

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

The Snow Queen

by Charles Way

Based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen

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Characters :

- Gerda
- Cei
- Mr Overskou
- Mrs Fyn
- Grandmother
- John
- Elisa
- The Snow Queen
- Queen of Spring {Mrs D}
- Queen of Summer {Fredrica}
- Queen of Autumn {Robber Girl}
- Snowdrop
- Bindweed
- Daffodil
- JJ
- Lily
- Robber Girl
- Robber Mother
- Laughing Robber.
- Bae
- Snow Creatures /Trolls?

{The play was written for a minimum cast of eight, five female, three male}

{Running Time. First half-40 minutes. Second half 40 minutes.}

Note: The play begins in a 're-imagined' industrial landscape; a northern brick making town in a northern country- like Denmark in the late 19th century . The costumes may then, reflect this pre modern age even though the speech rhythms of the characters are of now.

The Snow Queen

Act One.

Grandma Once upon a time-there it's been said and we're about to begin and here you are-wondering what on earth it's all going to be about. Well-I can tell you this-we shall know more about it at the end, than we do now. So-once upon a time-

{Music}

In the far frozen north of the world there lived a beautiful and powerful Queen, The Snow Queen.

[Lights rise on the Snow Queen.]

She lived in a palace made of ice and snow-Oh what a sparkling, cold palace it was with endless empty halls and in the middle of it a frozen lake into which the Snow Queen looked from time to time to see how beautiful she was, but she was not content because the lake always had some natural flaw in it-a crack, a bubble of air- and her own face could not be perfectly reflected back. So one day she ordered her servants-

[Enter Ice trolls]

strange troll like creatures she'd blown together with bits of ice and snow, to make her something that would perfectly reflect her own cold image forever and ever. A mirror. For a thousand years the ice trolls toiled until one day the mirror was made.

[The Trolls hold the mirror]

Oh how perfect it was, without blemish or blight and as the Snow Queen gazed into the mirror-she thought -Oh-how beautiful I truly am -if only everything was as perfect and as cold as me. As she stared into the mirror her vanity and pride grew and grew and the mirror reflected these cold qualities back a thousand times- and inch by inch ice began to cover the world. It was a long and terrible time, very little grew and anything that did grow soon froze to death.

The Snow Queen was so pleased with herself that she clapped her icy hands in glee and the trolls heard her cold rhythm and picked up the mirror and began to dance. Oh what a dance. They danced for a thousand years until even they grew weak and tired-and then one day--

[The Mirror is dropped by the trolls with a thud.]

That's right-they dropped it. A small crack appeared, hard to see at first but the mirror was oddly misshapen-the glass distorted and when the Snow Queen looked into it she did not seem beautiful or perfect anymore.

In a cold rage she ordered the ice trolls to destroy the mirror and with a freezing breath blew them to the top of the tallest mountain and there with all their strength they flung the mirror into the night sky. Higher and higher it went, spinning in the stillness of the heavens, until with terrible force, cover your ears now-

[A huge explosion]

It cracked and shattered, splintering into a million tiny pieces.

But here's the thing -since the day the mirror cracked fragments of it have been falling down to earth. Some smaller than specks of dust small enough to get into people's eyes- and when this happens they become-how should I say- a touch vain- a little proud. Everything that was good suddenly seems bad, beautiful landscapes look like boiled spinach. Some people even get a little bit of glass into their hearts and when this happens-well, you will see what happens. The years passed and the ice retreated. As for the Snow Queen-she's all but forgotten but-I say to you-be careful because in her cold heart she longs to be powerful again. She visits now-just once a year-when the snow begins to fall as it does now-on our cold northern town....

[Lights rise on Gerda's world- John & Elisa enter throwing snowballs. Gerda follows but does not join in.]

John Got you.

Elisa Got you back!

John Come on Gerda-

Gerda No I can't- I have a new skirt.

John It's only snow.

Gerda It's dirty.

John No it isn't. Its-Ow.

Elisa Got you! I love the snow Gerda-I really love it-I'm in love with it-I love the taste of it-the feel of it the-the- 'snowness' of it -the-Ow.

John Got you back!

