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Baba Yaga, The Russian Witch: An Operetta in Two Acts

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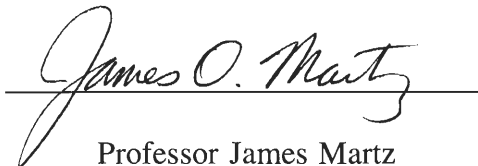
THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Stephan Moore, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in 1991, successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on March 24, 1996.

The title of the paper is:

"Baba Yaga, the Russian Witch, an operetta in two acts"



Professor James Martz
Theatre



Professor James Schwall
Music

BABA YAGA, THE RUSSIAN WITCH:

An Operetta in Two Acts

Libretto by Julie Moulds Rybicki

Music by Stephan Moore

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ACT TWO:

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Scene Two: Baba Yaga's hut, night.

Scene Three: The Blacksmith's shop, noon, the next day.

Scene Four: In the forest, dusk.

Scene Five: The peasant hut and in the forest, night.

Scene Six: Baba Yaga's hut, night.

CAST

THE BLACKSMITH (baritone) is middle-aged, and the fearful servant of **BABA YAGA**, who regularly threatens to eat him. He is the maker of her huge iron teeth, which she breaks regularly while she's eating her human prey and biting trees.

BABA YAGA (alto) is a Russian folk witch, tall, and very thin (possibly even played by a man). She is a cannibalistic ogress, with a penchant for eating bad children, and for flirting with handsome young men (though she eats them readily). She mistreats her servants **ALENKA** and **ALENKA'S CAT**, and lives in a house that walks on giant chicken legs, with a fence around it made from human bones. The forces of the universe, such as the **DAWN**, the **NIGHT HORSEMAN** and the weather, are at her command. She knows a thousand secrets, and people often come to her (at their peril) for wisdom. She has the strength of a dozen men. (See appendices for information on Baba Yaga as a Russian folk character.)

THE BRAVE YOUTH (tenor) is a Russian peasant boy, friends with the **BLACKSMITH**. His parents are **CAT** and **SPARROW**.

THE CAT (tenor) is the **BRAVE YOUTH**'s father. He may be a bit of a dandy, with a smoker's jacket and a pipe. He dispenses fatherly advice.

THE SPARROW (mezzo-soprano) is the **BRAVE YOUTH**'S overprotective mother, who is concerned by his visions of heroism. She and her family are native residents of the Thirty-first Kingdom.

THE ARCHER (baritone) is a young hero sent to the Thirty-first kingdom by his master, the Czar of another kingdom for a routine bird hunting mission that he considers quite beneath him.

THE BIRD PRINCESS (soprano) is a beautiful enchanted princess. She is a personification of grace, with a practical streak. Cursed by her father, she is a princess by day and a bird by night, wandering and flying through the forest of the Thirty-first kingdom in exile.

ALENKA, THE SILENT GIRL, (soprano) is the mistreated, mute servant girl of **BABA YAGA**. Her voice has been destroyed by **BABA YAGA**. She is a child, comparable in age to **THE BRAVE YOUTH**.

ALENKA'S CAT (tenor) is her devoted friend. He, too, is a mistreated servant of **BABA YAGA**.

DAWN, OR THE MORNING HORSEMAN, is a silent, recurring character. He or she is one of **BABA YAGA'S** servants. When he/she runs by, it is a sign that the sun is rising and a new day has begun. **DAWN** is a combination of two traditional servants of **BABA YAGA**, Daybreak and Sunrise. They are both horsemen, one in white vestments on a white horse, the other in orange vestments on an orange horse. A dancer might just wear an orange unitard.

THE NIGHT HORSEMAN is similar to **DAWN** in that he/she is also silent and a dancer. When he/she passes it becomes night. Traditionally **NIGHT** is completely in black, on a black horse.

ACT ONE

Overture:

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Setting: Indeterminate.

DAWN and THE NIGHT HORSEMAN dance during the overture. Near the end, the NIGHT HORSEMAN passes and the stage darkens. The forge remains unseen until the final notes of the overture.

Scene One

Setting: the Blacksmith's shop (R), a simple anvil and hammer, with a hint of woods above. A minimal shelter is optional. In larger productions, include the nearby River of Fire, and the distant exterior vision of Baba Yaga's hut standing on chicken legs.

Time: Late day.

(The BLACKSMITH is at his forge,
hammering to the beat of the chimes.)

BLACKSMITH

(Sung.)

In this Thirty-first Kingdom, the people's lives are filled with fear.
For, beyond the River of Fire, Baba Yaga's always near.
Ah! This cursed Russian witch, she fills my life with pain and grief.
She has made of me her slave, condemned to forge her iron teeth.

She breaks them on the armor of heroes, and on their steely bones.
So often the forest is filled with their cries and moans.
She breaks her teeth while chasing children, and biting through scores of trees.
Then comes to me screaming she needs a new set, of these!
(He indicates the iron teeth he's forging now.)

Ah! My poor wasted life; I'm now too old to try much more.
Once, I was a journeyman, and sold my wares on kinder shores.
I could have worked for royalty, and had the life that I deserve.
Now, instead of noblemen, this wretched crone is who I serve.

I'd rather be forging a sword for a soldier, a scepter for the Czar!
I'd rather be somewhere where no Baba Yagas are!
No Baba Yagas! No Baba Yagas! Ah! Ah! Ah!

I can see now in the sky, the evil hag is close at hand.
The stars begin to fall away, and there's a shaking in the land.
Here she comes! Here she comes! She is here!

(BABA YAGA enters L, cackling and screaming hysterically, on her bounding mortar and pestle, if possible (see appendices.) She has a sack, which contains a cane topped with a skull with glowing red eyes and some human thigh bones.)

BABA YAGA
(Spoken.)

ARE MY TEETH DONE YET, YOU WRETCHED FOOL?

I snapped my last pair on that last boy I ate.
He was juicy, and fresh from the farm,
But he wandered in my woods, so he came to harm.

Are my teeth done yet?

(Sung.)

You quivering fool!
You certainly know how FAMISHED I get!
You know I'm HUNGRY,

BLACKSMITH
(Cowering and singing.)

I know!

BABA YAGA

And how I'd love to eat you,

BLACKSMITH

God knows, I know!

BABA YAGA

And how I'd love to dice and heat you.

BLACKSMITH

Lord knows, I know!

BABA YAGA

But you're the only blacksmith left, in these woods, in the Thirty-first Kingdom.
(The BLACKSMITH runs back behind his forge.)

Handy,

(The BLACKSMITH raises his hammer to look useful.)

You certainly come in handy,
When the children taste like candy,
And I can't crack, their lily-white bones.

There's nothing like eating a bad child!
The ones who don't do what their parents say.
I like to munch them, lightly done!
I also enjoy the way that they run!

So man,
Stop your quaking and go, man,
get to hammerin', and forge me
a new set of iron teeth:
it's life or death on delivery!

I am the woman of power around here!
The whirlwinds whirl all around me!

(She is surrounded by wind).

I'm the one who calls the sun to rise.

(DAWN, THE MORNING HORSEMAN, passes.)

I'm the one who makes the Night Horseman ride.

(NIGHT HORSEMAN passes.)

I'm the one who can come after you.
And you won't ever get away!

I am the woman of power around here!
With a chicken-legged hut at my beck and call!

(She brandishes a bone cane with a skull taken from
her sack at him.)

And red eyed skulls guarding every entrance.
I'd like to take you there and put you in my stew,
But as long as you keep my teeth youth-full.
You just might not be my next toothfull.

(Nearly vaudevillian, dancing with the bone
cane. The BRAVE YOUTH appears silently
and hides behind a tree.)

They call me "Firehag".
They call me "Pegleg".
Some of them, they call me a bitch!
But I am Baba, I'm Baba Yaga, the Russian Witch!

My teeth are iron.

(She holds up her new teeth that the BLACKSMITH
has handed to her, finished.)

My legs are bony.

(She lifts her long shirt slightly.)

And you can bet your money,
if I'm hungry
then I will eat you,
I'm Baba Yaga!

(Spoken to the BLACKSMITH.)

These look like they'll fit fine.

(She turns away from the audience, puts the huge teeth
to her mouth, and looks into a large hand-held mirror
the BLACKSMITH hands to her. The mirror shows
the audience a picture of the witch with gruesome iron
teeth. BABA YAGA then pretends to take the teeth
out, and sets the mirror back down. She turns around,
faces the audience and smiles animatedly OR a mask
with detachable iron teeth could be used.)

