

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Beauty and the Beast

by Charles Way

Based on the story by LePrince de Beaumont

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CHARACTERS

George Godwin

Cassandra

Belle

Daniel Knightly

Jan

The Beast

The Housekeeper

Dancers/Shadows/Wolves

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

SETTING

The action takes place in London and the West Country Circa 1790. Belle is born in 1775, the same year as Jane Austen.

ACT ONE

A crack of thunder. The play begins in the bind of Belle, a merchant's daughter. She is dreaming about a storm at sea, which is slowly gathering strength. All manner of objects, to do with ships and the sea, float by her – ropes barrels, anchors. These need not be realistic in size. Some can be miniature and others enormous. Voices can be heard trying to shout over the rising wind. Belle herself, dressed in a night gown, stands in the middle of the confusion, her eyes wide open. She barely moves, but she clutches a soft toy dog, to her.

Behind her, shapes become clear and we see the figure of a seaman, in silhouette, trying to hold the wheel of the ship steady. This silhouette is important since it forms part of the 'shadow language' for the rest of the play. It is the form Belle's dreams or visions take.

The noise of the storm then ceases, though the action continues. Belle then becomes part of the dream, dancing beautifully through the moving objects. The wind then returns and she is no longer in control. The storm reaches a climax, with a terrible crack of thunder, and Belle collapses, the dream vanishes.

It is Morning. Enter Belle's sister Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

Belle? Belle, wake up, wake up!

Belle stirs.

CASSANDRA

I wish you'd stop doing this.

BELLE

Where am I?

CASSANDRA

Home where do you think?

BELLE

Is it over?

CASSANDRA

Is what over?

BELLE

Thunder, lightning.

CASSANDRA

You had another dream, that's all.

BELLE

No, it was more than a dream – it was –

CASSANDRA

And you were sleep – walking. I woke up and you were gone – again – on your travels with – *(She picks up the toy dog)*

BELLE

Janet.

CASSANDRA

Do you think that's a proper name for a dog?

BELLE

Give it back.

CASSANDRA

Was it a scary dream, Janet?

BELLE

There was a terrible storm and everything was floating about, like in a ...

CASSANDRA

Like in a dream.

Cassandra opens the shutters and light floods in.

CASSANDRA

There you see – no storm, just another beautiful day, cloudless. Belle, come to the window, come on. What are you scared of now?

BELLE

Nothing.

CASSANDRA

Then come here.

Slowly Belle approaches the window – suddenly Cassandra is behind here and covers her eyes with her hands.

BELLE

Don't, don't –

CASSANDRA

Stop wriggling – stop. There's nothing to be scared of.

BELLE

What are you doing?

CASSANDRA

It's a game.

BELLE

I don't like tit. What's out there?

CASSANDRA

Listen.

Slowly the sound of the outside world; the sounds of a busy street in London. Belle opens her eyes.

CASSANDRA

How sill you are. *(Mimics)* What's out there? London is out there. London. Horses, coaches, dances, theatre, opera –

BELLE

I don't like London.

CASSANDRA

Nonsense. "To be scared of London is to be scared of life." Someone nearly said that once. Anyway, there's nothing to be scared of, as long as one walks at a swift pace.

BELLE

Then there is something to be scared of?

CASSANDRA

Very well, we'll run. We will run headlong down the Strand.

BELLE

Run?

CASSANDRA

With our hair flowing all the way back to Buckingham Palace. And then we'll go to Convent Garden and laugh at some very strange shaped vegetables.

BELLE

I'd rather stay in.

CASSANDRA

Oh Belle.

BELLE

In my dream.

CASSANDRA

It is my solemn duty, sister, to inform you that your dreams are incredibly dull. I shall go on my own.

BELLE

You can't Father said quite clearly, that we must only go into town together.

CASSANDRA

Then, come with me. You force me to disobey him.

BELLE

You wouldn't dare.

Cassandra knows this is true and in frustration, she throws 'Janet' at Belle. Belle throws it back.

CASSANDRA

Perhaps Janet would like to see London?

BELLE

Don't, don't! *(Cassandra throws the dog out of the window.)* Cassandra!

CASSANDRA

Now look at you run to the window, without a fear in the world.

BELLE

It's him – he's here.

Cassandra runs to the window.

CASSANDRA

At this hour? Daniel. *(She waves)*

Cassandra! **BELLE**

Come up – come up. **CASSANDRA**

No, we're not dressed. **BELLE**

How wicked we are. **CASSANDRA**

Belle tries to flee but there is a knock at the door. She freezes, grabs a bed cover and wraps it round her. Enter Daniel Knightly with dog, he bows.

