand. All right: I accept your offer, if you will swear to stay with me until you've regained your voice.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) I swear.

**HORSE.** Hmph. *I'll* keep this—safe.

*(The recorder.)*

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Come then, good Duke of Robindale. We must go to the King.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** All right, then. Let us go to the castle.

*(The DUKE and HORSE exit. The FIREBIRD flies across the stage.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so they left the field and returned to the King, where...

*(A fanfare is played.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** My Liege: I have brought you the Firebird, as you commanded.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Well done, Duke, well done.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Thank you, Your Majesty.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Now, Firebird: Sing!

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Alas, I cannot Your Highness, for I have no voice.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** What is this foolish flapping of wings! I command you to sing!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** She cannot, Your Highness, for she has—lost her voice.

**KING.** (*Signs only.*) What?!

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) It is true, Your Majesty.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Well, find it! The Firebird may be golden, but her silence is not! How dare you bring such a gift to *me*.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I'm sure it's only a temporary problem, My Lord. I'm certain that, if I keep her with me, her voice will return.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** It had better! I want her to sing at my wedding!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Your wedding?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** My wedding. You see, since you are such a clever young man, I have another little task for you.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** —Another, task?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Yes. It is high time I married. But—I am the King, and only the finest Princess is worthy of me. You must bring her to me.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I—must?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Indeed. Therefore—you will travel to the Land of Never, on the far edge of the world. There is a Princess there named Catherine, who is said to be more beautiful than dawn and sweeter than apples. Bring her to me. If you do I will reward you. If you fail, however...

*(KING indicates: Off with your head. DUKE, questioningly, repeats the action; KING nods and repeats the action.)*

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes, Your Majesty.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Now—go.

(*DUKE starts to exit with FIREBIRD.*)

And bring me the Firebird's song as well, or...

(*The DUKE indicates: Off with my head? The KING nods and smiles. DUKE exits. FIREBIRD flies across the stage.*)

**RICHARD.** And so once again the unhappy Duke, accompanied by the Firebird, went to his stable, where his noble horse again dined and waited...

**HORSE.** Ah, Master. Would you care for a few oats?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only; sadly:*) No, thank you.

**HORSE.** (*To FIREBIRD:*) I don't suppose *you* want some?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) No.

**HORSE.** I thought not. All right, Master: What is it now?

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** The King—he has ordered me to ride to the edge of the world, to the Land of Never and bring back the Princess Catherine! I don't even know the way, and there are no maps to guide me.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) I know the way.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** You know the way?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Yes.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** But even so, what could I do that would persuade a Princess to leave her home to marry a King she has never met? If I fail, I shall lose my head!

**HORSE.** Oh, Master, you mustn't lose your head; it would make you far less handsome, not to mention difficult to talk to. I have a plan. Listen: Go to the King. Ask him for a large piece of cloth, some poles; and perfect discs of silver and of gold.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** A piece of cloth? Discs of silver and gold? Of what possible use are a large cloth and two round pieces of metal?

**HORSE.** Master: Which of us is the more insightful?

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is more understanding of the ways of a Princess?

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And therefore which of us is the better equipped to know how to entice the Princess Catherine to return with you, in order to save *your* head?

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** *(Beat.)* You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master. Now—to the King?

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Yes.

*(He exits.)*

**HORSE.** And you, my fine feathered friend—

*(He withdraws the recorder and blows on it. The sound is unpracticed.)*

Someday I *will* learn to speak with this. Even better than you.

*(The FIREBIRD flies across the stage.)*

*(During the following, the FIREBIRD guides the DUKE and HORSE. Their movements and actions should reflect the journey described.)*

**RICHARD.** And so, the Firebird led the Duke and Horse away from the Land of Robindale, toward the Land of Never, on the far edge of the world. They traveled many days...

*(Lights rise.)*

and many nights...

*(Lights dim, except for a “glow” around the FIREBIRD which will remain even through the dark of the Land of Never sequence.)*

over deserts...