[Enter Cei in a world of his own dancing to a rhythm in his head- he almost bumps into Gerda.]

Cei Gerda!

Gerda What are you doing?

Cei Dancing-

John You call that *dancing*?

Elisa I thought it was great Cei –I loved it-really loved it-I'm in love with-with your *dancing*.

John Oh yes-how about this then?

[John dances madly and oddly-makes them all laugh, except Gerda who watches seriously.]

Elisa I love it-I love it.

John Your turn.

Cei Go on Elisa. [He sets up a rhythm for her]

Elisa Right.

[Elisa dances even more oddly than John and Cei and John applaud when she finishes.]

John Hah that was top class-your turn Gerty.

Gerda No I-

Elisa Come on Gerda.

John Give us a laugh.

Gerda No I can't-

Elisa Course you can.

John Come on.

Gerda No --I don't want to.

John You'd rather have a snowball in the face?

Cei Leave her alone.

J+E Ooooooh.

John You in love?

Elisa [Throws a snowball at John] No they're not. Are you?

Cei Do you want to see something incredible. I mean like-really amazing?

[Cei swiftly makes a pile of snow. From his schoolbag he puts on it a ruler and other school items]

Cei Da. Da.

Elisa What's that then?

Cei Ice palace.

Elisa Oh?

Cei Obviously.

John That's not a palace-and it's not amazing-It's a blob.

Cei It's a palace

John Blob.

Cei What do you think Gerda?

Gerda Well I----

Cei Elisa?

Elisa I love it –no really. Love it to bits.

John Me to- too bits-[He kicks over the snow]

Cei Don't you --

[Cei chases John- grabs him and tries to push his face in the snow but John gets the better of him. From behind Gerda throws a snowball at John. It hits him.]

Elisa Now were talking. Fiiiiiiiiight.

[A mad snow ball fight occurs and they all laugh and laugh-Gerda loses herself in the fun. The school bell rings. They stop.]

Elisa Bell stops fun.

Gerda Oh no look at my dress.

John It's alright Gerda-don't worry so much.

Cei It's only school. And our motto is?

John 'Learn to live.

Elisa Live to learn'

Cei [Improvises] 'That's our motto all this term'.

Do your sums –dot your eyes

Don't answer back and don't ask why.

Figures and facts-can't be denied

If you fail at school you might as well Die-IE

John Nice one.

Elisa Love it.

[They form a line and chant the school motto as they enter the school Room represented by Mr Overskou and a blackboard. They sit before Mr Overskou- a kind man at heart but one bound by convention.]

Children Learn to live-live to learn.

That's our motto-all this term.

Mr Overskou Now-to last evening's homework.

[They take a deep breath]

Mr O I asked you to design a new town-for a new age- a perfect town-a town with so many factories employing so many people wearing so many clogs, in which workers earn so much money and spend so much money-income and outcome etc. Elisa?

Elisa Sir?

Mr O Why are you here-in this room?

Elisa To get a good education sir. Oh? Am I in the wrong room?

Mr O Almost certainly. John?

John Sir?

Mr O Answer the question boy -why are you here?

John Oh-right-um-because my parents fell in love Sir- and one thing led to another--

Mr O Gerda?

Gerda Yes Father- Sir. To help us get good jobs sir.

Mr O And what Job would that be -Cei?

Cei I don't know sir.

Mr O A town with six brick making factories and *you don't know?*

Cei I know what I'd like to be.

MR O I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU'D LIKE TO BE! If every child ended up in the job they'd like the world would be full of boxers and ballerinas. Look outside- what do you see? WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Cei Um-Streets-factories-shops-houses-

Mr O Any penguins?

[Silence]

Mr O Any penguins Master Fyn?

Cei No sir.

Mr O Then how do you explain this?

[Mr O holds up or reveals a large sheet of white paper on which is a design for a new town. In the centre there is a penguin, wearing a bobble hat.]

Cei I don't know sir-it just appeared-

Mr O Master Fyn, you are insubordinate.

Cei Thankyou sir.

Mr O Which means-insolent-rude-

Cei But I did see a penguin sir-

MR O YOU DID NOT SEE ANY PENGUINS! THERE ARE NO PENGUINS IN THIS TOWN. You are an imbecile Master Fyn. What are you?

