

# THE BEGGAR PRINCE

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A one-act comedy by  
Brenna McBride

Loosely based on the fairy tale "King Thrusheard"  
by The Brothers Grimm

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

QUEEN GERMAINE, queen of the realm.

PRINCE EDMUND, Queen Germaine's son, the future king.

LADY AMELIA/LIL, daughter of a duke/her beggar alter ego.

PAGE, servant to Queen Germaine (may be played by male or female).

LADY SERENA, noble lady of the realm (can double as OLD WOMAN, LADY or TOWNSPERSON 2).

LADY GLYNIS, noble lady of the realm (can double as OLD WOMAN, LADY or TOWNSPERSON 2).

OLD WOMAN, hawker at the market (can double as LADY SERENA, LADY GLYNIS, or TOWNSPERSON 2).

LORD, snobbish nobleman (can double as BEGGAR 1 or 2, TOWNSPERSON 1, COOK or JONAS).

LADY, equally snobbish noblewoman (can double as LADY SERENA, LADY GLYNIS, BEGGAR 1 or 2, TOWNSPERSON 2, COOK or JONAS).

COOK, oversees kitchen at the duke's house (male or female; can double for other roles depending on actor's gender).

JONAS, kitchen servant at the duke's house (male or female; can double for other roles depending on actor's gender).

BEGGARS 1 and 2, any age, any gender, can double for other roles as necessary.

TOWNSPERSON 1, male.

TOWNSPERSON 2, female.

ASSORTED BEGGARS, played by members of ensemble.

#### TIME

Vaguely medieval.

#### PLACE

Queen Germaine's throne room, the woods beyond the kingdom, the town square, and the kitchen of the Duke and Duchess of Dorchester.

#### PROPS

tape measure

sword

fan

loaf of bread

fake tomato

baskets of various sizes

bundles of mittens

fake money

a half-finished basket

dishes of fake food

mop

basket of fruit with real apple

**SCENE 1**

*(Queen Germaine's palace. Two thrones are placed against the center of the back wall. Three finely dressed ladies – SERENA, GLYNIS, and AMELIA – enter and gather downstage of the thrones.)*

**SERENA:** I'm so excited!

**GLYNIS:** I'm so nervous!

**SERENA:** Just think! By this time tomorrow, one of us will be the prince's bride!

**GLYNIS:** And the future queen!

**SERENA:** I can't believe it! How did we three get so lucky?

**AMELIA:** Because the prince has rejected everyone else? *(Off Serena's and Glynis's looks:)* That what I've heard, anyway.

**SERENA:** Oh, there must be a perfectly good explanation for that.

**AMELIA:** I'm sure there is.

**SERENA:** *(Giggling:)* I hear his hair is as thick and soft as a lion's mane!

**GLYNIS:** I hear his eyes sparkle like rare jewels.

**SERENA:** And I hear his teeth are so white that his smile can actually blind you!

*(Glynis and Serena sigh.)*

**AMELIA:** But...is he nice?

*(Beat.)*

**SERENA:** Well...I haven't heard that he isn't!

**GLYNIS:** I'm sure he's nice. He is a prince, after all!

**AMELIA:** Right. That he is.

*(Trumpets blare, and a PAGE enters.)*

**PAGE:** Announcing Her Majesty Queen Germaine!

*(QUEEN GERMAINE enters with royal panache. The ladies curtsy to her in unison.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** My dear girls, I am delighted to have you as guests of my palace today. As you know, I have decreed that my son, Prince Edmund, may not inherit my kingdom until he has a queen to rule by his side. This is a tradition that began with his father, my beloved late husband, King Leopold. *(She, the Page, and the ladies all bow their heads for no more than a second.)* And that is why I have spent many months...many long, grueling months...searching for a young woman with just the right...the right...quality to rule alongside the new king. You three have been chosen from thousands among THOUSANDS of the very finest young women from the noblest families across the kingdom. I would be honored to have any one of you as my daughter-in-law!

*(The ladies curtsy again in gratitude.)*

Before you meet my son, I want to tell you—that is, I should explain—

*(Before she can finish, there is a commotion as two frightened BEGGARS enter, followed by EDMUND, who brandishes his sword and chases them downstage.)*

**EDMUND:** How dare you trespass in the royal palace!

**BEGGAR 1:** Oh, please don't cut us, Your Majesty!

**BEGGAR 2:** We bleed easily!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Edmund, what's the meaning of all this?

**EDMUND:** I found these two filthy criminals in the kitchen, spreading their germs all over our food and silverware! The entire place will have to be fumigated!

**BEGGAR 1:** But we weren't trespassing, Your Excellence! Honest we weren't!

**BEGGAR 2:** Your cook invites us for leftovers every Monday!

**EDMUND:** Then he's fired! And you will both be thrown into prison for the rest of your miserable lives!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Son, I think you're overreacting.

**EDMUND:** Mother, do you know what they were doing when I caught them? They were eating all of the chocolate peanut butter cupcakes that Cook had prepared especially for my half-birthday next week!

**BEGGAR 1:** That's not true! I'm allergic to peanut butter!

**BEGGAR 2:** Gets terrible hives, it's disgusting!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Edmund, who really ate all of those cupcakes?

*(Beat. Edmund emits a soft belch. The Beggars giggle.)*

**EDMUND:** That's not important!! What's important is that these two need to be taught a lesson about taking what doesn't belong to them! What they haven't earned!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** *(To Beggars:)* I'm sorry, but I must



ask you to leave immediately, the same way you came in. (*Lowering her voice:*) Make sure Cook gives you something for the road on your way out.

**BEGGAR 1:** Oh, thank you, Your Mercifulness!

**BEGGAR 2:** We won't bother you again!

*(They turn to leave, then stop to glance warily back at Edmund. He snarls at them and waves his sword. They shriek and run offstage.)*

**EDMUND:** (*Sinking into his throne and sheathing his sword:*) Hmph, that was an unpleasant business. Almost made me late for my afternoon nap.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** EDMUND! We have GUESTS!

*(Edmund notices the ladies. They wave without enthusiasm.)*

**EDMUND:** (*Sneering:*) Who are they?

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Standing before you are three daughters of our kingdom's most loyal subjects. You are to choose one of them for your bride, remember?

**EDMUND:** (*With a sigh:*) Oh, right.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Not only your future, but the future of the kingdom is at stake, so choose wisely! (*Under her breath:*) And PLEASE be kind!

**EDMUND:** Mother, you insult me. When am I ever unkind?

*(Page snorts. Edmund glares at him.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** First, I give you Lady Serena, daughter of the Count and Countess of Castleberry!

*(Serena steps forward and curtsies low to Edmund. As she tries to rise, she trips on the hem of her gown and falls to the floor. Mortified, she staggers to her feet.)*

**SERENA:** I beg your pardon, Your Highness!

*(As she attempts to regain her posture, she begins to fall backwards, flailing her arms. Amelia rushes forward to catch her and helps her stand upright.)*

**EDMUND:** *(To the room at large:)* Next!!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Son, you're being a bit hasty.

**EDMUND:** Mother, be serious. She's a walking disaster! How can I preside over a royal dinner if I'm always worrying that my wife will pitch herself into her pudding?

**SERENA:** Oh please, Your Highness, if I may have just one more chance! I'm not used to these new shoes!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Of course, my dear. Let's just start from the beginning. Introducing Lady Serena!

*(Serena straightens her skirt and walks carefully towards Edmund. As she nears him, he sticks out his foot and trips her, sending her to the floor.)*

**AMELIA:** *(Rushing to Serena and helping her up:)* Are you all right?

**EDMUND:** No need for a third chance! Begone, you clumsy ox!

*(Serena bursts into tears and runs offstage, tripping over her own feet along the way. After she leaves, there is an awkward silence.)*

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**QUEEN GERMAINE:** ...Moving on, then. I present Lady Glynis, daughter of the Baron and Baroness of Bloomsberg!

*(After a moment's hesitation, Glynis steps forward and curtsies. As Edmund walks towards her, he stops and sniffs the air.)*

**EDMUND:** What is that...unusual...smell?

**GLYNIS:** *(Cheerfully:)* Oh, that's my perfume!

**EDMUND:** Your...perfume?

**GLYNIS:** Yes, it's essence of sheep's breath! It's very popular in my village! *(Everyone else makes disgusted faces.)*

**EDMUND:** *(Beckoning to Glynis:)* Come here. Come a bit closer.

*(She obeys.)*

Now take a whiff of me. Tell me what you smell.

**GLYNIS:** *(With a loud sniff:)* I smell soap...it smells a bit like lavender...and raspberries...and something...the forest after a spring rain...?

**EDMUND:** Yes, that's my hair.

**GLYNIS:** It's delicious.

**EDMUND:** I quite agree. Now, dear, do you know what you smell like?

**GLYNIS:** No...?

**EDMUND:** You smell like wet wool that's been soaked in the foulest sewage and left to dry in the hottest, stickiest summer air!

*(Glynis blinks in confusion. Edmund leans close to her.)*

In short, you STINK!

*(Like Serena before her, Glynis bursts into tears. She, too, starts to run off, but Amelia stops her.)*

**AMELIA:** Don't let him get to you! As long as you like the way you smell, who cares what he thinks?

*(Even as she speaks, she cannot help but react to the strong smell emanating from Glynis by wrinkling her nose and/or turning her head away.)*

**GLYNIS:** *(Sobbing:)* He said...he said I...I...STINK!  
WAHHHH!

*(She exits in tears. Amelia stares after her, then turns to glare at Edmund.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Edmund, that was a terrible thing to say.

**EDMUND:** I'm only being honest.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** There's honesty and then there's cruelty!

**EDMUND:** Oh really, Mother, she'll be fine. She'll find someone equally stinky, and they'll spend the rest of their lives happily bleating at each other and holding their noses. Like this. *(He holds his nose.)* Baaa...baaaa...

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Be quiet, Edmund! *(Collecting herself:)* I now present our final candidate for your queen, Lady Amelia, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Dorchester!

*(A stiff and tense Amelia approaches Edmund and curtsies low. After she rises, Edmund circles her, looking her up and down.)*

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**EDMUND:** Hold out your arms.

**AMELIA:** I beg your pardon?

**EDMUND:** Your arms. Hold them straight out in front of you.

*(She does so.)*

Aha! Just as I thought. One arm is longer than the other!

*(Amelia drops her arms to her sides.)*

**AMELIA:** That's not true!

**EDMUND:** Are you calling your prince a liar? *(Turning to Page:)* You, Page, come here and measure her arms!

*(Page looks from the Queen to Edmund, and, shrugging, produces a tape measure from his/her tunic and crosses to Amelia.)*

**PAGE:** *(Gesturing to her arms:)* Um, if you wouldn't mind, my lady...

**AMELIA:** Oh, for heaven's sake!

*(She holds out her arms. Page makes a great show of measuring them several times.)*

**EDMUND:** Well?

**PAGE:** Oh, my...it appears one arm is, in fact, longer than the other! Just by the merest inch, but still...

**EDMUND:** Ah-ha! Told you so!

*(Amelia crosses her arms across her chest.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Edmund, you're being ridiculous!

**EDMUND:** *(Pulling out his sword and using it as a mirror, in which he admires himself:)* Mother, look at me. I have the

thickest hair, the brightest eyes, and the whitest smile in the land! Such a perfect specimen as I cannot have a wife with this kind of glaring imperfection! She'll be better off with a husband as flawed as she...perhaps a bridge troll, or one of those pathetic beggars who were here earlier. Yes, that's it! She'd make an excellent mate for a beggar! After all, they can't be choosers!

*(He laughs at his own joke, then stops when he sees that Queen Germaine and Amelia are stone-faced.)*

As I said before, I'm just being honest.

*(Amelia walks towards Edmund and stops when they are practically nose-to-nose.)*

**AMELIA:** I, too, would like to be honest. You may well have the loveliest hair, eyes and teeth in all the world. But you, sir, also have the ugliest heart that I have ever seen! And I'd rather spend eternity with the beggars and the trolls than spend one more second in your company!

*(She exits, in the opposite direction from the other ladies.)*

**EDMUND:** *(Sputtering:)* Come back here! You can't talk to me like that! Mother, why are you just standing there! Have her arrested!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Why? I agree with everything she said.

**EDMUND:** What?!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Son, I am at a loss. I have introduced you to every eligible young woman across the kingdom, and you've found fault with every single one of them! One was too tall. One was too short. One too fat, one too thin. For heaven's sake, you rejected one because

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her eyelashes were too long!

**EDMUND:** They bothered me.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Quiet! I can't ignore the truth anymore: You're a spoiled, stuck-up brat! You're not anywhere near fit to follow in your sainted father's (*She, Edmund and Page bow their heads.*) footsteps! Maybe it's my fault. Maybe, somehow, I made you the way you are. And now I must make amends.

*(She advances towards Edmund, who cowers. Unseen by the others, Amelia enters from the same direction in which she exited.)*

**AMELIA:** (*To herself:*) Dummy, the door is that way!

*(Witnessing the scene before her, she ducks behind one of the thrones to hide.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** I WILL see you married, Edmund. And I declare, in front of this witness (*Gestures at Page:*) that I will marry YOU to the very first beggar who crosses my path!

*(Page and Amelia both gasp.)*

**EDMUND:** You...you're not serious. This is a jest, an empty threat!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Is it?

*(Queen Germaine exits in a huff. With a shrug at Edmund, the Page follows.)*

**EDMUND:** (*Following the Queen offstage:*) Mother, wait...let's talk about this!

*(After he leaves, Amelia emerges from behind the thrones.)*

**AMELIA:** *(To audience:)* Oh, what I wouldn't give to see that rotten prince married off to a *(Air quotes:)* "lowly" beggar! Won't he be furious! Won't he be humiliated? Won't he... But no, the Queen wouldn't really do that to him. Would she...? *(Beat. Then she brightens, as if struck with an idea.)* I guess there's only one way to find out!

*(She winks at the audience and starts to exit the wrong way, then remembers her mistake and exits in the right direction.)*

## SCENE 2

*(The throne room. Queen Germaine enters and proceeds to pace back and forth across the stage, followed by Page, who fans her as she walks.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** I don't understand it. I just don't know where he gets it from.

**PAGE:** 'Tis a mystery, milady.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** He certainly doesn't get it from me. And his father was the most generous man who ever lived! True, my mother-in-law had her occasional days of ill humor, but still, it doesn't add up to...what Edmund is now!

**PAGE:** Perhaps he was switched at birth?

*(Queen Germaine stops pacing so abruptly that Page narrowly avoids crashing into her. The Queen turns to glare at Page.)*

It was just a suggestion.

*(The Queen glares.)*

A rather creative one, I thought.

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*(Before Queen Germaine can respond, the silence is broken by offstage, off-key singing:)*

**AMELIA:** *(Off:)* There once was a maiden sad and fair  
Who liked to grow bluebells in her hair...

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Good heavens, what is that horrible noise? Go and see what sad creature is writhing in pain outside my palace!

*(Page exits. The caterwauling continues:)*

**AMELIA:** *(Off:)* She left all she had to her fat grey mare...

*(Page returns.)*

**PAGE:** Your Majesty, there's a beggar girl in the courtyard. Apparently she's...um...singing.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Singing?! I've heard sick cats with more melodious meows. Get rid of her, will you?

*(Page turns to leave.)*

Wait!