*(Lights rise.)*

and mountains...

*(Lights change.)*

across valleys deep as canyons.

**STEPHANIE.** Then, one bright afternoon as they came near the edge of the world, they reached the Great Blue Sea. And just as they had crossed it, the bright light began to fade, and as they went farther, it grew darker...

*(Lights dim.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Where are we?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* We have crossed the border of the Land of Never, good Duke.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** We've crossed into the Land of Never?! Why is it so dark?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Because the Land of Never is so far from the rest of the world, there is neither sun nor moon to bring it light.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** There is no sun- or moonlight in the Land of Never?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* None at all.

**HORSE.** Of course. It *is* the edge of the world, Master.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But, how shall I find the Princess Catherine in the dark? But for the light cast by your radiance, I could see nothing at all!

**HORSE.** You will see, Master. Now—mount the cloth on the poles.

*(The DUKE and the FIREBIRD raise the cloth, as a roof-like structure. The HORSE withdraws the two discs, and a small bag of powder; and begins to sprinkle the powder on the gold disc.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Why are you sprinkling that powder on the disc? Don't waste time: Build a fire, so we'll have some light.

**HORSE.** Master—which of us is the scientist?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is more knowledgeable about the ways of making light?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And, therefore, which of us is conversant with why it is necessary to sprinkle powder on the discs?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(Beat.)* You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master. Now—finish with the cloth.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** All right, but I do wish you would—

*(As the DUKE speaks, the HORSE “scatters” a burst of fire over the disc, and the lights begin to rise.)*

What is it!

**HORSE.** A little phosphorus, of course, and there you have it: An instant sun.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are amazing.

**HORSE.** I know.

*(He “hangs” the “sun” at the top of the platforms; the lights come up full.)*

It will last several hours; then the “moon” will rise.

*(He indicates the silver disc.)*

**PRINCESS.** *(Offstage.)* What’s going on!

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Someone’s coming!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Who?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* I don’t know.

**HORSE.** *(Sotto neigh-ce; self-satisfied.)* Like a moth to flame.

**PRINCESS.** *(Enters, wearing a crown of [just-extinguished] candles.)* What is this!? Why is it so bright? Who are you?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I am the Duke of Robindale, and this is my noble Horse.

*(HORSE bows, ostentatiously.)*

And this is the legendary Firebird.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Good afternoon.

**PRINCESS.** So you are the Firebird. And good afternoon to you.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) You understand her!? Without one of these?!

(*The amulet.*)

**PRINCESS.** I don't need one of those to understand her! I am the Princess Catherine and I understand every language of the earth.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) You're the Princess?

**PRINCESS.** Of course I am the Princess. Now—what are *you* doing here? What is—that?

(*The "sun."*)

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Why, um—

**HORSE.** That is the sun, Your Highness.

**PRINCESS.** *The sun?* Nonsense. There's no such thing.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Oh, um, but there it is, Your Highness.

**PRINCESS.** I *have* heard stories of such a thing, but I thought they were just fairy tales.

**HORSE.** My master carries the sun—and the moon—with him, and is able to light the sky whenever he pleases. Can't you, Master?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Oh—of course.

**PRINCESS.** The sun...! Well, take it away and go! It's too hot, and, in the Land of Never we're not used to it.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) But, Your Highness, the Duke has come from Robindale on the other side of the world to bring it to you.

**PRINCESS.** You've come from the other side of the world? To bring this to *me*?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes.

**HORSE.** And it's been a long trek. Surely Your Highness will let us rest a while? And eat a little?

*(He takes out a feed bag and begins to munch its contents.)*

**PRINCESS.** Well... It is interesting. And I've never seen a man's face so—clearly before. It's a very—interesting face.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Um, thank you.

**PRINCESS.** Yes, so strong, so—noble.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Um—

**PRINCESS.** But it's so hot!

*(She mops herself with a handkerchief.)*

**HORSE.** Then, come sit in the shade of my Master's tent. It *is* cooler there. Isn't it, Master.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Oh—yes. Would you join me, Milady?

