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The Insulting Princess

CHARACTERS

ROYAL PAGE, one or more, m or f

KING DULDRUM

QUEEN FLUTTERBYE, his wife

PRINCESS GRETA, their daughter

KNIGHT OF KNOODLE, a suitor

EARL OF VINEGAR, a suitor

DUKE OF CUKE, a suitor

PRINCE WALDO, a suitor

ALFRED GREENLEAF, a baker

EXTRAS (optional) may play VILLAGERS and COURTIERS

Note: For a larger cast, in addition to VILLAGERS and COURTIERS, more than one ROYAL PAGE may be used, with lines and action divided among them.

For a smaller cast of 3m, 2f, 1m or f, the four suitors may all be played by one actor.

TIME: Once upon a...

PLACE: Various locations in the kingdom of Great Western Wullaberry, all of which may be played on a bare stage with simple set pieces.

PLAYING TIME: about 50 minutes

The Insulting Princess

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The stage is bare. PAGE enters, struggling under the weight of Greta's throne. (If more than one PAGE is used, ALL enter now, sharing the burden of the throne. Action is divided among them.) He manages to set it down, finally, right of C. He eyes it critically, moves it left, then right, then upstage, then down, until he's satisfied that it's exactly right. Then he moves it once more, for good measure. With a glance off L and R to make sure he isn't being watched, he sits on the throne, gingerly at first, and then with more confidence. He strikes a haughty, scowling pose, then bursts into a fit of giggles and runs off UL. QUEEN and KING hurry in from DR, or through audience.*

KING. Oh, me, oh my! This is too much. Too, too, much.

Much, much too much. I cannot go through it again, Flutterbye.

QUEEN. Please calm down, Duldrum.

KING. How can I calm down? Another suitor is on his way to meet Greta. An earl, a duke, a who-knows-what—

QUEEN. I believe it's a knight this time, dear. The Knight of Knoodle.

KING. Noodle-poodle-shmoodle! Before he has a chance to sit down, Greta will drive him away with another of her

wretched insults. I tell you, Flutterbye, I simply cannot bear it.

QUEEN. Hush, Duldrum, dear. You must bear it.

KING. I can't, I tell you!

QUEEN. You must.

KING. Why?

QUEEN. Because I must bear it.

KING. How can you?

QUEEN (*a momentary weakness*). I can't. (*Immediately pulling herself together*.) But I must.

KING. Why?

QUEEN. Because the entire kingdom of Great Western Wullaberry must bear it.

KING. But they can't.

QUEEN. They must.

KING. Why?

QUEEN. For Greta's sake.

KING. Greta?

QUEEN (*as if reminding him*). The princess. Your daughter.

KING. I know who she is—our scowling, selfish, insulting daughter!

QUEEN. Who rhymes.

KING. Rhymes? Is an insult any better because it rhymes?

QUEEN. Well, it's no worse.

KING (*exasperated, he exits UL, still talking*). Ooooh! This is too much. Too, too, much. Much, much too much. I simply cannot bear it.

QUEEN (*following him off*). But you must!

(*A beat, and then PAGE enters UL and stands at attention for an offstage FANFARE. If COURTIERS are used,*

they may enter at this point and arrange themselves about the stage. They applaud and cheer each royal entrance enthusiastically—except GRETA's.)

PAGE. King Duldrum of Great Western Wullaberry!

(KING sweeps in from UL, smiling and waving pleasantly to the real or imagined crowd, despite a slightly pained expression. He stands to the right of throne. There is a second FANFARE.)

Queen Flutterbye of Great Western Wullaberry!

(QUEEN enters regally, smiling and waving to her subjects. She stands to left of throne. A third FANFARE. PAGE fights the urge to giggle during this announcement.)

Princess Greta—mmmph, ah— *(KING shoots him a severe glance. PAGE straightens up.)* of Great Western Wullaberry!

(GRETA enters, haughty and scowling. She looks more like a witch than a princess, although she is young and nicely gowned. COURTIERS, if used, pull back slightly with a gasp, and applaud minimally and only out of politeness. Without waving, GRETA stalks over to her throne and sits. A beat, and then:)

Our exalted guest, the Knight of Knoodle.

(To a long and very ornate FANFARE, KNIGHT enters from DR, or through audience, preening himself vainly and holding a large rose on a long stem. He has a clown's big, red nose. As FANFARE ends, he offers a series of flowery bows to the ROYAL FAMILY.)

KNIGHT. Your Royal Majesties! Your Royal Highness!

(Turning fully to GRETA.) Ah! My dearest Princess Greta, knowing what a delicate, sensitive, exquisite flower you are, I have brought you the one and only blossom in the world worthy of your company—this perfect rose. (He holds out rose.)

KING, QUEEN & PAGE *(approvingly, with COURTIERS, if used).* Ahhhhhhhh!

GRETA *(takes rose, regards it for a moment, then positions it between herself and KNIGHT).* This rose you've brought will come in handy—for hiding your nose, which is really a dandy!

KING, QUEEN & PAGE *(in disappointment, with COURTIERS).* Oooohhhh!

KNIGHT *(aghast).* My word! Such impertinence! *(Starts off.)* My nose? A dandy? *(Turns back and snatches the rose away from GRETA, pricking his finger in the process.)* Ouch! *(He runs off R or through audience, nursing his finger and his bruised ego.)* Ooooh! Really! I never!

KING *(calling after KNOODLE).* Knoodle! Sir Knoodle! Wait!

QUEEN. I'm afraid he's gone, dear.

KING. But, Knoodle—

QUEEN. Give up, Duldrum.

(GRETA remains unmoved, except perhaps more haughty and scowling than ever. PAGE—and COURTIERS—do their best to conceal their amusement. As KING turns back, PAGE snaps to attention.)

KING. Ooooh, Greta! Did you have to insult that poor fellow?

GRETA *(a slow, measured, unremorseful response)*. Yes. I did.

KING *(throws his hands in the air and exits UL, as PAGE—and COURTIERS—bow and curtsy)*. I can't go through this again, I tell you. It's too much! Too, too much. Much, much too much...

QUEEN *(following him off, as PAGE—and COURTIERS—bow and curtsy a second time)*. But we must, Duldrum!

(GRETA rises stiffly and follows them off. PAGE—and COURTIERS—bow and curtsy a third time, then, after GRETA is gone, burst out in guffaws. After a moment of this, an offstage FANFARE snaps them ALL back to attention.)

PAGE. King Duldrum of Great Western Wullaberry.

(KING enters, still smiling and waving, even less enthusiastically, and takes his place beside throne. Another FANFARE.)

Queen Flutterbye of Great Western Wullaberry.

(QUEEN enters, putting up a brave front, and takes her place. The third FANFARE begins, sputters out, begins again, sputters out, as if bugler were laughing. PAGE can barely control his own laughter. ALL react according to their moods: embarrassed, amused, angry, etc. Finally, FANFARE sounds. PAGE blurts out announcement.)

PAGE. Princess Greta of Great Western Wullaberry.

(GRETA enters as before and sits on throne.)

Our exalted guest, the Duke of Cuke!

(To another ornate FANFARE, DUKE bounds in from R or through audience, wearing an enormous hat decorated with birds of various feathers and/or fruit and vegetables. With a great effort at balancing himself and the hat, he bows to the ROYAL FAMILY and sinks to one knee in front of GRETA as the FANFARE ends with an off-key BLAT!)

DUKE. Your Majesties. Your Highness. Princess Greta, I know that others have offered you diamonds and emeralds, flattery and roses, but I am not your fancy kind of fellow. I'm a simple man, and I like to come right to the point. Princess Greta, will you marry me?

KING, QUEEN & PAGE *(with COURTIERS)*. Aaaahhhh!
GRETA *(after a moment's consideration, plucks a feather or fruit from DUKE's hat)*. Though as a groom, you'll never do, I believe your hat would make a fine stew.

KING, QUEEN & PAGE (*with COURTIERS, groaning*).
Oooooohhhh!

DUKE. My hat? A stew? (*Reaches up to protect hat and topples himself over, then struggles to right himself like an overturned turtle*.) A stew? My hat? (*Makes it to his feet, snatches feather out of GRETA's hand and reels off R, or through audience, muttering indignantly*.) A stew?
A stew! My hat? My hat!

KING (*calling after him*). Duke! Cuke? Duke of Cuke!
Come back!

QUEEN. He's gone, dear.

KING (*still calling to DUKE*). She really doesn't mean anything by it. She doesn't even like stew. Oh, Duke!
Do come back!

QUEEN. Give up, Duldrum.

(*KING turns back to find PAGE—and COURTIERS—weak with silent laughter. ALL pull themselves together quickly*.)

KING (*to GRETA*). Greta, must you insult every single one of these gentlemen?

GRETA (*as before*). Yes. I must.

KING (*throws his hands in the air and exits*). Too much, too much, too much, toooooooooooooooo much— (*PAGE—and COURTIERS—bow and curtsy as he goes by*)

QUEEN (*following him off*). Hush, Duldrum. Hush...

(*Another round of bows and curtsies. GRETA rises and coolly follows KING and QUEEN out. PAGE and COURTIERS bow and curtsy—then collapse laughing until a FANFARE snaps them back to attention*.)

PAGE. King Duldrum of— (*FANFARE sounds again. PAGE is surprised, but waits it out.*) King Duldrum of Great— (*FANFARE interrupts again. PAGE grows impatient, tries to wedge his announcement in between blasts of FANFARE. COURTIERS murmur their concern at this breach of protocol.*) King...Duldrum...of—

KING (*enters UL*). Enough, enough! Everybody hush! (*FANFARE goes sour and peters out.*) Just forget all that pomp and circumstance. We're exhausted.

PAGE. Very well, Your Majesty.

KING (*taking his position beside throne*). Flutterbye! Greta! Come out here and let's get this over with!

(*QUEEN hurries on, a bit disconcerted but game. GRETA follows, haughty and aloof as ever. They take their places. KING motions for PAGE to get on with it.*)

PAGE. Oh. Well. Um—our ex alted guest, I guess. The Earl of Vinegar!

(*FANFARE begins.*)

KING. I said hush!