*(Page stops.)*

A beggar girl, you say?

**PAGE:** Yes, Your Majesty. As filthy and homely a beggar as I've ever seen.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** *(To audience:)* Perfect! *(To Page:)* Tell her that the Queen requests her presence!

*(Page exits.)*

*(Aside:)* Now, Edmund, you'll see that I never make empty threats!

*(Page enters, dragging Amelia – disguised as a beggar –*

*behind him. She wears an old, patched dress, her hair is arranged in a ratty, unkempt braid, and her face is streaked with dirt.)*

**PAGE:** (*Pushing Amelia forward:*) Your Majesty, here is the beggar you requested!

*(Amelia grins and waves.)*

*(Hissing:)* Curtsy to the queen!

*(Amelia dips into a quick, awkward curtsy.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** So this is the songbird who has interrupted my peaceful afternoon!

**AMELIA:** Beggin' your pardon, Your Majesty! Hey, get it? "Beggin'!"?

*(She laugh-snorts.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Well then, Miss...Miss...

**AMELIA:** Call me Lil!

*(NOTE: From here on, Amelia will be known as Lil.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Lil...you are a beggar, correct? This is how you make your...living?

**LIL:** It's true, some of the time I do. But I'm not a complete layabout, Your Grace. I also sell baskets on market days. Make 'em from twigs and branches, I do!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** I see. Now, Lil, as your queen, I would like to ask a great favor of you. And if you grant this favor, I will see to it that you never want for anything ever again.

**LIL:** Just name it, Your Worship!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** I want you to marry my son.

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*(Page chokes.)*

**LIL:** Done!

*(She spits in her hand and offers it to the Queen to shake. The Queen hesitates, then ignores it.)*

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** I should explain, you won't really be marrying him. You'll be part of a little trick I'm playing on the prince. It's like...a game of pretend!

**LIL:** You've come to the right gal, Your Highness. I'm very good at pretending!

*(She winks to the audience.)*

And besides, I could use some company. The streets are lonely... Be nice to have a partner in crime, so to speak.

**PAGE:** *(Laughing:)* Listen to the dolt! She thinks she'll take the prince begging with her! Have you ever heard –

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** That is exactly what she'll do.

**PAGE:** – such a marvelous idea?

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** *(Gingerly taking Lil by the arm and walking about the stage with her:)* My dear...er, Lil...I want you to marry my son and show him your ways. You see, I love him very much, but I don't like what he's become. He's selfish and mean, and not fit to rule a rose garden, let alone an entire kingdom! He needs to learn some hard lessons, and you may be the only one who can teach them. If, in three months' time, you return my son to me a changed man, I will reward you handsomely.

**LIL:** *(With another clumsy curtsy:)* I'm at your disposal, Your Greatness!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Then let's not waste any time! *(To Page:)* Get the costume.

**PAGE:** You mean the—

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Yes.

**PAGE:** But it's so itchy!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** NOW!

*(Page exits as Edmund enters.)*

**EDMUND:** Mother, is the castle being attacked by wolves? I heard the most dreadful howling.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** No, Edmund, that was your new wife.

**EDMUND:** My—what?

*(The Queen gestures to Lil, who, instead of curtsying, runs to Edmund and vigorously shakes his hand with the same hand in which she spit earlier.)*

**EDMUND:** *(Starting to laugh:)* What an excellent joke, Mother! Well done! She even looks like a real beggar!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** It's no joke, son. I warned you.

*(Edmund gapes at Lil, who smiles at him, revealing blackened teeth. He turns to run away, only to see the Page entering, wearing an ill-fitting priest's costume and a large fake moustache.)*

**EDMUND:** No.

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Yes.

**EDMUND:** *(In a tantrum:)* No. No. No!!! I won't do it! You can't make me!

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**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Need I remind you that I am not just your mother, but your queen as well? What makes you think you can disobey my command?

**EDMUND:** But Mother! You can't be serious! Do you really want to bring one of...of...THESE to live in the palace?

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Of course not!

*(Edmund sighs in relief.)*

You'll go and live with Lil.

**EDMUND:** Live with HER?! Where? She's a beggar, she has no home!

**LIL:** Actually, I do have a little place of my own out in the woods...

**EDMUND:** No one is talking to you!

**PAGE:** *(Scratching:)* Uh, Your Majesty, if we could begin...?

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** We're ready!

*(Lil pulls Edmund over to stand beside her in front of Page and holds his wrists in a vice grip. Edmund strains to escape.)*

**PAGE:** Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today...

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** You can just skip all that.

**PAGE:** *(Whining:)* But it's the best part!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** SKIP IT!!

**PAGE:** Yes, Your Grace. Do you, Prince Edmund, take this woman...um...

**LIL:** Lil!

**PAGE:** – Lil, to be your lawfully wedded wife?

**EDMUND:** No, nyet, non, nein, a thousand times no!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Edmund, let me make myself perfectly clear. If you do not marry this woman right here, right now, I swear by my crown that you will never inherit this kingdom. I will find some distant relative to assume the throne and you will be treated no better than a servant in your own home for the rest of your life! Do you understand?

**EDMUND:** Yes, ma'am.

**PAGE:** Do you, Edmund –

**EDMUND:** Fine, whatever.

**PAGE:** And do you, Lil –

**LIL:** I do! I do!

**PAGE:** If there are no further objections –

**EDMUND:** YES!

**QUEEN & LIL:** NO!!

**PAGE:** – I now pronounce you husband and wife! Prince Edmund, you may kiss your bride.

*(Lil puckers her lips. Edmund shudders.)*

**EDMUND:** All right, Mother, I've obeyed you, but I have my limits!

**LIL:** No matter. Plenty of time for that later, eh?

*(Edmund shudders again. Page bows and exits in a hurry, scratching all the way. As Lil tugs at Edmund's arm:)*

C'mon, hubby! We'd better get a move on before it gets dark. It's a long walk to the old homestead!

**EDMUND:** WALK?! Surely we can take the horses!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Have you lost your senses? I would never let beggars ride the royal steeds!

**EDMUND:** I'm no beggar! I'm your son! The prince!

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Ah, no, see, you're now a common beggar just like your wife. Now both of you begone before I call the guards!

**LIL:** (*Grabbing Edmund's arm and dragging him offstage:*)  
Come on! Time to go home!

**EDMUND:** But...but...but...

**QUEEN GERMAINE:** Godspeed! Safe trip! Don't steal anything on the way out! (*To the sky:*) Oh, dear Leopold, I hope I know what I'm doing.

*(She starts to exit, then stops.)*

What am I saying? Of course I know what I'm doing! I'm the queen!

*(She exits.)*

### SCENE 3

*(A dilapidated wooden shack, missing a portion of its roof, located in a clearing of the forest. Twigs and tree branches litter the stage. Lil and Edmund enter. Lil is carrying a loaf of bread and singing painfully off-key, either a series of syllables or words she makes up herself on the spot. Edmund drags behind her, exhausted and dirty, his clothes torn. Soon after they enter, Edmund falls to his knees.)*

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**EDMUND:** Please, please, please, stop singing!!

*(He rolls over onto his back.)*

**LIL:** I'm just trying to make the time go by a little faster.

**EDMUND:** You've slowed it to a crawl.

**LIL:** Ah, stop yer moanin' and have some bread.

*(She hands him a small piece of the loaf.)*

**EDMUND:** *(Sitting up:)* Where did you get this?

**LIL:** From that baker we met in the road, remember, the one you kept askin' to put you out of your misery. I pinched his goods while he was distracted by you! What d'you know, only been married a couple of hours and we already make a good begging team!

*(She punches Edmund on the arm, pal-like. Edmund recoils and jumps to his feet.)*

**EDMUND:** Now, listen here, you...you...ugh, I'm too tired to think of an insult right now! But let me make this clear: We are not, under any circumstances, a team! By morning my mother will have come to her senses and will send her guards to fetch me home, and you will be thrown into our deepest, coldest dungeon, where you can sing all you want because only the rats will hear you!! How do you like that, huh? HUH?!!

*(Beat. Edmund pants.)*

**LIL:** You wouldn't be so cranky if you'd eat something.

**EDMUND:** *(In a tantrum:)* Blast! BLAST BLAST BLAST!!!!

*(After he calms down, he takes a bite of the bread.)*

**LIL:** Anyways, you'll be happy to hear that we don't have



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to walk anymore. We're home.

**EDMUND:** (*Mouth full:*) We...are? But where... (*He looks around, notices the shack.*) Oh, no. No. You can't mean...

**LIL:** Isn't it cute? It's been in the family for years. True, it's kind of a fixer-upper, but it's kind of cozy once you get used to it. And it's got walls, so it keeps the critters away. Mostly.

**EDMUND:** I am NOT sleeping in that...that...hovel! I am a PRINCE!!

**LIL:** Fine, suit yourself. Sleep outside. But don't come cryin' to me when a raccoon makes a nest in your hair. (*She yawns.*) Thinkin' we should turn in. Been a long day, and we've got lots to do tomorrow.

**EDMUND:** Yes, a full day of begging. I can't contain my excitement.

**LIL:** Actually, tomorrow's market day. You'll be in town sellin' the baskets I make.

**EDMUND:** Wait, wait. Why am I taking them to market tomorrow instead of you?

**LIL:** Seein' as you're new to the beggin' business, I thought I'd take care of that myself and let you handle the sellin'.

**EDMUND:** Who do you think you are, telling me what to do with my day? I'm the husband, you're the wife. You're supposed to obey me.

**LIL:** That so?

**EDMUND:** That so!

**LIL:** Wow, I sure am glad you're here to learn me all the

things I haven't been taught. So then, great and powerful husband (*She bows.*) what is your command?

**EDMUND:** As the man of the house, I should bring home the food.

**LIL:** So you want to beg.

**EDMUND:** I wouldn't use that word. Let's say...I'll inquire.

**LIL:** Fair enough, husband. But...meanin' no disrespect by askin' this, do you know how to beg? I mean, inquire?

**EDMUND:** True, I've never done it before...but how hard can it be? I bet I'll be even better at it than you! No one will refuse a charming, handsome, well-groomed young man!