**PRINCESS.** Well... I will sit with you for a little while.

*(She and the DUKE sit beneath the tent and “converse.” During the following, the lights change accordingly.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And as the Princess and the Duke talked, quickly the day passed; they laughed, and soon the sun began to fade; and they talked some more...

**PRINCESS.** Well, it's getting late.

*(Yawns.)*

You are *very* interesting and this

*(The sun.)*

has been amusing, but now take it away so I can sleep.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But, Your Highness, we have other pleasures for you.

**PRINCESS.** You do?

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Yes. Firebird?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Yes, Duke?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Will you dance for the Princess?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Happily.

(*She dances.*)

Does that please Your Majesty?

**PRINCESS.** That pleases me greatly!

**HORSE.** Your Majesty! You have never seen *true* terpsichorean talent until you have seen a horse dance. Allow *me*.

(*He dances comically and bows broadly.*)

Your Ladyship.

**PRINCESS.** Uh—thank you, noble horse.

(*HORSE preens and, per the dialogue, replaces the sun with the moon.*)

Now, Duke: It is time, I think, *you* danced, with me.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only; with a gulp.*) I—dance with you?

**PRINCESS.** Of course. In fact, I command you to dance with me.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Well...

(*They dance.*)

**STEPHANIE.** And so the Duke and the Princess danced, and as they did the sun set and the “moon” rose in the sky...

**PRINCESS.** So that is the moon. It *is* lovely, much nicer than these plain old candles. And it’s so—romantic.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** In the land of Robindale the moon rises every night, and there are stars whose lights shine across the sky like *millions* of candles.

**PRINCESS.** I’d like to see *that*. It must be very—romantic.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And there is light every day, and every night.

**PRINCESS.** How do you sleep?!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Oh, um, it’s dark sometimes.

**PRINCESS.** I hope so. The dark is so much more—romantic.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And, um, there is a great King?; it is *he* to whom this sun and moon really belong.

**PRINCESS.** Is that so?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** In fact, he is the one who bid us bring this to you, as a token of his esteem. You should meet him.

**PRINCESS.** Of *his* esteem? What about *your* esteem?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Well, um, he, um—

**PRINCESS.** Is he as handsome as you are?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Oh, well, I—he is—handsome. In his way.

**PRINCESS.** In his way.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes.

**PRINCESS.** I see. And is he young and strong as you are?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Well, he is—strong. Sort of.

**PRINCESS.** Sort of.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Sort of.

**PRINCESS.** I see. And does he dance as well as you?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Frankly, I don't think he dances at all.

**PRINCESS.** Then why would I want to meet him?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** He is rich.

**PRINCESS.** *I* am rich.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** He rules a large and wealthy nation.

**PRINCESS.** *I* rule a large and wealthy nation.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** ...He will cut off my head if you don't marry him?

**PRINCESS.** *What?*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I said: He will cut—

**PRINCESS.** I heard you! Well, I'm going to have a little talk with this "King." We'll see just whose head gets cut off! Come—let's go.

*(During the following the DUKE, HORSE and FIREBIRD gather up the cloth, et al. All exit. The FIREBIRD flies across the stage. KING enters to his throne. DUKE re-enters with the PRINCESS and the FIREBIRD.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so the Duke, the Horse, Princess Catherine and the Firebird returned to the Land of Robindale, where the King awaited them—and, especially his bride—most anxiously.

*(A fanfare is played.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Good morning, Your Highness.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Ah, Duke. At last you're back. And I see you've—

**PRINCESS.** What do you mean, you'll

*(SHE indicates: Cut off the DUKE's head.)*

if I don't marry you!