Cei An imbecile SIR!

Mr O You will write out a thousand times –'there are no penguins in this town'. All of you repeat after me,' There are no penguins in this town'. Now get out all of you

[Thus chanting –'There are no penguins in this town' they leave school. Finally Cei laughs]

[John and Elisa hurry off.]

Gerda It isn't funny Cei-

Cei A thousand lines- I'll still be doing them at the end of time. Where are you going?

Gerda Home.

Cei Not that way-here-take my hand.

Gerda What?

Cei My hand quickly-quickly.

Gerda No-stop-people are looking.

Cei They're not people Gerda they're-IMBECILES-and they're after us-they're going to eat us
and our escape is –is across the rickety rope bridge.

Gerda What rickety rope bridge?

Cei The one across this ravenous ravine. Quick.

[He grabs her hand.]

Gerda Let go of me-let go!

Cei No, no ,no Gerda, don't let go-don't let—

[She pulls away and falls over. He falls with a fading cry]

Gerda My skirt.

Cei You let go? And I fell a thousand feet from the rickety rope bridge down into the
ravenous ravine onto the –the-raggedy rocks.

Gerda It won't come off.

Cei Are you the same Gerda who lived next door?

Gerda What do you mean?

Cei There used to be this girl next door-unusual- is how I'd describe her-and when we were
little she and I used to play together all the time. Our houses were so close at the top we
could jump from my room to hers-across the ravenous ravine. We even put a plank
across and built a little garden.

Gerda Stop it Cei.

Cei Some roses-but they never grew.

Gerda See what you've done?

Cei It's only a little mud Gerda-it's what the world's made of.

Gerda You don't understand--My Father. [She starts to breath rapidly]

Cei Don't panic so-

Gerda But it's- [She breathes into a brown paper bag. He waits-used to this] new.

Cei Come over to my house right now and Mother will clean it off in no time. Come on.

Gerda No-no.

Cei She'd love to see you-she's always saying-ask Gerda in for some tea and a slice of Copenhagen cake.

[He drags her forward. A light rises on Mrs Fyn. She stands over a wooden tub full of washing, She is exhausted but at the sound of Cei's voice-she smiles.]

Cei Mum!

Mrs Fyn Cei-and Gerda too-how very good. We don't see enough of you these days. You're tired I suppose after all that learning. I'll make some tea and you'll have a slice of cake I hope from Copenhagen.

Cei Gerda's got some mud on her skirt. And it's important her Father doesn't know.

Mrs Fyn [Mrs Fyn takes a sponge and starts to work on the skirt] Cei's not getting you into trouble I hope?

Gerda No Mrs Fyn-not me.

Mrs Fyn Oh-the Penguin?

[Outside the house Mister Overskou approaches.]

Mr O Mrs Fyn-are you at home?

Gerda Father!

Cei What does he want-here?

Gerda My skirt--my skirt--

Mrs Fyn Don't fluster yourself Gerda-now go upstairs .

I'll be with you now Mr Overskou-[She shoos them upstairs] in a minute. Go-go.

MR O Ah Mrs Fyn

Mrs Fyn Mister Overskou-you look well though a little tired, it's the teaching profession-it's not the same these days I've read all about it- you'd like a cup of tea. [Exit]

Cei Jump-you'll have to jump

Gerda I can't.

Cei Why not-you'll be home before he is?

Gerda You know why.

Cei You're frightened.

Gerda It's forbidden.

Mr O Mrs Fyn? I'm here in a professional capacity.

[Enter Mrs Fyn with the same cups of tea]

Mrs Fyn Ah-I thought so-you've come about the penguin, Cei!

Mr O No-I'd like to speak to you.

Mrs Fyn Oh? I'm very pleased to hear that Mister Overskou-Thomas. We've known each have such fond memories of your dear wife. I remember once --

Mr O Mrs Fyn-this is difficult enough.

Mrs Fyn Oh?

[Above them Cei puts a plank across the divide between the upper stories of the two houses and as her father speaks she gingerly makes her way across.]