(*FANFARE screeches to a halt.*)

EARL (*peers in DR or enters through audience; he wears a fright wig and, once he gets going, bows and chatters incessantly*). Is it time? Am I on? Oh, my, so I am. Very well, then. Hip, hip! Here I go! Your Majesties! Your Highness. I have come, I am here, here am I—as you may have guessed, nay, as you already know—to ask

for, to seek, to request, to hope for, to obtain, to earn through my every waking thought, word, and deed, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer—preferably richer, of course, but no matter, we can work these things out—in sickness and in health, till death do us part, first and foremost, last but not least, now and forever, Princess Greta, your hand, as they say, so to speak, as it were, in marriage.

KING, QUEEN & PAGE (*with COURTIERS*). Aaaaahhhh!

(*GRETA opens her mouth to speak, but EARL goes right on.*)

EARL. And yet, you might ask—and quite rightly, without a qualm, without a doubt—what right have I—a lowly earl, a mere peon, a peasant, you might say—to ask so great a gift, a prize, a treasure from so lofty, so grand, so highborn a princess as your self? What right? What right, indeed? What right at all?

GRETA (*interrupting him, highly annoyed but still cool and aloof*). What right? What left? What up? What down? Be quiet! Be quick! Be gone, you clown!

EARL (*backs away, gasping, momentarily at a loss for words*). What, what, what, what? Me? A clown? A jester? A fool? I'm shocked, I'm astonished, amazed, aghast—(*A beat, then:*) As a matter of fact, I'm gone! (*Exits R or through audience.*)

KING. Earl! Vinegar! Wait!

QUEEN. Give up, Duldrum.

KING (*to GRETA, his usual question, abbreviated*). Greta?

GRETA (*her usual response, also abbreviated, but just as measured and cool*). Yes!

KING. Why?

GRETA. Because.

KING (*tearing his hair*). Oooooooo!

QUEEN. Perhaps you'd better go, Greta.

GRETA. Very well.

(*GRETA exits UL. PAGE—and COURTIERS—begin to follow her, giggling, until she turns and scowls, at which point the giggles turn into coughs and PAGE—and COURTIERS—hurry off R.*)

KING. What are we going to do, Flutterbye?

QUEEN. I don't know.

KING. Even the servants are laughing at us.

QUEEN. I know.

KING. We have a kingdom to run here. How can we manage a kingdom properly when we can't even manage our own daughter?

QUEEN. I don't know.

KING. Everything is at stake, here, Flutterbye, our family, our kingdom, our reputations.

QUEEN. I know.

KING. The situation is absolutely desperate. So...it must be time for the prince.

QUEEN. What prince?

KING. *The* prince. The one and only prince. The prince who will cure Greta of her insulting habit and solve all of our problems. It always turns out that way. A prince is the answer. I suspected that all along. We can bring in knights, earls, and dukes until the moon turns maroon, but it won't do us a bit of good. We need a prince.

QUEEN. No prince has ever agreed to meet Greta, let alone cure her. The world is packed full of pleasant princesses, Duldrum, the kind princes generally prefer. Where are we supposed to get a prince for our Greta?

KING. I don't know where. But a prince is definitely what's needed. Have I ever been wrong?

QUEEN. Well, that depends.

KING. Depends on what?

QUEEN. Are you counting the time you named our cat Henry—and she had kittens? Or what about the time—

KING. That's quite enough, Flutterbye. You mark my words, I'm right about this. A prince and only a prince will cure Greta.

QUEEN. I don't think so. A prince might present a bigger and better challenge, requiring bigger and better insults, but Greta will beat him just the same.

KING. Never.

QUEEN. Any day of the week.

KING. Never.

QUEEN. Even before breakfast.

KING. Never!

QUEEN. With one hand tied behind her back.

KING. NEVER!

QUEEN. We'll never know, will we, until we get a prince in here and see what happens.

KING. That's true. So let's find one. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a prince desperate enough to give our Greta a try.

QUEEN. Princes usually demand half a kingdom for work of this sort.

KING. A small price to pay. We'll issue a proclamation. Wanted: A desperate prince—

QUEEN. To solve a desperate problem. That's very good, Duldrum. Let's do it!

(*KING and QUEEN hurry off L. LIGHTS fade.*)

SCENE 2

AT RISE: *The Village Green, indicated by a sign: GREAT WESTERN WULLABERRY VILLAGE GREEN. FANFARE sounds as PAGE enters L, or through audience, holding a scroll and announcing the proclamation in a running battle with the bugle, which constantly interrupts him with impromptu blasts, blats and melodies. If OTHER COURTIERS are used, they may accompany PAGE, as flag bearers, displaying the king's coat of arms, etc. If VILLAGERS are used, they may follow the procession curiously. VILLAGERS may speak dialogue in italics below, or it may be omitted.*

PAGE (*FANFARE interruptions are indicated by ellipses. PAGE speaks louder and louder in protest.*) Hear ye! Hear ye!...King Duldrum...King Duldrum and Queen Flutterbye...King Duldrum and Queen Flutterbye have issued a royal proclamation...To wit...To whom...To wit...To whom...To wit...To whom it may concern: Wanted...a desperate prince...prince...PRINCE... (*he gets the idea of speaking more softly.*) prince— (*he waits; no fanfare. He continues, softly:*) to solve a desperate problem. The king and queen desire help for their daughter, Princess Greta. Whoever cures her of her insulting habit will inherit half the kingdom of Great

Western Wullaberry. (*Loudly again, with FANFARE resuming interruptions.*) Hear ye...hear ye...! (*PAGE exists—with COURTIERS.*)

FIRST VILLAGER. Cure Greta of her insulting habit?

SECOND VILLAGER. Whatever happened to the easy stuff—like slaying dragons?

THIRD VILLAGER. Or giants?

FOURTH VILLAGER. Or ogres?

FIFTH VILLAGER. Cure Greta?

SIXTH VILLAGER. Impossible!

(VILLAGERS hurry off. LIGHTS fade.)

SCENE 3

AT RISE: *LIGHTS come up on the Village Green, later the same day. After a slight pause, QUEEN and KING enter. KING checks his pocket watch and both strain their necks toward R—or audience—in expectation.*

QUEEN. Well?

KING. Well, what?

QUEEN. Where is he? Where's our prince?

KING (*checking his watch again*). According to my calculations, he ought to be here any minute now. In fact, he ought to have been here several minutes ago.

QUEEN. Three hours and forty-eight minutes ago, according to his letter.

KING (*listening intently*). Hush! Do you hear the sound of a horse's hooves?

QUEEN (*pauses to listen*). No.

KING. Do you hear any sound at all?

QUEEN. No. Wait! Yes! But what in the world is that?

ALFRED (*offstage, from a distance*). Fresh bread and rolls,
fresh bread and rolls.

QUEEN. Fresh bread and rolls?

KING. What an odd way for a prince to announce his arrival. Do you suppose he's hungry?

QUEEN. It's not a prince, Duldrum. It's a baker.

KING. But we're not expecting a baker. We're expecting a prince!

QUEEN. We don't always get what we expect, do we? Remember Henry the cat and her kittens?

KING. But we advertised for a prince, a prince responded, and a prince said he'd be here at two o'clock sharp.

QUEEN. Well, he's either not coming or he can't tell time. Either way, this is not a prince.

ALFRED (*enters R, or through audience, a basket of bread and rolls over his arm*). Fresh bread and rolls! Fresh bread and—oh, hello.

QUEEN. Hello.

KING (*suspicious of ALFRED*). Who are you?

ALFRED. I'm Alfred Greenleaf. Who are you?

KING. Don't you know who we are?

QUEEN. Oh, Duldrum, that's no way to treat a stranger. (*To ALFRED.*) How do you do? I'm Queen Flutterbye and this is King Duldrum. Welcome to Great Western Wullaberry, Mr. Greenleaf.

ALFRED (*setting down his basket and bowing deeply*). Oh, Your Majesties. I had no idea—

QUEEN. That's quite all right. May we call you Alfred?

ALFRED. Of course. I'd be honored.

KING (*still suspicious*). What brings you to Great Western Wullaberry, Alfred? (*Aside.*) If, indeed, that is your name.

ALFRED. I'm a baker, and I'm here to sell my wares. I'd like to set up a new shop.

QUEEN. A new bakery! Isn't that exciting? (*To KING, who is frowning at ALFRED suspiciously.*) Isn't that exciting, Duldrum?

KING. Hmmmm, yes, I suppose so. (*Checks his watch again.*) I'd rather he were a prince, though.

ALFRED. A prince?

QUEEN (*as KING returns to scanning the horizon*). Yes, we're waiting for a prince.

KING. Due to arrive any minute now—I think.

QUEEN. We've had earls, dukes, and knights all along. But none of them has worked out.

ALFRED. Worked out?

QUEEN. As a match for our daughter, Princess Greta.

ALFRED. Oh, I see.

KING. So we issued a proclamation—

QUEEN. And got exactly one response.

KING. Prince Waldo of the Grand Eastern Pits. He said he'd be here this afternoon.

ALFRED. And you want to be the first to greet him when he arrives.

QUEEN. No, we want to be the first to warn him.

ALFRED. Warn him?

KING. About the insults. Every time a duke or earl or knight comes to town, our Greta flattens him with a royal—

QUEEN. Rhyming—

KING. Insult.

QUEEN. The insult fit for a prince may be the highlight of Greta's entire career. So I feel we ought to give Prince Waldo fair warning.

KING. It's my theory that a prince will be the perfect match for Greta, the only one up to the task of curing her of her insulting habit.

ALFRED. Why does it have to be a prince?

KING. Because it always is a prince. Remember the princess who couldn't laugh? Who solved her problem?

ALFRED. A prince.

KING. And the princess atop the glass mountain? And Princess Snow White? And the princess who—

ALFRED. Yes, yes, it's always been a prince. But does it always have to *be* a prince? Couldn't it be someone else for a change?

KING. Who?

ALFRED. A baker, perhaps?

KING. A baker? Do you know what the chances are of a baker solving the problems of a princess?

ALFRED. No, I don't.

KING. One in a million.

ALFRED. Is that so?

KING. According to my calculations. And I'm always right, aren't I, Flutterbye?

QUEEN. Yes, Duldrum, except when you're wrong. Like the time you said the prince would be here—several hours ago. It's getting dark, and I'm tired of waiting. Perhaps we'd better go home, so you can recalculate.

KING (*checks watch, looks for prince once more*). Well, I don't know...

QUEEN. Come along, Alfred. We'll get you settled in for the night. And we'll see about buying some of those rolls of yours, too.

ALFRED. Wonderful! Thank you!

(*QUEEN and ALFRED exit.*)

KING. But what about our *prince*? Oh, dear.

(*He hurries out after them. LIGHTS dim. PRINCE drags himself in or onto stage through audience. He's bedraggled and exhausted.*)

PRINCE. Hello? Anyone here? Oh, I must be terribly late.

(*Shouting off the way he came in.*) Stupid horse! Go on, run away! See if I care! Next time, *I'll* run away and leave *you* sitting in a mud puddle. We'll see how you like it then, won't we? (*He thumbs his nose and makes a rude noise in the horse's direction, then turns his attention back to the Village Green.*) Hello? Prince Waldo of the Grand Eastern Pits here. I believe someone was supposed to meet me on the Village Green? Yoo-hoo! This is Great Western Wullaberry, isn't it?

GRETA (*enters UL, without her scowl*). It is.

PRINCE. At last! A kindly stranger to help me on my way.

I've been walking for hours and I'm totally exhausted.

(*Sits down, removes one boot and massages his foot.*)

GRETA (*with tentative kindness*). I'm sorry—

PRINCE (*interrupting her*). And as if that weren't bad enough, I've got to meet this awful Princess Sourpuss or whatever her name is.

GRETA (*stiffening*). Greta.

PRINCE. Yes, that's the one—Greta. (*Shudders.*) Ugh! From what I've heard, she must be the meanest, ugliest princess in the world. I'm not the least bit interested in meeting her, but my father made me come. A princess is a princess, he said, and there's half a kingdom in it for you. We're a bit short of land, you see, over in the Pits. As a matter of fact, since the last flood, we've been pretty much under water. (*Looks at GRETA.*) But enough about me. Tell me about this Greta. I understand she's given to insults, rhyming insults, they say, and she's driven off fifty-nine dukes, earls and knights. What a joke! Who would be afraid of an ugly girl and her nasty insults?

GRETA. Those who are vain and foolish and weak—and fail to think before they speak.

PRINCE (*laughing*). Oh, that's very clever. It rhymes! It— (*Catching on and scrambling to his feet.*) Gr—reh—reh—reh—reh—reta?

GRETA (*advancing on him as he retreats, backward, boot in hand*). Yes. Greta. Mean, nasty, ugly Greta.

PRINCE. Oh, dear. Um—ah—I think I hear my horse calling me. Yes! I do! Better run! Nice meeting you! Bye!

(He dashes off as he came, trying in vain to get his boot on as he goes. GRETA stands stiff and tall for a moment, then slowly her shoulders sag and she begins to weep. PAGE enters UL, sees her, and runs back off. Then he returns with KING and QUEEN.)

QUEEN. Oh, there you are, Greta. (*GRETA immediately straightens up, quickly wiping away her tears and taking*

on her usual haughty air.) I wish you wouldn't wander off alone like that during our evening walks.

GRETA. I wasn't alone.

QUEEN. You weren't?

GRETA. I met a prince.

KING. A prince?

GRETA. Prince Waldo, I believe, of the Grand Eastern Pits.

KING. Yes! That's the one we've been expecting!

QUEEN. Where is he?

GRETA. Hurrying home, like all the others.

KING. Oh, no! You haven't run him off, have you? (*Silence.*) A prince, Greta! Your one and only prince! I don't believe it!

QUEEN. Believe it, Duldrum.

KING. Oh, Greta! How could you?

GRETA (*her usual cool, measured response*). It...was... easy.

(*GRETA sweeps past KING and QUEEN and exits UL. PAGE follows her out.*)

KING (*shaking his fist*). Ooooooo! What that girl needs—

QUEEN. No, dear, that's not what she needs.

KING. Well, she needs something.

QUEEN. Yes, she does. But I can't imagine what. She's got everything a princess could possibly want: a private tutor—

KING. A lady-in-waiting—

QUEEN. A dance master—

KING. A music teacher—

QUEEN. A horseback-riding coach—

KING. And what have we got? A well-educated, perfectly groomed princess who dances, plays the piano, rides a horse—and insults people!

QUEEN. We must have forgotten something.

KING. But what?

QUEEN. Somebody, somewhere has got to help her.

KING. Who? And where? And how do we find this “somebody, somewhere”?

QUEEN. We could try another royal proclamation.

KING. Who would care? Our subjects know all about Greta and they simply find her amusing. The earls and dukes and knights in the neighborhood won’t come anywhere near her. And now she’s run off a prince. Nobody cares what we proclaim anymore, Flutterbye.

QUEEN. Then how about trying something new? How about...a baker?

KING. Don’t be ridiculous.

QUEEN. Duldrum, we are at our wits’ end. We’ve tried everything else. We must try once more—for Greta and our kingdom.

KING. But—a baker?

QUEEN. He seemed interested.

KING. It’s a one in a million chance.

QUEEN. One is all it takes—if it’s the right one.

KING. Wait a minute, wait a minute here! I’ve got it!

QUEEN. What?

KING. It’s all making sense now. It’s all coming together.

QUEEN. *What?*

KING. Alfred...is a prince in disguise!

QUEEN. What are you talking about?

KING. He is! Why else would he want to try? We’re talking about curing Greta, and to cure Greta you’d have to

face Greta. Who but a prince would have that kind of courage? Alfred is a prince in disguise!

QUEEN. If Alfred is a prince in disguise, I am a barnyard chicken.

KING. If Alfred is *not* a prince in disguise, I am a braying donkey. So buck-buck-a-buck, buck-buck-a-buck to you, Flutterbye.

QUEEN. You mean hee-haw, hee-haw to you, Duldrum.

KING. We'll just see, won't we?

QUEEN. We certainly will. Send for Alfred!

KING (*as they both hurry off UL*). Send for Alfred!

(*LIGHTS dim.*)

SCENE 4

AT RISE: *Greta's room. May be played on bare stage or in front of closed curtain. PAGE enters with a small desk and chair, sets them down. He stands behind chair as GRETA enters, then helps to seat her. She stares straight ahead with her usual scowl.*

PAGE. Does Your Highness require anything more?

GRETA. No, I require nothing.

PAGE. Very well, then. (*Starts to leave, then stops and turns back.*) Your Highness, may I ask you a question?

GRETA. You may.

PAGE. Do you *dream* insults?

GRETA (*coldly*). Yes. I do.

PAGE (*laughing*). I thought so! Good night, Your Highness!

(He exits. GRETA continues to stare for a moment, then her scowl dissolves into an expression of great sadness.)

GRETA. Do I dream insults? Yes! And I call them nightmares. *(She begins to weep, then sighs deeply, dries her eyes and noisily blows her nose.)* Oh, what is to become of me? Why do I do it? Why can't I stop? *(She sighs again, then suddenly opens a desk drawer and pulls out a sheet of paper and a plumed pen. After a moment's thought, she begins to write.)* Dear Knight of Knoodle: I am truly sorry for the way I spoke to you during your recent visit to Great Western Wullaberry. I had no right to discuss your nose. The truth is, I am not what I seem to be. If only you knew me better, you would understand that I am very...very... *(She pauses, at a loss for words, then speaks without writing.)* But how could you possibly understand when I don't understand myself?

(She sighs again, puts away the paper and pen. LIGHTS dim.)

SCENE 5

AT RISE: *Throne room. The stage is bare. PAGE rushes in with throne and all but tosses it into place at C. If additional PAGES and COURTIERS are used, they hurry on and excitedly take their places. PAGE assumes his usual spot just in time to announce—*

PAGE. King Duldrum of Great Western Wullaberry.

KING (*enters quickly from UL, and cuts off a rapidly fired FANFARE with a wave of his arm*). Get on with it, please. The suspense is killing me.

(FANFARES, announcements and entrances get faster and faster until ALFRED practically gallops onto stage from DR or through audience.)

PAGE. Queen Flutterbye of Great Western Wullaberry.

(QUEEN enters as before, only faster.)

Princess Greta of Great Western Wullaberry.

(GRETA enters, as haughty as before. KING hurries her to throne, where she sits down.)

Our not-so-exalted guest, Alfred Greenleaf of the Bakery.

ALFRED (*enters, carrying a long, wrapped package, bows—actually leans over to catch his breath—and gasps out his greetings*). Your Majesties. Your Highness. This is all rather sudden—

QUEEN. Take your time, Alfred.

ALFRED (*takes a deep breath, calms down a bit*). Oh, thank you, Your Majesty.

KING. But not too much time. Get on with it!

ALFRED (*speeding up again*). Yes, Your Majesty. Of course, Your Majesty.

KING. Are you ready, Greta?

GRETA (*grimly*). I'm ready.

KING (*losing faith*). That's what I was afraid of.

QUEEN (*aside to KING*). Hee-haw, Duldrum.

KING (*rising to the challenge, aside to QUEEN*). Buck-buck-a-buck, Flutterbye.

ALFRED (*after another deep breath, pulls himself together and gives it his best shot*). Your Majesties. Your Highness. Good day. (*He bows again, properly.*)

KING, QUEEN, PAGE(S) & COURTIERS. Aaaaaaah!

GRETA. You might think it good if your head were of wood.

KING, QUEEN, PAGE(S) & COURTIERS. Oooooooh!

ALFRED (*quite calmly now*). Yes, I suppose one might, if one could think at all with a wooden head. I don't know anything about that. But an ordinary head like my own definitely finds it good. That much I know for certain.

QUEEN (*aside to KING*). Psssst. (*KING crosses behind throne to her side*). It's going well.

KING. Yes, he's lasted a full five seconds.

QUEEN. Let's leave them alone together.

KING. Good idea.

(*KING and QUEEN tiptoe off DR, signaling to PAGE(S) and COURTIERS to follow. ALL but ALFRED and GRETA exit, but KING and QUEEN can be seen peeking in from time to time.*)

ALFRED (*to GRETA*). I've brought you a gift, Your Highness.

GRETA. To be perfectly blunt, you have nothing I'd want.

ALFRED (*calmly*). Well, of course you don't want it. How could you, when you don't even know what it might be?

GRETA (*confused by his composure, she drops her façade a bit*). What?

ALFRED (*unwraps his gift, a large loaf of bread*). Here it is, my very best recipe. I baked it especially for you.

GRETA (*resumes her scowl*). A loaf for a peasant could hardly be pleasant.

ALFRED (*unruffled*). True enough, a peasant would be pleased to have my delicious bread. But a princess could enjoy it, too. (*Breaks off a bite and chews it with obvious delight.*) Mmmmm, it's very good, if I must say so myself. Care for a bite?

GRETA (*stands up and scowls with all of her might*). What is wrong with you? Why don't you get insulted like all the others?

ALFRED. Insulted? By what?

GRETA. By my words!

ALFRED. Which words?

GRETA. The ones that rhyme!

ALFRED (*laughing*). Oh, Your Highness, I am terribly sorry if I've disappointed you, but it takes two to make an insult: one to give and one to receive. If I'm not insulted by your words, they're not insults. They're just... *words!* And I like myself. I like my bread. Nothing you can say will change my mind.

GRETA. Oh, no? (*She squares off in front of ALFRED.*) Get out of my sight, you blithering blight!

ALFRED (*enjoying him self, as if she'd challenged him to a game*). You may cluck and you may bray; as for me, I plan to stay.

GRETA (*moves in closer*). Insult a princess, you loitering loon? I'll have your head on a platter by noon!

ALFRED (*also steps closer*). You don't scare me and you'll never make queen. You're far too haughty and you're far too mean.

GRETA (*nose to nose with ALFRED*). You nattering nitwit.

ALFRED. You scowling screech owl.

GRETA. You lumox.

ALFRED. You lunkhead.

GRETA. You lizard.

ALFRED. You lout.

(Suddenly they find themselves in a sort of dueling dance to the rhythm of their insults. GRETA begins to enjoy herself; ALFRED already is. The dance grows faster and fancier as they proceed through the alphabet, so that they're competing physically as well as verbally, possibly with cartwheels, pat-a-cake, juggling the ball-like gold ornaments on the throne, tossing the loaf of bread to and fro, etc.)

(At various points in this contest, KING, QUEEN, PAGES and COURTIERS are seen peeking in, reacting in a variety of ways, and quickly withdrawing. Both KING and QUEEN are alarmed at first, but QUEEN quickly sees the humor and fun in it, while KING gets increasingly irate. Finally, he starts onstage, wagging a finger to stop the contest, but QUEEN yanks him back offstage before ALFRED and GRETA notice. When he is pulled off, ALL except ALFRED and GRETA disappear as well.)

GRETA. You artichoke.

ALFRED. You alley cat.

GRETA. You bumbler.

ALFRED. You boor.
GRETA. You coward.
ALFRED. You crumb.
GRETA. You dummy.
ALFRED. You doodlebug.
GRETA. You elephant.
ALFRED. You eel.
GRETA. Flibbertygibbet !
ALFRED. Fussbudget!
GRETA. Gorilla!
ALFRED. Goon!
GRETA. Hippo!
ALFRED. Hiccup!
GRETA. Inkblot!
ALFRED. Iceberg!
GRETA. Jughead !
ALFRED. Joke!
GRETA. Killjoy!
ALFRED. Kumquat!
GRETA. Laughingstock!
ALFRED. Liverwurst!
GRETA. Monster!
ALFRED. Monkey!
GRETA. Nincompoop!
ALFRED. Nanny goat!
GRETA. Onion!
ALFRED. Octopus!
GRETA. Pimple!
ALFRED. Prune!
GRETA. Quagmire!
ALFRED. Quack!
GRETA. Rascal!

ALFRED. Raspberry!

GRETA. Simpleton!

ALFRED. Sourpuss!

GRETA. Turtlehead.

ALFRED. Toad.

GRETA. Upstart!

ALFRED. Undertow!

GRETA. Viper!

ALFRED. Vermin!

GRETA. Weasel!

ALFRED. Weed!

GRETA (*beginning to run out of steam*). You...you...

ALFRED. "X."

GRETA. ...xyloid!

ALFRED (*also tiring*). You...xenophobe!

GRETA. You...you...yahoo!

ALFRED. You...yegg!

GRETA. You...zany!

ALFRED. You...you...you...zip!

GRETA. You...

ALFRED. You...

GRETA. You...

ALFRED. You...

GRETA. YOU...

ALFRED. YOU...

(*They collapse together, tired, triumphant and laughing.*)

GRETA (*when she has caught her breath*). I've never met anyone like you in my entire life.

ALFRED. I'm not surprised. There is no one like me. I'm one in a million. So are you.

GRETA. I don't know how to deal with you.

ALFRED. Or anybody else, from what I've heard. Poor Greta. Shut away in a drafty old palace all by herself.

GRETA. I'm not all by myself. I've got a tutor and an athletic coach and a dance master and a...

ALFRED. All very nice, I'm sure. But do you have a friend?

GRETA. A friend? No. No, I don't.

ALFRED. I'd like to be your friend.

GRETA. You would?

ALFRED. I like you.

GRETA. You do?

ALFRED. Uh-huh.

GRETA (*astounded*). Are you sure?

ALFRED. Of course, I'm sure. Why wouldn't I be?

GRETA. Oh, I don't know. It's just that...I've been so afraid no one would ever really like me. People fuss over me because I'm a princess, but that doesn't mean they like me. Practically everyone I see gets *paid* to spend time with me! (*Suddenly realizing the truth.*) That's why I insult people, isn't it? So they won't insult me first.

ALFRED. What if they did?

GRETA. It would hurt my feelings. Prince Waldo hurt my feelings. He said I was mean and nasty and ugly.

ALFRED. He hurt your feelings because you believed him. Don't you see? It takes *two* to make an insult. I called you a lot of things just now—liverwurstand octopus and prune!—but that didn't hurt your feelings.

GRETA. That's true. It made me laugh. They were just silly old words.

ALFRED. Most insults are, if you like yourself.

GRETA. Well, I am kind of witty.

ALFRED. You certainly are!

GRETA. And I do have a way with words.

ALFRED. Especially words that rhyme.

GRETA. Alfred...maybe I could be a writer! I could write poems!

ALFRED. You already do!

GRETA. But first—I'm going to write to all those dukes and earls and knights and apologize for my insults. In rhyme! "Apologies for what I said. Come back; we'll dine on cake instead!"

ALFRED. I'll bake the cake!

GRETA. What fun! Thank you, Alfred. I think I'll even invite Prince Waldo!

(She dashes off in one direction; KING and QUEEN hurry on from another.)

KING. You've done it, Alfred!

QUEEN. You've cured Greta!

KING. Congratulations, my boy.

ALFRED. Greta cured herself, mostly.

KING. Don't be modest, Alfred. You did it, and now you can tell us the truth.

ALFRED. I've always told you the truth, Your Majesty.

KING *(wagging a finger at him)*. Tut, tut, my boy. There's one little bit of information you've been keeping from us. Out with it now.

ALFRED. I don't know what you mean, Your Majesty.

KING *(tugging at ALFRED's shirt as if it were covering his royal clothing)*. I mean you're a prince disguised as a baker!

ALFRED. Your Majesty, I'm not! This isn't a disguise. These are my clothes!

QUEEN. If Alfred's not a prince, Duldrum, guess what that makes you! Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw! Let's hear it, Duldrum: hee-haw, hee-haw! (*QUEEN chases KING around stage—or through audience—hee-hawing over his ad libbed protests.*)

KING (*suddenly stopping short*). Wait a minute here! Alfred cured Greta. According to our proclamation, he's entitled to half our kingdom. That makes him a prince!

(*FANFARE sounds; PAGE enters and places a crown on ALFRED's head.*)

PAGE. Prince Alfred of Great Western Wullaberry!

ALFRED. I'm a prince! A prince who bakes. Or a baker who princes!

KING. And you, Flutterbye, are a barnyard chicken!
Buck-buck-a-buck, buck-buck-a-buck!

(*Flapping his arms and clucking, he chases her back the other way, clucking above her squeals of protest. They come face-to-face with ALFRED and stop short.*)

ALFRED. Do I have to cure this entire family?

(*KING and QUEEN look at one another sheepishly.*)

KING. Sorry, Flutterbye.

QUEEN. Sorry, Duldrum. (*They giggle and hug.*)

ALFRED & PAGE. Ahhhhhh!

(*If COURTIERS and extra PAGES are used, PAGE exits and soon returns with entire cast, who join in the follow-*

ing coos of approval. But first, GRETA enters, causing a flurry of alarm until QUEEN welcomes her with outstretched arms.)

QUEEN. Greta!

GRETA. Mommy! *(They hug.)*

ALL. Ahhhhhh!

KING *(arms outstretched).* Greta!

GRETA. Daddy! *(They hug.)*

ALL. Ahhhhhh!

KING, QUEEN, and GRETA *(same business).* Alfred!

ALFRED. Family! *(Group hug.)*

ALL. Ahhhhhh!

(If only PAGE is watching, KING, QUEEN, GRETA and ALFRED cry “Page,” to which he responds “Your Majesties!” and joins in a group hug and “Ahhhhh!” If COURTIERS and extra PAGES are used, KING, QUEEN, GRETA and ALFRED cry “Great Western Wullaberry!” to which all reply “Your Majesties!” and join in a really big group hug and “Ahhhhh!”)

KING. You truly are one in a million, Alfred!

ALFRED. Thank you, Your Majesty. *(Takes GRETA’s hand and speaks to audience.)* You’re one in a million, too!

GRETA. Every last one of you!

(One last, rapturous FANFARE, as ALL blow kisses and wave and possibly exit through audience. LIGHTS dim. Curtain. End of play.)

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

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