**KING.** *(Signs only.)* What?!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Um, Your Majesty, may I present to you the—

**PRINCESS.** *I am the Princess Catherine, the ruler of the Land of Never; and just who are you?*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Um, Princess Catherine?, this is—

**STEPHANIE and KING.** *I am the King of Robindale, and I have—invited you here as my guest.*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Um, as I was saying, this—

**PRINCESS.** *Invited me?! Your guest?! The Duke has told me you would remove his head unless I married you.*

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Oh, the Duke—exaggerates. *Don't you.*

**PRINCESS.** He does?

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* I do?

*(KING smiles and, subtly, indicates: Off with your head?)*

Oh—I, um, do.

**PRINCESS.** I see.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** We have—invited you here because we have heard you were beautiful and sweet.

**PRINCESS.** Oh. Beautiful and sweet!

**STEPHANIE and KING.** —And, uh—*wise. Very wise.*

**PRINCESS.** I see.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** And we thought it would be good for both countries if we got ma—to know each other.

**PRINCESS.** Is this true?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) No.

**PRINCESS.** Hmm. I see.

**KING.** (*Signs only.*) What is that silly flapping? What did she say?

**PRINCESS.** She said every word Your Majesty has spoken is true, *and* that you are a wise and kind King who has the best interests of all his people at heart, *and* who would never threaten anyone, *least* of all anyone as noble and handsome and—romantic as—the Duke of Robindale, *nor* force a Princess to marry you against her wishes.

**KING.** (*Signs only, very exaggeratedly:*) “No”

**STEPHANIE and KING.** means all that?

**PRINCESS.** Of course!

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Oh. Well—in any case, we are pleased to have you here at our Court, Princess Catherine.

**PRINCESS.** And *I* am pleased to be at the Court of such an *honest* and *honorable* King.

(*With a look at the DUKE.*)

*Someone* has obviously misled me.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But Princess Cath—

**PRINCESS.** And it *would* be good for both countries if we were to—form a union.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** You think so? I mean: It would. Of course.

**PRINCESS.** I will marry, however, only the man I choose to marry. I would like to wed someone who *is* noble and truthful as your *words* seem. But...

**KING, DUKE, FIREBIRD.** (*Sign only.*) But?

**PRINCESS.** Alas: I cannot marry anyone unless...

**KING, DUKE, FIREBIRD.** (*Sign only.*) Unless?

**PRINCESS.** Unless I wear the wedding dress every Princess of Never has worn since time began.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Then you will wear it. Where is it?

**PRINCESS.** In the middle of the Great Blue Sea that lies just at the border of the Land of Never, there lies a great gray stone. Beneath that stone lies a great marble chest, and inside that chest lies my wedding dress.

**KING.** (*Signs only.*) Duke!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I know—get the dress.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** And hurry!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Yes, Your Majesty.

(*DUKE starts to exit with FIREBIRD.*)

**STEPHANIE and KING.** (*With a smile.*) And if you fail to bring it back...?

(*KING again subtly indicates: Off with your head.*)

Come, Princess. Let me show you my Kingdom.

**PRINCESS.** (*As KING exits:*) Thank you. I'll join you in a moment. Duke?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes, Your Highness?

**PRINCESS.** It is *said* my wedding dress can only be retrieved by a clever man of outstanding character, one who would never lie to his Princess. And one whom she truly loves.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Yes, Your Highness.

*(All exit. The FIREBIRD crosses the stage.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so, the Duke and the Firebird went once more to the Duke's stable, where...

**HORSE.** Master: Good evening. Care for some nice, fresh alfalfa? It's very tasty.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only; glumly:)* No, thank you.

**HORSE.** And good evening to you, Flapper.

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Good evening.

**HORSE.** Master—why are you so gloomy?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** The King—*now* he has ordered me to return to the Land of Never and get the Princess' wedding dress from a chest that lies at the bottom of the Great Blue Sea.

**HORSE.** Well, do not weep. *I* have a plan. As usual. Go to the King and ask him for a huge pot and a long piece of string.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* A string?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* And a pot.

**HORSE.** A string and a pot.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But, how can we get the wedding dress from the bottom of the sea using just a string and a pot?

**HORSE.** Master—which of us is more familiar with the sea?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is—in *your* own words—brilliant?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And, therefore, which of us is apt to devise a plan to rescue the Princess Catherine's dress and thus save *your* life?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(Beat.)* You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master. So?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** All right. I'll go to the King.

*(FIREBIRD flies across the stage. All exit.)*

**STEPHANIE.** And so, carrying the string and an enormous pot, once again the Duke of Robindale, accompanied by his remarkable Horse

*(HORSE preens.)*

and the Firebird, set out toward the Land of Never. Again they traveled over deserts...

*(Lights rise.)*

and mountains...

*(Lights change.)*

across deep valleys, through rain and snow and heat; and, at last, they came once more to the Great Blue Sea that stood at the very brink of the Land of Never, at the very edge of the world...

**HORSE.** Well, Master: Here we are. Now—a little dinner.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** *Dinner?* We must get the Princess' dress! What about your plan?

**HORSE.** All in good time, Master. Right now, I *plan*—to have some grass.

*(He opens the feed bag and begins to eat.)*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** You're astonishing!

**HORSE.** I know.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** But what about the dress—it's way out there, in the middle of the sea!

**HORSE.** That's a lot of water, Master. Horses do *not* swim.

*(Offstage, the LOBSTER is heard, singing the Lobster Quadrille.<sup>1</sup>)*

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Good Duke, look: Over there.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** What? What is it?

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<sup>1</sup> See back of script.

**HORSE.** It looks to be a large—lobster, Master.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) A lobster?

**LOBSTER.** (*Enters; sings/signs.*) A lobster, a lobster, a lobster!

But not just *any* lobster. To say *I'm* just a lobster  
Is to say Robin Hood was just a mobster.

For you see...

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** (*LOBSTER sings to the tune of "When I was a Lad."*)

When I was just small I listened and learned  
As should every young crustacean in the sea that yearns  
To grow very large. There are rules, you see  
And they must all be followed very carefully.

*(He scats, dances for four beats.)*

There are rules you must follow and I did, with *esprit*  
And now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** There are rules you must follow, and he did.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** I see.

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** (*LOBSTER sings.*)  
And now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

*(He dances a vamp.)*

The first rule, of course, is "don't get caught  
By a fisherman or -woman, or you'll end in a pot"

*(Force the rhyme.)*

Avoid every trap and avoid every net  
And eventually you'll live to wear the coronet.

*(He scats, dances for four beats.)*

I avoided ev'ry trap so successfully  
That now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** He avoided ev'ry trap

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** so successfully

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** (*LOBSTER sings.*)

That now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

*(He dances a vamp, with the FIREBIRD.)*

The second rule, you know, is take care whom you eat—  
 (Sardines may be tasty but they're indiscreet)—  
 Every scallop, every shrimp, every sturgeon and each shark  
 Has a ballot to be tallied with the voting clerk.

*(He scats, dances for four beats.)*

I elected all my dinners with such polity  
 The rest elected me the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** He elected all his dinners

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** so prudently

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** (*LOBSTER sings.*)

The rest elected me the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

*(He dances a vamp with the HORSE.)*

And last but not least, when you wear the crown  
 You're entrusted with the care of the royal wedding gown:  
 You must guard it with your life; and I do, you see,  
 And thus I'm the perfect Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

*(He scats, dances for four beats.)*

**LOBSTER.** (*Sings/signs. Ritard.*)

So listen and learn, and follow rules one, two, three,  
 And *you* may become the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** So listen and learn,

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** And follow rules one, two, three,

**ALL.** (*Only LOBSTER sings; all others sign only. Down tempo.*)

And *you* may become the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea...

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** You are the guardian of Princess Catherine's wedding dress?!

**LOBSTER.** (*Sings/signs.*) I am, I am, *I am.*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** How fortunate. I am the Duke of Robin-dale.

**LOBSTER.** Of claws you are.

*(He giggles wildly.)*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** I beg your pardon?

**LOBSTER.** Of *claws?* you are? Never mind; just a little crustacean humor.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* I see.

**LOBSTER.** Charmed, I'm sure.

*(He offers a "claw.")*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** How do you do.

**LOBSTER.** Frankly, not very well. My mandibles are killing me and I've got a pain in the carapace like you wouldn't believe.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* I'm sorry.

**LOBSTER.** Ah, well.

*(Sings.)*

Ah, well; ah, well; *ah, well.*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** But it *is* fortunate that we've met you. You see, I've been sent to get Princess Catherine's wedding dress.

**LOBSTER.** He has?

*(He giggles.)*

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** Yes. The Duke has been sent by Princess Catherine herself.

**LOBSTER.** Oh, ho, ho, ho, you don't expect me to believe that.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* We do.

**LOBSTER.** *(During the following, the LOBSTER gradually moves closer to the DUKE. The HORSE casually walks behind the LOBSTER and stands on his "tail.")*

*(Increasingly histrionic.)*

And on your word I'm supposed to just—turn over the Princess' wedding dress? The very gown I am sworn, as Ruler of the Great Blue Sea, to protect though I'm threatened with starvation, with torture, with boiling water? (Boiling water! Ooh!) Do you know how—valuable it is? Do you have any idea how many mollusks, how many snails, how many *whelks* surrendered their shells for decoration? How many needlefish it took to sew it? How many squid sacrificed their ink to dye it? Are you aware, sir, that the gold of ten thousand goldfish went into making the sash alone and why are you standing on my tail?

**HORSE.** Master: Would you get the pot?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Of course.

*(During the following, the DUKE and the FIREBIRD take out the pot and "fill" it.)*

**LOBSTER.** Pot? What pot?

**HORSE.** That one.

**LOBSTER.** Oh. *That* pot. That very big, I might even say enormous, pot.

**HORSE.** Uh-huh.

**LOBSTER.** Uh—why do you need a pot?

**HORSE.** To fill with water.

**LOBSTER.** Water? In a pot? Heh-heh-heh. Uhm—why do you need to fill the pot with water?

**HORSE.** So we can boil the water.

**LOBSTER.** Ooh, don't even *say* such a thing. Boiling water—ooh! But, um, why would you need to do that?

**HORSE.** To cook something.

**LOBSTER.** Ulp. And just what did you—have in mind?

**HORSE.** Master: Did you bring the melted butter?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) I have it.

**LOBSTER.** Melted butter? Oh, no, you—you mustn't. You can't.

**HORSE.** Unless we can recover Princess Catherine's dress from the bottom of the sea, my master will lose his head. He might as well enjoy his last meal.

**LOBSTER.** *His, ulp, last meal?*

*(The DUKE begins to "examine" the LOBSTER.)*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** He's right. And I do love a good lobster. They're so—tender and sweet.

**LOBSTER.** Oh, I wouldn't be good at all. Tough; you see? Old and tough. *Nothing* sweet about me. And tender—unh-uh. Not a bit. Not old crusty-shelled me. In fact, underneath this shell lies a tail like a rock. That's what they call me, you know. Rocky. Well, gotta fly now.

*(He struggles to escape; then, unable to:)*

*All right what do you want?*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** Just get the Princess' wedding dress, and we'll go.

*(The HORSE attaches the string to the LOBSTER.)*

**HORSE.** Here: This will hold you while you get it.

**LOBSTER.** *(Nobly:)* The dress? No; I cannot. My duty is my duty.

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* The water is almost ready.

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** Good. Let me know as soon as the water's—boiling.

**LOBSTER.** On the other hand, my tail is my tail. Back in a minute.

*(He exits and returns with the dress. As he moves:)*

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** *(LOBSTER sings.)*  
The first rule, of course, is "don't get caught  
By a fisherman or -woman, or you'll end in a pot"

*(Force the rhyme.)*

Avoid every trap and avoid every net  
And eventually you'll live to wear the coronet.