*(On the words "well-groomed," he brushes dirt from his clothes.)*

**LIL:** Ok...but in case your good looks fail ya, just try to be as polite and humble as humanly possible! Sometimes it helps to get down on your knees... (*She demonstrates.*) And give them the real big sad eyes, they love it... (*She bugs her eyes.*) But don't actually cry! Have some pride, you know! And always remember to say "please." (*She makes her voice small, high and meek.*) "Please, good sir, I'm ever so hungry today. Just a morsel of meat, a fraction of fruit, whatever you can spare. Oh, please, kind lord?"

*(She holds her pose for another second, then stands.)*

You got that?

**EDMUND:** If you think I'm getting on my knees, you'd best think again! I won't need to do any of that. You wait

and see.

**LIL:** All right, best of luck to ya, then! Now, I'd like to get some shuteye – that is, if it pleases you, husband.

**EDMUND:** Oh, go on. I suppose I'll find somewhere to sleep out here.

**LIL:** Want me to sing you a lullaby?

*(She squawks the first note.)*

**EDMUND:** No!! Just go to sleep!

**LIL:** Are you absolutely sure you don't want to get your zzzs inside? There's a nice little corner right beside the mousehole...

**EDMUND:** You will never catch me setting foot in that house!

**LIL:** Okay, then. Good night, sleep tight, don't let...anything...bite!

*(She exits offstage in the direction of the house. Edmund attempts to make himself comfortable among the twigs and branches. As he closes his eyes, there is a blackout. In the darkness, there is a rustle, a loud squeak, and Edmund's scream. Then, frantic knocking.)*

**EDMUND'S VOICE:** Let me in, let me in!!!

#### SCENE 4

*(An empty stage. Either the backdrops are in shadow, or the curtain/scrim is closed. A still-dirty Edmund enters. He takes a deep breath and gives the audience his widest, most "charming" smile.)*

**EDMUND:** *(To audience:)* Good morning! I say, you're all

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looking particularly fresh and clean this fine day. Might I inquire as to whether or not you can spare a bit of food for a hungry young man? Who also happens to be a prince?

*(He moves through the audience, with no success. After several refusals, he becomes agitated.)*

Look here, I'm not asking for much! Just an apple here, a drumstick there. Certainly you can part with just a small portion of your breakfast, can't you? You all look like you could stand to miss a meal!

*(Insulted reaction from audience.)*

Okay, okay, that was harsh, I admit. Let's try again. You won't just be feeding me, you'll be helping to feed my lovely wife and our four adorable children! They're back at home, with their sad eyes and growling stomachs, crying out "Daddy, Daddy, please feed us!" Won't you think of the children? Somebody, anybody, think of the children!!!

*(He makes big sad eyes just as Lil demonstrated. No response.)*

All right, there aren't quite four of them.

*(Beat.)*

All right, there aren't any at all! But there is a wife...of sorts...and I'm sure she's hungry too!

*(Still no one helps him. In a temper:)*

That's it! I've tried being nice, I've tried appealing to your sense of common decency, but since you've all got black holes where your hearts should be, I've no choice but to

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get nasty! (*Hollering offstage to an unseen party:*) You there, in the name of Prince Edmund, son of Her Highness Queen Germaine, I command you on pain of imprisonment to BRING ME FOOD! This is a royal order! Obey me or face the consequences! What do you say to THAT?

*(A tomato thrown from offstage hits Edmund.)*

### SCENE 5

*(The town center marketplace. Lil and Edmund enter, both carrying baskets of varying sizes.)*

**LIL:** You shouldn't feel badly. No one begs right their first time out!

**EDMUND:** Please stop talking.

**LIL:** Listen, the key to gettin' the customers' attention is to put a little pizzazz into your sales pitch. Like this.

*(She moves to the opposite side of the stage and calls to audience and unseen passerby.)*

Baskets, get your bright beautiful baskets here! Made from the bonniest birch and balsa wood in the kingdom!!  
*(To Edmund:)* Got it?

*(Beat, while Edmund considers. Then he turns to the audience, remaining on his side of the stage.)*

**EDMUND:** Baskets! Get your baskets here! Hand-made baskets! They're made from...from...some really nice trees!

*(Lil shakes her head at him. Suddenly, an OLD WOMAN enters from Edmund's side of the stage, carrying bundles of mittens.)*

**OLD WOMAN:** (*Poking Edmund:*) Hey, you! Basket Boy! You're in my spot!

**LIL:** (*Crossing to them:*) What? No he isn't!

**EDMUND:** Yes, I was here first!

**OLD WOMAN:** Listen here, sonny, I've been parking myself and my wares in this spot for the past forty years! It's lucky for me! And no young upstart's going to take it away from me, even if he does have nice teeth and thick hair and...and... (*She feels Edmund's bicep.*) ...eh, average muscles.

**EDMUND:** Excuse me! (*Yanking his arm away:*) This spot doesn't have your name on it any more than it does mine! And like I said before, I was here first! So find somewhere else to sell your... (*He peers at the mittens:*) ...what are those, anyway?

**OLD WOMAN:** They're stockings for your hands! I invented them myself! The idea just came to me one night. I thought to myself, why are we so worried about covering our feet in the winter when it's our hands that end up all red and raw from the cold? So I said to myself, "Bluebird"—I call myself that sometimes—"Bluebird, why not knit some stockings for your hands?" So I did and I gave 'em to my whole family, and they loved 'em so much that they told all their friends, and those friends told their friends, and now I'm the most popular vendor in the market!

**LIL:** I don't believe you. Those things look utterly useless!

**OLD WOMAN:** They're a lot more useful than the stuff

you're hawking!

**EDMUND:** What are you talking about? These are baskets! Everyone needs baskets, to...to...

**LIL:** To carry their flowers! And their bread! And their...um...eggs! (*Aside to Edmund:*) As long as they don't put all of them in one basket, if ya know what I mean!

*(Edmund and Lil share a laugh, then resume glaring at Old Woman.)*

**OLD WOMAN:** Look, if you'll just let me have my spot back, I'll leave you to perfect your comedy routine in peace.

**EDMUND:** For the last time, this is not your spot! Now if you'll excuse us, (*Gesturing to an indignant Lil, who nods:*) we have to get back to work! BASKETS! Get your baskets here!

*(The Old Woman elbows Edmund aside.)*

**OLD WOMAN:** Hand stockings! Get your hand stockings here! Now in six lovely colors!

*(Edmund, Lil and Old Woman continue their cries of "baskets!" and "hand stockings!". They may direct their sales pitches to the first few rows of the audience. Eventually, a well-dressed LORD and LADY enter the stage. The three notice the couple at the same time, and nearly knock each other down in their haste to reach them.)*

**EDMUND:** Baskets for sale!

**LIL:** Fine baskets, excellent woodwork!

**OLD WOMAN:** Hand stockings! Keep your fingers

toasty warm on the coldest days!

*(The Lord and Lady recoil.)*

**LADY:** Dear, let's hurry and select a housewarming gift for the Brewsters so we can get away from these...people!

**LORD:** Don't worry darling, we'll be out of here in a jiff. I'll take... *(He peers at the Old Woman's mittens:)* What are those?

**OLD WOMAN:** Hand stockings! My own invention! Here, try them on!

*(She hands one to Lord, who puts it on.)*

**LADY:** It looks ridiculous!

**LORD:** *(Attempting to wiggle his fingers inside the mitten:)* I can barely move my fingers! How am I supposed to hold a fork, or grasp my horse's reins?

**OLD WOMAN:** Uh...I guess you wouldn't wear them while eating. Or...riding. Or—

**LORD:** Never mind.

*(He removes the mitten and hands it back to Old Woman.)*

We can't bring these to the Brewsters, we'd be the laughingstocks of the party!

**LADY:** *(Shuddering:)* Horrors!

**LIL:** If my husband and I may present these beautiful baskets for your consideration?

**LORD:** *(Examining them:)* Hm. *(To Lady:)* Could the Brewsters do with one of these?

**LADY:** I'm not sure. I think our milkmaid uses one!



**EDMUND:** It has many uses, milady. Fill it with flowers, trim it with a bit of ribbon, it'll make a pretty centerpiece for a dining room table!

**LORD:** That's a good idea.

**EDMUND:** (*Surprised at himself:*) It is, isn't it?

**LIL:** (*Equally surprised:*) It really is!

**LADY:** Just buy one and let's go! We're late as it is!

**LORD:** I'll take this one.

*(He selects a basket, hands Edmund some money, and exits with Lady. Edmund and Lil look at each other, then at the money, then back at each other.)*

**LIL:** You made a sale.

**EDMUND:** I made a sale.

**EDMUND & LIL:** (*In unison:*) We made a sale!!

*(They run back and forth across the stage and perform their own unique victory dance.)*

We made a sa-ale! We made a sa-ale!

**OLD WOMAN:** Harrumph. Beginner's luck!

*(She exits, but Edmund and Lil are too caught up in their victory celebration to notice. In their excitement, they drop their baskets and embrace each other. When they separate, they gaze at each other for a charged moment.)*

**EDMUND:** Yes, well.

**LIL:** Well, indeed.

*(She clears her throat.)*

I think, after all that hard work, we deserve a treat. Race you to the roasted almonds!

*(She runs offstage. Edmund chases her, laughing. They both leave their baskets behind. After a beat, the Old Woman re-enters, notices the baskets, and smiles mischievously.)*

**OLD WOMAN:** Take MY lucky spot, will you? I'll show you!

*(She looks around to make sure no one is watching, and carries the baskets offstage, where, unseen, she stomps them into smithereens, whinnying like a horse. In between whinnies:)*

Wild horse!! Wild horse!! Someone stop it!

## SCENE 6

*(The woods. Some time has passed, indicated by Edmund's straggly beard. He sits on the ground, attempting to make a basket out of branches.)*

**EDMUND:** *(To a passing TOWNSPERSON 1:)* Spare a bit of food or change, good sir?

**TOWNSPERSON 1:** Get a job!

*(Exits.)*

**EDMUND:** Indeed. Thanks anyway! *(To another passing TOWNSPERSON 2:)* Have mercy on a poor hungry soul, my lady?

**TOWNSPERSON 2:** *(Clutching her bag tighter:)* I've nothing for you! Leave me alone!

*(Exits.)*

**EDMUND:** As you wish.

*(Lil enters with a bag.)*

**LIL:** Hey there, hubby. Whatcha up to?

**EDMUND:** Oh, Lil, I'm glad you're here! Get a load of this!

*(With a flourish, he stands to display a sorry-looking basket.)*

**LIL:** Wow. That's....some basket, right there.

**EDMUND:** It took me two weeks, but I finally finished it! When's the next market day? Wait 'til the other hawkers see THIS work of art!

**LIL:** *(Taking the basket from him:)* Whoa, slow down there, Da Vinci. Do you really want to put this one up for sale? After all, it's the first you ever made with your own hands! This is the result of your imagination, your genius, your blood and sweat and tears and... *(She shakes her hand, as if to dry it.)* ...more sweat! Nobody else will appreciate this...fine...craftsmanship the way you do!

*(Beat.)*

**EDMUND:** *(Taking it back from her:)* You think it's terrible.

**LIL:** I never said that!

**EDMUND:** You didn't have to. And you're right. It's a piece of garbage. It's worthless. Like me. If I hadn't been so stupid as to leave our good baskets for that horse to trample...

**LIL:** Eddie, that wasn't your fault! We both forgot the baskets that day!

**EDMUND:** (*Sitting:*) It's not just that.

**LIL:** (*Sitting next to him:*) What is it?

**EDMUND:** How long have we lived like this? I've lost track of the days.

**LIL:** I'm guessing a month...maybe two?

**EDMUND:** And my mother still hasn't sent for me. You know, for a long time I still believed this was all some sort of joke. But I have to face facts. My mother's glad to be rid of me.

**LIL:** Edmund, don't—

**EDMUND:** I always thought that just because I was the prince, I was so much better than everyone else. I treated people like dirt under my shoe. I became someone my mother despised...someone of whom my father would have been ashamed. And now I know that I was never worthy of his throne.

**LIL:** You just stop that talk right now. Your mother loves you! Maybe she thinks...maybe she thinks living like this will help you become the kind of king your dad was. She wants you to mingle with the common folk, see the other side of life, that sort of thing.

**EDMUND:** (*Picking at his ragged clothes:*) It doesn't get much more common than this!

**LIL:** That's the truth! Now, I've got something to cheer you up. Look at what I managed to wheedle out of the baker's apprentice this morning!

*(She reaches into her bag and produces a cinnamon bun.)*

Ta-da!

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**EDMUND:** (*Snatching it from her hand:*) Is that...a cinnamon roll? With cream cheese frosting?!

**LIL:** Fresh and hot out of the oven!

**EDMUND:** (*Biting into the bun:*)  
Mmmmmmm...delicious!

**LIL:** Feel better now?

**EDMUND:** Much. Thank you, Lil. You've been good to me...better than I deserve.

**LIL:** Oh, stop. You haven't been so bad yourself.

*(They smile into each other's eyes, then start to lean towards each other. Lil is the first to pull back. Flustered:)*

Uh...I almost forgot, I've got another surprise for you. I was told...uh, I mean I heard gossip in the village that the Duke and Duchess of Dorchester are throwing some kind of huge ball or festival or whatever you call them, and their cook is lookin' for extra people in the kitchen!

*(Beat.)*

**EDMUND:** So, what's the surprise?

**LIL:** That's it! There's a job openin' in their kitchen! A job, Eddie! Actual income! We can take a break from beggin' for a spell! We can go to market and buy our own bread like proper citizens!

**EDMUND:** But I don't know the first thing about what goes on in a kitchen!

**LIL:** Just...kitcheny stuff, I imagine. It can't be too hard! So, what do you say? Will you go see the cook today?

**EDMUND:** (*Sighing:*) I guess I might as well.

**LIL:** Now you had better clean yourself up and find something to wear that isn't so...holey!

**EDMUND:** (*Bowing:*) I live to serve, good wife.

*(As they start to exit, Beggars 1 and 2 from Scene 1 enter. They are dirtier than both Edmund and Lil. They do not recognize Edmund as the prince.)*

**BEGGAR 1:** Please, good people, have you any food? We haven't eaten in a day!

**EDMUND:** I'm sorry, but we too are beggars. We have nothing to spare.

**BEGGAR 2:** Ah, I see. Sorry to have bothered you. It's a hard road to travel, this begging business, not knowing when you'll see your next meal.

**BEGGAR 1:** Not even knowing if you'll see the next morning.

**BEGGAR 2:** But we don't have to tell you that. We wish you Godspeed.

*(Edmund and Lil watch sadly as the two begin to amble offstage. Suddenly, Edmund takes the bag of cinnamon buns from Lil.)*

**EDMUND:** Wait, good people.

*(They turn to him.)*

Take these. We don't need them.

*(He offers them the bag. They take it.)*

**BEGGAR 1:** Oh, thank you, sir! A thousand blessings on you and your missus!

*(They both exit with a lighter step. Edmund turns to Lil,*

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*who is awed by his actions. Embarrassed, he turns away.)*

**EDMUND:** I must bathe and get to the duke's house before dark.

*(He exits. Lil turns to the audience.)*

**LIL:** What just happened?

*(She shakes her head.)*

I do not think he's cute. I DO NOT think he's cute. This is NOT part of the plan, do you hear?! He is NOT cute. Or sweet. Or... Oh, this wasn't what I expected at all! Who'd have thought he'd actually...CHANGE?

Want to read the entire script? Order a perusal copy today!