Mr O This is a hard cold town Mrs Fyn, as you know. Everyday folk come in from the countryside, looking for work and they're prepared to accept harsh conditions-they're prepared to accept reality. Unfortunately your son does not seem to have any notion of this reality. He lives in some sort of dreamland imagining that one day he will become a famous singer-or worse-a poet. Mrs Fyn-I have twenty-thirty children waiting to take his place, children who are willing to learn the nature of reality. I fear I cannot educate your son. Out of respect for you and your circumstances I will give him one more chance - though I fear he is incapable of taking it-after that I will let him go. I will expel him-if I have to.

Mrs Fyn Thankyou, Mr Overskou-for your honesty. Will that be all?

Mr O One other thing-Mrs Fyn. For Gerda's sake I would be grateful If you would tell your son-not to speak to her anymore.

[Silence]

I feel he is a bad influence -at this time- and is capable of leading her astray-and I must protect her. You understand I'm sure.

[She takes his cup from him]

Mrs Fyn Goodbye Mister Overskou.

[Mr Overskou steps outside and snow falls –but only upon him. He goes into his own house where Gerda's grandmother is stirring soup in an iron pot. Upstairs Gerda treads quietly.]

Grandma You look troubled Thomas.

Mr O Where's Gerda?

Grandma She's not home yet.

[They both hear a noise from upstairs.]

Mr O I want to speak to her. Would you fetch her down?

Grandma I bought the boots

Mr O The boots?

Grandma The boots you asked me to get for Gerda.

[She shows them to Mr O]

Mr O No,no,no, black shoes, not red boots. Gerda can't go to school in red boots- you stupid woman. She can't go to church or even to the shops-she can't do anything in red boots unless she's running away to join the circus! Gerda. Gerda.

[Gerda comes down and as she leaves her room Cei crosses from his room to hers and overhears what's said.]

Mr O Gerda, you know that everything I do is in your own best-- -what have you done to your new skirt?

Gerda Nothing-I was playing-I fell.

Mr O Playing-who with? --Who with?

Gerda With Cei. Master Fyn.

Mr O I see- you will not 'play' with Master Fyn anymore. From this day on you will not associate with him.

Grandma Associate?

Mr O Mother!

Grandma I don't know what associate may mean, seeing as he's our next door neighbour but then I am a bit 'stupid'.

Mr O I have already spoken to his mother. You will not speak to Cei or spend any time in his company.

Gerda But I don't understand, he's-I've known him all my life—

Mr O It's for your own good and there's an end to it.

[Gerda is about to reply but then turns and goes up to her room. Cei goes back to his own house across the plank. He pulls it back in to his room. The Snow Queen watches him.]

Mr O See she gets some supper.

Grandma I will. You can fetch your own.

[Gerda-is breathing hard-she goes to her window and takes the cold air into her lungs. Enter Grandma.]

Grandma Your Father can't stop you being friends with Cei. It would be like trying to stop spring following on the heels of winter. It can't be done.

Gerda [She hugs Grandma.] What would I do without you Grandma?

Grandma You'd do very well child. Sleep now-sleep.

[Grandma sends her off to sleep with the following rhyme]

Grandma Against the snow, the ice, the cold

To my hand tightly hold

The blood within is warm and true

The heart is hot and red of hue.

[Gerda falls asleep and Cei goes downstairs.]

Mrs Fyn Cei, there you are---

Cei I heard what Mr Overskou said. I can't obey mother -I won't

Mrs Fyn Something's changed in that man-ever since his wife passed on I suppose.

Cei Father wasn't like that-was he?

Mrs Fyn Ha-no-in no way-your Father? Bless the holes in his socks.

Cei One day things will be better for us mother—I'll audition for the Grand theatre and make lots of money- no more holes in socks-I promise.

Mrs Fyn It's cold in here –frost on the window. The river will be frozen by tomorrow.

Cei Great-I'd go skating-if –I- had-some SKATES!

Mrs Fyn You know how much skates cost?

Cei Will you sing to me mother?

Mrs Fyn It's getting late

Cei Just one – please.

Mrs Fyn Snow, snow , falling down
Soft and light on the ground
Covering the world with a blanket –bright
Softly falling through the night.

Cei You made that up!

Mrs Fyn Of course. Goodnight Cei.

PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT