

CINDERELLA

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Act One Scene One

Outside the Fiddler's Elbow in the village of Stoneybroke.

Upstage is the exterior of an olde worlde inn with hanging sign, and above the door: Licensee Lottie Lightale. There are flower boxes at the windows and so on, a rustic bench outside and to one side a large barrel for customers to lean on and deposit their glasses, plus some small tables with stools. Some trees and greenery. The villagers are on stage making merry and Lottie is in the pub doorway.

SONG A: Drinking Song.

All: Cheers! *(There is much raising and clashing of tankards and glasses)*

1st villager: 'Morning Lottie!

Lottie *(moving forward):* Good morning! I hope everyone's having a smashing time.

2nd and 3rd villagers: We certainly are! *(They clash tankards vigorously and beer sloshes out.)* Whoops!

Lottie: Steady! I didn't mean you to take me literally.

2nd and 3rd villagers: Sorry Lottie! *(Lottie examines their tankards.)*

Lottie: Well, no harm done. And it's no use crying over spilt ... ale! But we'll have to get this mess mopped up. Anyone seen Doris? Doris! Doris! Oh drat the girl! *(The villagers look about, calling. There is a sound of loud snoring and Lottie holds up a hand.)* Listen! *(The snoring comes again and a few villagers gather round the barrel.)*

4th villager: Here she is Lottie.

5th villager: Hey, wake up Doris.

6th villager: Come on, stir yourself you lazy so and so!

Lottie: Doris! Fetch your mop Doris! *(Doris suddenly bursts out from the barrel, brandishing her mop and scattering villagers.)* Blimey! Honestly, Doris. You really must try harder to stay awake.

Doris: Sorry Mistress Lightale. But I do get SO sleepy. It's why they call me Dozy Doris.

Lottie: Yes, and looking at the state of you it's a wonder they don't call you Dirty Doris. How many times do I have to tell you hygiene is very important in the catering trade? Just look at those hands. *(Doris does so, then wipes them down her front.)* Now, I want you to – oh it beggars belief! *(Doris has nodded off, leaning over her mop. Lottie shakes her.)* Doris! Wake up Doris! Oh, what's to be done with the girl? *(Villager whispers)* What? Oh! Fetch your mop Doris! *(Doris wakes with a start and begins mopping.)* Well I never! But I'm not always around to jump-start her. Would you all help?

1st villager: We'd love to Lottie - but we can't be here all the time either. *(Others shake their heads, agreeing. Villager whispers again, pointing to audience)*

Lottie: Ask them? Oh, my! That's a good idea. I say – would you be willing to help us out?

Audience: Yes!

Lottie: Oh, good. I bet you can't guess what we want you to do! Whenever you see Dozy Doris here falling asleep would you all shout "Fetch your mop Doris!" as loud as you possibly can?

Audience: Yes!

Lottie: Oh, that's so kind! But it must be at the very tops of your voices, mind – what's that? *(Doris has nodded off and the audience has started shouting, encouraged by the band and villagers. Doris wakes up and mops)* Oh, I see! What a bright lot you are. You've really caught on quickly. I thought we might have had to practice. Well, perhaps once to be on the safe – *(Doris has gone again.)*

Audience: Fetch your mop Doris! *(She wakes and mops)*

Lottie: Splendid. *(Doris mops the spilt ale, mingling with the villagers. Some go off or into the pub, others sit at tables, chatting. The lights dim on them and Lottie comes forward into a spotlight.)* That's such a help - and I need all the help I can get here 'cos it's not easy running a pub. Are any of you pub landladies? Yes? Then you know what it's like. It's not just a matter of standing behind the bar, pulling the pints, is it? Oh, no. It's a big responsibility. Well you've got your quiz to run on a Thursday, and your entertainment to organise on a Friday. I ask you? Do you give them **LOCAL ENTERTAINER** or do you give them **LOCAL ENTERTAINER**? And as for Ladies Darts Night on a Monday – well!!! You see, I haven't been doing this very long. In fact – but I expect you've all guessed by now. *(She looks from side to side and lowers her voice)* I'm not really a pub landlady at all. I'm only pretending to be Lottie Lightale. Here, take a peek. *(She coyly raises the hem of her overskirt to reveal a glittering white frock)* Yes, beneath this homely exterior, I'm a real, genuine, hundred-per-cent, no-holds-barred Fairy Godmother.

Band: Oooooh!!!

Lottie: There, I knew you'd be impressed. But I bet you can't guess whose Fairy Godmother I am.

Audience *(we hope!)*: Cinderella!

Lottie *(crestfallen)*: Aww, shucks! Were you here last night or something? Anyway – yes, I am Cinderella's Fairy Godmother. You see, Cinderella lives just down the road there, at Stoneybroke Hall with her father, Baron Boris the Bankrupt, and her two ghastly stepsisters, Ermintrude and Ernestina. *They* treat little Cinderella like a slave, and *he* won't recognise her as his rightful daughter any more.

Audience: Aww!

Lottie: It's a lot sadder than that!

Audience: AWWW!

Lottie: Anyway, I promised Cinderella's mum that I'd keep an eye on poor Cinders. So I've adopted this cunning disguise to be close by in case she needs my help. There, that's enough plot to be going on with. I've got work to do. *(The lights start to come back up and she looks around.)* Doris! *(Doris is asleep, and gives a loud snore)*

Audience: Fetch your mop Doris! *(She wakes with a start and mops)*

Lottie: Thank you so much. Come on then Doris, let's be - *(She turns and comes up against the Man in Black, who has entered unobserved, and now stands, centre stage, posing with his silver-topped cane. He flicks out elegant lace cuffs)* Ohhh! *(Lottie backs off and bobs a curtsey)* Sorry, Sir, didn't see you there. May I get you anything, Sir?

Man in Black: A tankard of your finest ale, my good woman.

Lottie: Certainly sir. Doris, you heard the gentleman. *(She starts to bundle Doris off.)*

Man in Black: And –

Lottie: Yes?

Doris (*helpfully*): Packet of pork scratchings?

Man in Black: And – your account books.

Lottie: My what! (*She looks at Doris, who shrugs*)

Doris: He means pork scratchings. Whoever he is.

Man in Black: I, Mistress Lightale, work for the Inland Revenue. (*There is a mass gasp from the villagers*) I am the Tax Man. (*Murmurs of consternation begin and villagers begin to sidle away in ones and twos*) And it appears, Mistress Lightale, that you haven't paid any taxes for years. I need to cast my eye over your accounts.

Lottie: Well, if you say so, Sir, but I don't know anything about taxes. I haven't been here very long you see. Isn't that right? (*She looks around for support*) Ohhh – they've all gone.

Man in Black: Well? I'm waiting.

Lottie: I'll see what I can do. Oooh, Doris, I'm all of a twitter. (*She scurries off. Doris goes to follow, then turns back*)

Doris: Look, are you sure you wouldn't prefer the pork scra – ahem. Account books it is then. (*She follows Lottie into the pub*)

Man in Black (*with a disdainful laugh as the lights dim, leaving him in a spotlight*): It never fails! Mention accounts, and it sends them into a blind panic, poor fools! Oh I do love my job! (*He stops in his tracks*) What! Not booing are we? I do hope not – because while we're waiting for Mistress Lottie to cook her books, I could come down and take a look at yours! (*He makes for the steps*) Not that any of you will have anything to worry about, for I'm sure all your tax returns will be in perfect order. (*He turns coy*) But no. I expect you've guessed my little secret by now. (*He looks to either side and lowers his voice*) I'm not really from the Inland Revenue at all. I'm only pretending to be a Tax Man. (*He swishes his coat back to reveal a demon's tail tucked into up into his belt.*) Yes, beneath this suave, sophisticated exterior I'm a real, genuine, hundred-per-cent, no-holds-barred Panto Demon! There – boo all you like! (*He laughs*) I've adopted this cunning disguise to keep an eye on Boris the Baron. Boris the BANKRUPT Baron! And yes folks, it's thanks to me that he's penniless. Skint. Stoneybroke. But it's not just for tax purposes that I've got him under my thumb. I pride myself on being even more evil than that! You see, Baron Boris has a beautiful daughter who used to be the apple of his eye. But her mother died when she was a mere infant.

Audience: Aww!

Man in Black: It's a lot sadder than that!

Audience: AWWW!!

Man in Black: Yes, the poor man was left to bring up the babe alone. Who could blame him for marrying again? Well, his second wife was a woman after my own heart – a real stinker. Managed to make him favour her two girls and cast off his own daughter! She's dead too, but I've managed to keep him under my evil influence – so much so that he believes Cinderella is just a servant. As for the stepsisters – what a repulsive pair of rotters! And guess what? – they're even better than me at screwing money out of the old codger. But that's enough plot for now. I've got work to do. And, what's more, I want to get on with it undetected. (*He raises his voice and calls off into the wings.*) Which means I don't want you lot blowing my cover with bangs and flashes every time I come on. Got that? (*pause*) Good. (*He turns back to audience and holds up a hand as the lights come back up*) Hark! This sounds like Boris the Bankrupt coming now. (*The Man in Black moves to sit at a table and Boris appears, humming happily to himself. He comes down centre, looks up at the pub sign. He pulls*

a few coins out of his pocket and starts counting them. Doris comes out of the pub with a tankard on a tray. She puts it in front of the Man in Black.)

Doris: There you are Sir. Tankard of our finest ale. And a pocket of pork scratchings. *(She drops them on the table and holds her hand out. The Man in Black ignores her, picks up a newspaper and starts to read. Doris shrugs and exits.)*

Boris: Yes, I think I've just enough pennies here to buy myself a little drinkie. *(The Man in Black coughs and turns a page of his paper. Boris looks round, and jumps in horror.)* Oh no! The Man in Black! I mustn't let him catch me with this little bit of untaxed income. *(He dives behind the barrel. The Man in Black laughs, folds the newspaper, drains his tankard and stands.)*

Man in Black: Like I said - *(He pauses, picks up the pork scratchings and strides left, opening the packet. Boris cautiously raises his head)* I do love my job! *(There is a bang and a flash. Boris dives for cover, the Man in Black gives a start, scattering pork scratchings, tuts and exits.)*

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