

Scene Four
The Manor House

(One week later. CINDERELLA exits as the STEPMOTHER, JOY, and GRACE enter, all decked out for the ball. Music out.)

STEMMOTHER. Tonight my girls will be the envy of everyone at the ball!

JOY. Do you really think so, Mother?

GRACE. She said so, didn't she?

STEMMOTHER. Why, our family has always been known for its fascinating women. I might have married a prince myself if I'd had the advantages you've had.

(With growing bitterness.)

If I'd had someone to push me like you girls do, someone to sacrifice everything for *me*!

(She collects herself.)

Now tell me, Grace - what will you say when you meet the prince?

(GRACE is a bundle of nerves, anxious for her mother's approval, and when she's nervous, she itches uncontrollably.)

GRACE. Well, you said to show him there's more to me than mere beauty, so I'm going to recite a poem.

JOY. Poetry? Bor-ing!

GRACE. Is not!

JOY. Is so!

GRACE. Not!

JOY. So!

GRACE. *Not!*

STEMMOTHER. So much bickering, so little time! For heaven's sake, Grace, stop scratching yourself.

GRACE. I can't help it. You know I get itchy when I'm nervous.

STEPMOTHER. Poppycock! Now Joy, how do you plan to make an impression upon the prince?

JOY. I've been cultivating my naturally infectious laughter.

GRACE. As if.

JOY. The prince's every witty remark will be met with peals of delighted laughter.

(She demonstrates, topping off her high-pitched twitter with an involuntary snort.)

STEPMOTHER. *(Wincing.)* Joy, I beg of you, whatever you do – do not snort at the prince. Remember girls: “The clever bride hides her flaws...”?

JOY & GRACE. “...Until *after* the wedding.”

STEPMOTHER. Good!

CINDERELLA. *(Entering, wearing her mother's dress.)* So, what do you think?

STEPMOTHER. Think about what, Cinderella?

CINDERELLA. *(Turning to show off her dress.)* My dress. For the ball.

STEPMOTHER. The ball? You?

(They look to one another, then break into fits of laughter.)

CINDERELLA. What's so funny? Every eligible girl is *commanded* to attend.

STEPMOTHER. I'll do the commanding around here! So, tell me, Lady Cinderella, what would you say to capture the prince?

CINDERELLA. I won't try to capture him. I'll get to know him – ask him about himself.

STEPMOTHER. Fascinating. Take my advice, Cinderella, which I give with all my heart. Know your place and be satisfied with it. And your place is here.

GRACE. You were gonna go to the royal palace in that funky old thing?

JOY. Now *that's* funny!

(She lets rip with a series of giggles and snorts.)

STEPMOTHER. Now, girls, there's no need to be mean.

(Crossing to CINDERELLA, slyly.)

Cinderella, I think your dress is...sweet. It becomes you. It's just that, well -

(She grabs the sleeve, gives it a yank, and rips the dress, which now hangs sadly.)

Cheap cloth, Cinderella. Like what you're cut from.

CINDERELLA. *(Struggling to control herself.)* This was my mother's dress and it's beautiful.

STEPMOTHER. Your mother was common and so is that dress. And so are you.

CINDERELLA. If my father were alive...

STEPMOTHER. But he's not, is he?

CINDERELLA. I have as much right to go to the ball as they do!

STEPMOTHER. Right? You have a right?! When your father died everyone said, "Throw her into the street! After all, she's not *your* daughter!" But no. I've kept you on all these years - sacrificed for you at the expense of my *own* daughters! And this is the thanks I get!

GRACE. Have you ever seen a more ungrateful child in your life?

JOY. Who are *you* callin' ungrateful?!

GRACE. *(Ready to slug her.)* Sister, you are workin' my last good nerve!

STEPMOTHER. Now girls, I do not want you getting upset. Be a swan, Grace, be a swan.

(GRACE breathes deeply and flutters her arms a bit.)

Shoulders back, Joy, and try to live up to your name.

(JOY smiles lamely. We hear the carriage pulling up outside the house.)

STEPMOTHER. Ah, there's the coach. Girls, this is our big chance – don't fail me now. And remember: "Restraint..?"

GRACE & JOY. "...Above all else!"

STEPMOTHER. Good! Cinderella, the door.

(There's a moment when, for the first time, we're not certain CINDERELLA will obey. But finally she crosses slowly, opens the door, and her STEPMOTHER and STEPSISTERS parade out.)

(Offstage.) To the palace and make it snappy!

(CINDERELLA stands watching as the carriage rolls off into the distance without her. She closes the door and hurries to her chair by the fireplace. The door creaks open and all she can do is bury her face in her hands.)

[MUSIC NO. 07 "IN MY OWN LITTLE CORNER (REPRISE)"]

(The MICE come out of hiding, go to the door, and with some effort, push it shut. CHARLES and the DOVE appear, and the ANIMALS all go to CINDERELLA, who takes off her mother's dress and puts on her raggedy dress as she sings sadly.)

I AM STANDING BY HIS HIGHNESS OF ALL PLACES,
AND WE FACE THE COURT MAGNIFICENTLY CLOTHED,
I'M THE ENVY OF A THOUSAND STARING FACES
WHO HAVE JUST HEARD THAT I AM HIS BETROTHED.

(She lovingly folds her mother's dress and replaces it in the chest.)

I'M THE BELLE OF THE BALL IN MY OWN LITTLE CORNER,
ALL ALONE...

(No longer able to hold back her emotions, CINDERELLA breaks down crying, as the scene has shifted to:)

CIN

FAI

CIN

FAI

CIN

FAI

CIN

FAI

CIN

FAI

CIN

FAI