Ladies, good morning. **DANIEL**

It is, suddenly, a very good morning. **CASSANDRA**

I see, I've caught you unprepared. **DANIEL**

Perhaps not. Don't blush, Belle, it doesn't match the – the dress. **CASSANDRA**

That's a new style I take it. **DANIEL**

Just in from – from Paris – la spread de bed. **CASSANDRA**

Bonjour, Madame Belle. Your dog gave me quite a scare. It is yours, I believe, Madame? **DANIEL**

She's lost her voice. **CASSANDRA**

I'm sorry to hear that. **DANIEL**

CASSANDRA

You won't have to – it's lost – lost. She's very careless – lost her sense of humor years ago – how we searched.

She takes the dog from Daniel and throws it back to Belle. Then she takes Daniel to one side.

CASSANDRA

It's very early to be calling on a young lady.

DANIEL

I've come to speak to your Father, on a most urgent matter.

CASSANDRA

That concerns?

DANIEL

That concerns our future happiness.

CASSANDRA

Daniel...

She throws her arms around him.

BELLE

Cassandra!

CASSANDRA

Did you hear something?

DANIEL

Nothing, nothing at all.

They kiss. Belle covers her face with the bedspread.

CASSANDRA

I'll go and wake Father. Belle, stay with Mister Knightly – entertain him.

Belle has never been so embarrassed.

DANIEL

Belle...May I speak plainly to you? It is my fervent hope that your sister and I shall be married. And I also hope – that you and I, can be friends. may I assure you, that whatever my reputation, as a – an adventurer – that I love her. I love her more than is possible to say, I love her – fervently. (*Silence*) Yes, ah – what's this?

BELLE

It's a book.

DANIEL

Yes, I recognize the shape. 'Myths and Legends of the Ancient Greeks'. Have you ever been to Greece?

BELLE

No.

DANIEL

I have – once in Aegean sea I was sat upon by Pirates.

BELLE

Sat upon?

DANIEL

Attacked, captured – sat upon and – tortured.

BELLE

Torture indeed sir, to be used, as a common chair. A man of your worth could at least expect as a chaise longue.

Silence.

DANIEL

But I overcame the guard, he was drunk, which gave me the edge. I then dressed in his pirate clothes. I am a master of disguise, and then went up on dock. The pirate captain was there waiting, sword in hand. He had his wonderful black beard as long as a rope, black as coal, and in his beard, were diamonds – diamonds, that shone –

BELLE

Fervently, no doubt.

DANIEL

I see you're not impressed by my adventures.

BELLE

What did you do?

DANIEL

I cut off his head – beard – diamonds and all. *(He takes out a ring from his pocket)* This ring contains one of those diamonds, soon it will belong to your sister. Whom I love, indeed most – fervently – but I promise I will never use that word again in your company.

BELLE

And these 'diamonds' are they the basis of your wealth?

Enter Cassandra

CASSANDRA

He's on his way.

Belle suddenly screams.

DANIEL

What? What?

BELLE

A spi – spi – spi –

CASSANDRA

Will you stop doing that.

DANIEL

What troubles you?

CASSANDRA

A spider.

DANIEL

Are you scared of spiders?

CASSANDRA

She's scared of everything. There, it's gone. It's free – free as a – spider, Belle! it's gone.

Enter George Goodwin.

GODWIN

Mr. Knightly. What brings you here so early?

DANIEL

Last night, sir, your ships were reported three miles off the coast of Dover.

GODWIN

Ha, ha! So soon – so soon. Ha Ha! *(He embraces Daniel)* Fortune does indeed favor the brave.

CASSANDRA

Belle, by noon we shall be rich, rich beyond our wildest dreams. From this day forward you shall want for nothing. ha ha! Is there something else, Mister Knightly?

GODWIN

I did not expect them to arrive from France until Tuesday –

DANIEL

If I may ask –

GODWIN

Why are you wearing a bedcover? From today, you shall have clothes fit for a princess – my Beauty. You are your Mother's image. If only she were here to share this day.

CASSANDRA

Father?

GODWIN

Yes.

DANIEL

Sir, if I may now ask, beg – please, for you daughter's hand in marriage...

GODWIN

Belle? You are a dark horse.

DANIEL

No sir, Cassandra.

GODWIN

Cassandra?

CASSANDRA

Yes!

DANIEL

Whom I love most – f-f-f-fervently

GODWIN

My dear boy, my sweet things. I've been so taken up with the business of risk – that I – I failed to see this particular ship so near the harbor wall. Is your heart true?

DANIEL

Yes sir.

GODWIN

And you – love him?

CASSANDRA

I do.

GODWIN

Be happy then, but be cautious, your combined fortunes will make you the envy of this great, greedy city. Of which I shall shortly be the Merchant King. Ha, ha – Daniel, my son, go down to Tillbury Docks and wait for the news of my ships. I shall – I shall – I shall go and get dressed.

Exit Godwin.

CASSANDRA

Everything I ever dreamed is coming true.

DANIEL

I shall never leave you.

He goes. Cassandra dances around the room.

CASSANDRA

What's the matter?

BELLE

Strange, how they say they'll never leave, then do so immediately.

CASSANDRA

Will you be my bridesmaid?

BELLE

If you want.

CASSANDRA

Of course, I want. Oh, Belle, whatever will we do with you? I know, we'll start with your hair.

BELLE

What's wrong with my hair?

CASSANDRA

Nothing, you just need to let it down.

BELLE

I don't like it down, I like it up.

CASSANDRA

You don't want to look pretty?

BELLE

No.

CASSANDRA

Why not?

BELLE

What for?

CASSANDRA

For fun, Belle – to feel the wind rushing through it – the rain soaking every strand and the sun baking it dry until the wind starts to blow through it again and again.

She dances.

BELLE

I'm going to get dressed. *(Cassandra grabs both her arms and forces her to dance)*
Cassandra, please stop.

CASSANDRA

Never.

They dance and laugh, until both are dizzy and they fall over. Enter Daniel.

CASSANDRA

Daniel, what is it? What's the matter?

DANIEL

Call your Father.

CASSANDRA

Father!

Exit Cassandra.

BELLE

What has happened, Mr. Knightly? Why do you look so grim.

Enter Godwin.

GODWIN

Daniel? Back so soon? What news?

DANIEL

A crowd of men, who say you owe them money, are marching from the docks. They have sticks and stones and are in a grim mood Mr. Godwin.

GODWIN

My ships - ?

DANIEL

Last night, your ships –

BELLE

A storm at sea?

DANIEL

You know?

BELLE

No – I –

GODWIN

For pity's sake, man, what kind of storm? What has happened to my ships?

DANIEL

Lost, sir.

GODWIN

Lost? How many Lost?

DANIEL

All – sir.

GODWIN

All? All my ships are lost?

DANIEL

It took them by surprise, a storm out of nothing. Waves as high as hills –

Godwin collapses.

CASSANDRA

Father?

The men? **GODWIN**

Sixteen are saved – **DANIEL**

Thank God for that, at least – **GODWIN**

CASSANDRA
Father, surely you have money put by, in case of such an accident.

No. **GODWIN**

You are insured? **CASSANDRA**

GODWIN
The insurers said the risk was too high. But still I borrowed money. I borrowed, I took the risk. The men I borrowed from want it back – they're marching down upon us now.

CASSANDRA
We have nothing left?

GODWIN
Nothing.

There is a sudden banging on the door.

BELLE
Thunder. Lighting.

CASSANDRA
Be quiet.

There is more banging, which now can become unrealistic, a threatening sound.

GODWIN
God have mercy on us.

BELLE
My dream, my dream.

CASSANDRA

Stop it! Mr. Knightly and I, are to be married. His fortune can save us. Daniel, you have money, come to our rescue – you can get rid of these men, Daniel?

DANIEL

Cassandra...

CASSANDRA

What is it?

GODWIN

A little money is all I need, to give me time. I beg you – I will repay you, I swear. On my daughter's love, I swear.

Another knocking sound. Belle covers her ears.

CASSANDRA

Daniel?

DANIEL

I am not – I am not wealthy.

CASSANDRA

The diamonds?

DANIEL

They – are not real.

CASSANDRA

Not real? But you have money, you said, you had money.

DANIEL

Everyone says they have money, but I do not.

CASSANDRA

You lied?

DANIEL

No – yes, because I love you and you would not look at me, if I were not –

CASSANDRA

You are – worthless then.

DANIEL

Yes – no, I am – I have nothing, but you also have nothing.

CASSANDRA

You were going to marry me for my fortune, now it's gone.

DANIEL

I will still marry you, I love you.

The noise outside increases. Belle starts to dance as if she were not in the scene at all.

BELLE

Thunder, lightning.

CASSANDRA

Stop it, stop, stop.

GODWIN

I'm lost, I'm lost.

DANIEL

Cassandra?

CASSANDRA

Go away, go away. I never wish to see your face again.

GODWIN

My heart, my heart.

CASSANDRA

Father?

The knocking on the door reaches a climax. There now follows a dream like change, involving sound and movement, as the scene changes to a poor cottage in Devon. The interior is visible, as is the outside yard. Throughout this change, Belle dances as the items signifying their wealth drift away, all around her.

CASSANDRA

Wake up! Belle! Belle! *(She shakes Belle)* Wake up.

BELLE

Help me, help me.

CASSANDRA

Belle!

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