*(The HORSE and the FIREBIRD dance for four beats.)*

I avoided ev'ry trap so successfully  
That now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

**HORSE and FIREBIRD.** He avoided ev'ry trap

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** so successfully

**LOBSTER and STEPHANIE.** *(LOBSTER sings.)*

That now I am the Ruler of the Great Blue Sea.

*(DUKE, HORSE and FIREBIRD dance until LOBSTER returns to the stage.)*

**LOBSTER.** Well, here it is.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Thank you.

**LOBSTER.** *(HORSE detaches the string.)* Wish the Princess well. Tell her—tell her: I did my best.

*(Sings/signs.)*

My best, my best, *my best.*

**STEPHANIE and DUKE.** We will. Come now; to Robindale.

*(DUKE, FIREBIRD and HORSE start out.)*

**HORSE.** Farewell. Take care of your carapace.

**LOBSTER.** Of *claws* I will.

*(Giggles.)*

Bye.

*(He watches them a moment, then peeks into the “boiling pot” and shudders.)*

Ooh!

*(He exits singing the Lobster Quadrille.<sup>2</sup> The FIREBIRD flies across the stage.)*

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<sup>2</sup> See back of script.

**STEPHANIE.** And so the Duke, the Horse and the Firebird journeyed once more to see the King of Robindale, and the Princess Catherine. And when they arrived...

*(A fanfare is played.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** My Lord: We have returned with the Princess Catherine's wedding dress, as you commanded.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Good. Let the wedding preparations commence!

**PRINCESS.** Wait: I will not marry until the person *responsible* for bringing me here has done penance in a vat of boiling oil. Firebird—don't *you* agree that is as it should be?

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Oh, yes, Your Highness!

**STEPHANIE and KING.** So be it. Duke!

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* Yes, Your Majesty?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** You are under arrest!

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* I am?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** You are. After all, you *are* the one who brought the Princess here.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** But, My Liege, *you* are the one who—

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Horse, take him away. And return him to me, at sunset tonight. We will have—everything ready.

*(HORSE, FIREBIRD, DUKE start out.)*

And Firebird?!

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Your Highness?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** You had better find your voice, very soon, or else...

*(KING indicates: Off with your head.)*

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Yes, Your Highness.

**STEPHANIE.** *(As she speaks, RICHARD performs the actions described.)* And so the King's servants brought many sticks of wood

and built a great fire, and on it placed a huge cauldron, and filled the cauldron with oil that began to grow warmer and warmer; and very soon it began to bubble.

**RICHARD.** (*Bells sound.*) In the meantime, the King ordered a great celebration in honor of his wedding and, while the Princess Catherine dressed in her beautiful wedding gown, a feast of the finest wines and foods was prepared.

**STEPHANIE.** But the Duke waited sadly in the castle dungeon, with his horse and the Firebird.

*(DUKE is discovered, pacing in circles. The HORSE tries to watch.)*

**HORSE.** Master, *please*: Not on an empty stomach. You are making me dizzy.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** There are only a few minutes before the sun sets. Can't you think of something?

**HORSE.** I'm sorry, Master. I'm too hungry.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Duke?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Do you still have the feather I dropped when you first tried to capture me?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Why, yes, I still have your feather. It's right here.

*(He takes it out.)*

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Then you must keep it close to you; and when you enter the Court, don't wait to be thrown into the oil, but instead run and leap into the cauldron.

**HORSE.** What's she saying? What *is* all that...

*(He flaps his "arms.")*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** She says I must keep her feather close to me; and not to wait to be thrown into the boiling oil, but instead run and leap into it.

**HORSE.** Master: Really!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You have a better idea?

**HORSE.** Of course I—don't.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** All right; I will trust you. Horse?

**HORSE.** *(Sadly:)* Yes, Master?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** If I—don't come out of the vat of oil, you are to give the Firebird back her song.

**HORSE.** *(More sadly:)* Yes, Master.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And, years from now, when you think of me?, think of me kindly.

**HORSE.** *(In tears.)* Yes, Master.

*(HORSE breaks down and sobs. The DUKE holds him.)*

**RICHARD and DUKE.** There, there, don't be so upset; it will be all right.

**HORSE.** Oh, Master: If only you'd listened to me and not taken the feather to begin with! Now, which of us is destined to mourn?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Of course. And which of us is going to spend long, lonely days and nights with no comfort but his little bit of hay, a little grass, a little clover, a little straw?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** You are.

**HORSE.** Naturally. And, therefore, which of us is entitled to be so upset?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** *(Beat; then, incredulously:)* You are?

**HORSE.** Very good, Master.

**RALITSA** *(Offstage.)* **and STEPHANIE.** Horse: It is time. Bring the Duke to the King.

**FIREBIRD.** *(Signs only.)* Good Duke: It's time. Don't forget: Leap into the boiling oil.

**DUKE.** *(Signs only.)* I will. Come.

**STEPHANIE.** (*FIREBIRD flies across the stage. A fanfare is played. KING enters, with PRINCESS; DUKE, HORSE and FIREBIRD enter.*) And so, at last, the Duke was brought before the King once more, to face his terrible fate.

**PRINCESS.** Ah, it is the Duke. Be brave, good Duke.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Well, Duke: Have you any last words?

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I wish only to bid farewell to the lovely Princess Catherine and to my friends. Good bye, fair Princess.

**PRINCESS.** Noble Duke—such a—romantic man! For now: Farewell. And listen to the Firebird.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** I have. And—farewell to you, Firebird.

**FIREBIRD.** (*Swirls around the DUKE; signs only.*) Keep the feather close.

**RICHARD and DUKE.** And, you, Horse—

*(HORSE starts to bawl.)*

Head up, old fellow.

**HORSE.** Yes, Master.

*(Sniffles; sotto neigh-ce:)*

But I do wish I had a little clover.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Now.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** You're ready?

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) I am.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** Then I command that—

*(DUKE hurtles forward and leaps into the pot of oil. All react. He sinks once, his head emerges; it sinks and rises again; and, a third time; but now he vaults completely out of the pot, dressed in an ornately jeweled top and wearing an equally ornate crown.)*

**PRINCESS and FIREBIRD, HORSE.** Ahh.

**KING.** (*Signs only.*) What?!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Your Majesties, I have done my penance in boiling oil, as you have commanded.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** This is impossible!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Perhaps; but nonetheless here I stand before you.

**STEPHANIE and KING.** That coat—it's magnificent. And the crown. Why, it's worth more than mine! The oil must be magical! I must try it myself!

**RICHARD and DUKE.** Before you do, would Your Majesty care to have the Firebird's magnificent feather?

**STEPHANIE and KING.** A feather! I told you before that was not a fit gift for a King. What insolence! Now, stand aside.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes, Your Majesty.

(*The KING runs and leaps into the vat of oil.*)

**KING.** (*In the vat; voices only.*) Yeeooowwww!

(*All wait. Nothing happens. All walk over to the vat and peer inside.*)

**STEPHANIE and DUKE, HORSE and FIREBIRD, PRINCESS and RICHARD.** Ooooh!

**STEPHANIE.** And—of course—the King was never heard from again, for, indeed, he was the one who had been *responsible* for bringing the Princess to Robindale.

**HORSE.** Oh, Master. You're safe! ...Of course, I knew you would be.

**PRINCESS.** And now *we* can be married.

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) Yes; but first: Firebird?

**FIREBIRD.** (*Signs only.*) Yes, Good Duke?

(*DUKE takes the recorder from the HORSE and prepares to give it to her.*)

**HORSE.** Wait!

**DUKE.** (*Signs only.*) What?

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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