Hmm. I smell something. Let me see, it's a

(She sniffs significantly after each phrase. Music Cue.)

a young boy. He's hiding somewhere-- in a northeasterly direction. He smells like his mother
recently fed him with-- salmon loaf, and sweet-- Russian cream and kissel. That's always a good
sign. I like them plump and hearty, my dinners.

(She follows her nose to a tree behind the forge, where
the BRAVE YOUTH is hiding.)

Ah! It's that appetizing little boy that lives on the other side of the forest!

(To BRAVE YOUTH.)

I'll catch you, my little rabbit!

(She chases the BRAVE YOUTH offstage.)

BLACKSMITH

That was the Brave Youth come to visit me!

(The BLACKSMITH yells.)

Run Brave Youth, run! Get home as fast as you can!

(Blackout while music continues into next scene.)

SCENE TWO

Setting: the Forest. Pre-dawn.

(The ARCHER, an ex-soldier and hero, is disillusioned with his glamourless role as a bird hunter. His actions are broad and comically heroic.)

ARCHER

(Sung.)

I could be tracking down a bear;
I'd wear his hide upon my back.
I could be shooting at a wolf;
I'd make warm boots of his fine grey fur.

I could be chasing Koshchey the Deathless,
and rid the world of that skeleton pale.
But the Czar, my employer, has sent me to this.
He's put his hero on Bird Detail.

Bird Detail, bagging birds for his feasts,
I wish he'd assigned a more glorious beast
than birds.

(ARCHER draws out the first line, sighing.)

O how I miss
Heroism! A chance to be brave!
Quests to conquer and
maidens to save!
Heroism! Large creatures to stalk!
Heroism!

But what is a hero to do
when there's no war to be brave in,
and his muscles are starting to cave in?
What is a hero to do?

The great problem of our age, is
the civilized solve all our rages,
and the heroes are sent to the Thirty-first Kingdom
on Bird Detail.

(The ARCHER takes a sack or basket and starts unceremoniously dropping dead birds into it as he sings.)

Oh, how I miss
Heroism! A chance to be brave!
Quests to conquer and
maidens to save!

ARCHER (cont.)

Heroism! Large creatures to stalk!
Swords and arrows,
a proud hero's walk!
Heroism!

(A bird song is heard. Next line is spoken.)

I need something more a challenge, something I can't conquer. Like a woman.
(Sung.)

Yes, I need a girl, with a face like a pearl,
a difficult girl, a glory.
With a soul that the angels blessed,
who would require a quest.
A girl, like the princess of story.

Well, a hero has hunting to do.
I see another bird now.
It's a shame to shoot her, I guess.
but beauty is beauty, and business is business.

(The ARCHER hides and prepares to shoot a bird
offstage. DAWN, THE MORNING HORSEMAN
passes. A change of light indicates the BIRD
PRINCESS transformation off or onstage.)

My God! That dove just turned into a beautiful girl!

(The BIRD PRINCESS enters, unaware of the
ARCHER. She begins to sing the GRACE
SONG, and dances. The ARCHER is smitten.)

BIRD PRINCESS
(Spoken.)

Ah, a little dead sparrow.

(She bends down and touches a dead bird with an
arrow through it.)

Poor little soul. I'd better be more careful.

(She sighs.)

That was a long flight. I'll never get used to it, changing from bird to girl, girl to bird, day and
night and day. Ah well, I guess I should remember what dear departed mother used to say--what
you can't change, try to enjoy. And except for love, nothing's better than flying.

(Sung while dancing:)

Since my father lay his curse,
I fly each night, a sad white dove.
And when the Morning Horseman rides,
I fall, a half-girl from the skies.

I dream a rescuing love from heaven
with his bravery, someday may
transform this lonesome bird to maiden
and break this curse some miraculous way.

(Spoken.)

But then the Night Horseman always passes, and my arms turn back to wings.

(Sung.)

I'm told my face is like a flower,
But flowers always fade away,

BIRD PRINCESS (cont.)

In grace, I've found my golden tower,
in grace, my sacred place to stay!

I fly at night, alone, in the woods
and sing the forest my secret grief.
But then I rise up through God's sweet heaven,
and in these words shine my belief:

(At first, the BIRD PRINCESS doesn't know THE ARCHER is singing a duet with her, as he is singing "aside." But very soon, she is aware of his presence and possible romance.)

The milk of grace is wine.
The gift of grace is wings.
Grace fills the heart like song.
It's silent, then, it sings.

BIRD PRINCESS
It rains so coolly down,
and soothes just like a dream,
a dream encased in cloud,
or bright, like sunny beam.

The milk of grace is wine.
The gift of grace is wings.
Grace fills the heart with song.
It's silent, then it sings.

ARCHER
Heroism, a chance to be brave!
Quests to conquer, and maidens to save!
Heroism! Large creatures to stalk!
Swords and arrows, a proud hero's walk!

I am a hero! I'll set you free!
For you I'll journey, o'er land and sea!
For you, I'll duel who'er I must!
This girl is worthy of one as brave as me!

(The two meet C. The ARCHER bows,
The BIRD PRINCESS curtsies, though is taken aback.

ARCHER
(Spoken.)

I'd like to introduce myself, my name is Ivan Vladimir, Archer, and Hero extraordinaire. I couldn't help but overhear your plight, and I place myself, heart, soul, and deed in your service.

BIRD PRINCESS
(Spoken.)

Kind sir, I thank you, but I don't need--

ARCHER

May I ask your name?

BIRD PRINCESS

Why yes, my name is Princess--

ARCHER

A princess! I could just tell you were. Oh princess, I know we're in the middle of the forest, and it's just daybreak, and we've only just met, but could I have this dance?

BIRD PRINCESS

Wouldn't we need music for that?

ARCHER

There is the music of your beauty, and of course, there are the birds.

BIRD PRINCESS

Ah yes, the birds--

(The BIRD PRINCESS makes a several bird whistles and suddenly there is a symphony of bird song.)

Shall we dance?

(The BIRD PRINCESS curtsies. The ARCHER takes her arm. They start to dance in the exaggerated way of swooning lovers in old movies. They turn together, away, together, away, running further and further apart on stage. At a moment when he is DR, and she is UL, you hear ominous BABA YAGA theme over the PRINCESS' WALTZ. The ARCHER is in his own world of rhapsody and doesn't even notice the witch sneaking up on, and grabbing the BIRD PRINCESS, who protests dramatically, if silently at first. The BIRD PRINCESS makes a birdlike squawk as the witch drags her off. The ARCHER, too late, realizes what has just happened.)

ARCHER

My heart is gone!

(All that is left of the BIRD PRINCESS are some white feathers that fell off her cape/dress. THE ARCHER reverently picks them up. He then faces the audience and, before he runs in hopeless pursuit, he makes a vow.)

I swear, by the noble Czar, and by the grace of God in heaven, I'll rescue that girl, break her curse, and win her hand and heart.

(He chases after the witch. The BIRD PRINCESS screams offstage.)

SCENE THREE

Setting: The Brave Youth's hut--a simple peasant hut with a long rectangular wood table and wide benches that double later as beds. The table has upon it a glass holding three spoons. The hut also needs a broom, a fireplace, some pots and pans, plates, and toys for a heroic boy.

Time: Pre-dawn.

(The CAT, the SPARROW, and the BRAVE YOUTH have finished breakfast. The SPARROW is putting away dishes and CEREMONIOUSLY puts the three spoons into a jar on the table. She clinks them loudly.)

SPARROW

Ah, the family spoons! Such treasures!

(Pause.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Papa Cat, Mama Sparrow, I must confess something--last night Baba Yaga was after me!

CAT

Ah, that's bad news, my boy. That means she likely followed you here. She rarely gives up on a dinner she's chased.

SPARROW

(Twittering.)

Oh, my brave one, haven't we told you to stay out of her part of the woods. You know how she likes to eat children.

CAT

(Aside.)

Especially bad Russian children who don't mind their parents.

BRAVE YOUTH

But I was visiting the forge.

SPARROW

Not the forge! That's practically next to her chicken-legged hut!

BRAVE YOUTH

You know how lonesome the Blacksmith gets. No one likes to be around him with Baba Yaga always near. And it's so hard for him to get away.

SPARROW

We told you never ever to bridge the River of Fire!

BRAVE YOUTH

But the poor Blacksmith. He's practically her slave, making her two, three, sets of iron teeth a week.

CAT

Remember why she needs all those iron teeth, Brave Youth. She breaks them chewing up all the people she eats. Now your mother and I must go deep in the forest today, to cut firewood for my sick Uncle Alexander. He's near death, the old tom. How do we know we can trust you?

SPARROW

He's growing up. We must try to trust him.

CAT

Well, your mother and I aren't leaving until we make a plan if Baba Yaga comes here after you.

SPARROW

Yes, my darling, now we've told you this all before, but I'm going to remind you how it works. If Baba Yaga comes in this house, you must not say a word. As long as you are silent, she can't grab you for her dinner.

(The SPARROW grabs and hugs her boy.)

She's powerless.

CAT

But one sound, one word from you, and you're cooked
(Aside.)
literally.

BRAVE YOUTH

That doesn't make any sense.

SPARROW

Of course it does. In the Thirty-first Kingdom, those are the Rules of the Universe.

CAT

(Miming actions.)

So if she comes in, if she taunts you and teases. If she tickles your toes and twists your nose.
Even if she touches your spoon--

BRAVE YOUTH

(Horrificed.)

Not my spoon!

SPARROW

(Picks up spoon.)

Even if she touches your spoon,
you are not to say a word.

BRAVE YOUTH

But I'm the Brave Youth! If she touched my spoon, I'd have to say something.
I'd have to run up to her and grab it back!

(He takes the spoon from the SPARROW.)

Then I'd challenge her to a fight with daggers, then--

(CAT gently pushes the boy down onto a chair.)

SPARROW

Sit still son, we've got some advice.

CAT

You must learn to be quiet or she'll stew you with rice.
In our house, one word is all she needs to take you away--

SPARROW

These are the Rules of the Universe.

(Pause. Then earnestly.)

If you want to live 'til morning, please boy, heed our warnings.

CAT

(Cue music.)

He might as well hear the rest, dear bird.
Sit down boy, until you've heard:

SPARROW

(Sung.)

Don't wake a sleeping twelve headed dragon.

CAT
(Sung.)

Don't climb a giant cabbage up to heaven.

SPARROW

Don't ever swim in the river of fire.

CAT

Don't be cruel to a three-eyed girl.

CAT and SPARROW

And don't get caught in Baba Yaga's iron teeth.
For these are the Rules of the Universe.

CAT

Always remember that princes love pudding.

SPARROW

In December, don't let anyone sell you snow.

CAT

Always drink beer at royal weddings.

SPARROW

Never discount a mother's blessing.

CAT and SPARROW

And remember, of all bad things, a witch's teeth are worst--
for these are the Rules of the Universe.

It doesn't matter how brave you feel.
If she tickles your toes, or twists your nose.
If you make one sound, you're her next meal!
These are the Rules of the Universe.

SPARROW

You need high stilts to cross the sea.

CAT

There's no such thing as a watermelon tree.

SPARROW

When you're sad, remember to breathe God's fresh air.

CAT

And don't keep your berries from a hungry bear.

CAT and SPARROW

And be silent, or Baba Yaga's teeth will be your curse,
for these are, these are, these are the Rules of the Universe.

(CAT picks up his ax. BABA YAGA's head
appears in the window, noticed.)

CAT
(Spoken.)

We'd better leave for Uncle Alexander's before the day gets old. Now you listen good to what we said.

SPARROW
(Spoken.)

Yes, please be careful, my dear one. We'll be deep in the woods and can't help you if she comes.
(Pause.)

Good-bye.

(She hugs him.)

CAT

Take care.

(The CAT touches the boy's hair.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Good-bye.

(SPARROW lets go of the BRAVE YOUTH and picks up her ax. CAT and SPARROW leave, humming the tune to THESE ARE THE RULES OF THE UNIVERSE. The BRAVE YOUTH looks around the hut, looks at the cup of spoons, and touches the each one. He pauses briefly.)

The spoons--

(He grabs a broom and starts to sweep.
Music changes to ominous BABA YAGA Entrance Music. The audience sees her entering behind the BRAVE YOUTH, creeping into the hut, possibly through a window, silently sneaking up on her prey.)

BABA YAGA
(Chanting at first.)

Boy, boy, my bundle of joy,
I've come for you--
you'll never get away!
Boy, boy, I'm tired of being coy,
I've brought my sack for you.

(He keeps tensing up silently, wanting to fight back. She moves in.)

You think you're so brave.

(Aside.)

Are you brave enough to be quiet? I doubt it.

(Pause. She taunts him, puts up her fists.)

Come on, come on boy, raise those minuscule biceps, defend yourself.

(He puts up his fists, but cowers backwards.)

Just what I thought--a coward.

You're so timid I bet tiny mice gather around you on the kitchen table, and laugh at you.
You're so scrawny, if I made a fence out of your leg bones, little baby rabbits could jump right over it.

(He opens his mouth to yell but he stops himself.)

BABA YAGA (cont.)

How does a runt of a human boy get a cat and a sparrow for parents. Shouldn't you be a feathered feline? What are you, a little freak?

(Music Cue. BRAVE YOUTH is enraged, and practically charges her, but still is silent.)

SPARROW and CAT
(Sung offstage.)

Remember boy, not one word....

BABA YAGA

This obviously isn't working. Well, if I can't have you yet, I can at least take everything precious to you.

(She goes around touching things in the hut, toys, his bow and arrow, his clothes, stuffed animal heads on the wall, etc., chanting a taunt repeatedly, like an obnoxious school girl.)

This is the Brave Youth's, I'm going to take it.
This is the Brave Youth's, I'm going to take it.

(BABA YAGA starts banging things on the table, and breaking things. The BRAVE YOUTH wants to charge her, but remains silent. He looks significantly at the glass of spoons, moving towards them, as if to take them into his protective hands. BABA YAGA sees his look and knows what to do now.)

Ah, the spoons. Now I know your weakness.

(Chants.)

I've got you in a corner now
and I feel I've got to warn you now, that
I'm walking to the table now.
I'm sitting at the table now.

(Mock surprise.)

Ah, what do I see?
A glass with silver spoons,
One, Two, Three.

(She counts the spoon heads, without touching them, then continues, evilly. Menacingly she then ceremoniously grabs the spoons. At each repeat of her taunt, she gets louder and louder, until she is nearly screaming.)

HERE is the Cat's spoon. (Music cue.)

HERE is the Sparrow's spoon. (Music cue.)

HERE, IS THE BRAVE YOUTH'S SPOON! (Music cue.)

(The BRAVE YOUTH is visibly shaken.)

Come on boy!

(She waves. She dances.)

HERE is the Cat's spoon. (Music cue.)

HERE is the Sparrow's spoon. (Music cue.)

HERE IS THE BRAVE YOUTH'S SPOON! (Music cue.)

(Musical screams again. BABA YAGA is emphatic now: enraged, and yelling.)

BABA YAGA (cont.)

I said,

HERE, IS THE CAT'S SPOON. (Music cue.)

HERE, IS THE SPARROW'S SPOON! (Music cue.)

HERE, IS THE BRAVE YOUTH'S SPOON! (Music cue.)

(There is total silence, then the
BRAVE YOUTH screams.)

BRAVE YOUTH

BABA YAGA! DON'T TOUCH MY SPOON! (Music cue.)

(BABA YAGA turns to the audience, and
smiles triumphantly. A chase ensues, with BABA
YAGA and the BRAVE YOUTH going over and
under and around the table, hiding behind cupboards.
There are near catches and escapes, etc.)

BRAVE YOUTH

(Shouts defiantly during the pauses in the chase.)

Can't get me!

BABA YAGA

Oh, come here, my little dumpling!

BRAVE YOUTH

I am the Brave Youth!

BABA YAGA

You're dinner to me!

BRAVE YOUTH

Hairy hag! Crone!

BABA YAGA

My feisty plum pudding!

BRAVE YOUTH

I won't ever let you catch me!

BABA YAGA

(She grabs him, throws a sack over his head, and
pulls him struggling to her in an evil hug.)

Ah, come, my little supper, to me.

(She drags him offstage.)

SCENE FOUR

Setting: The Blacksmith's shop. Midday.

BLACKSMITH

(Hammering and singing at his forge.)

Here, in this darkened wood, an epic tale begins anew.

When a hero meets a girl, what else but love is he to do?

When a princess meets a man, and her pure heart is set aflame.

Neither shall have any rest--for apart they can't remain.

He searches madly for she who has caught him, she whom he adores.

She pines for him like as every maid in minstrel lore.

There's a love and lover in every minstrel's song.

And they must get together, or else the story will be wrong.

SCENE FIVE

Setting: Baba Yaga's Hut--includes a massive stove (C), two large cages big enough for three adults each, and a small wooden table and two chairs. Large cooking pots, a samovar, witch paraphernalia, such as a broom and bottles of herbs, large knives, and a spinning wheel, should be obvious. A hint of the fence of bones and glowing skulls (perhaps as a painted scene out a window) is important. Broken iron teeth (animal traps) would increase atmosphere.
Time: Afternoon.

(The two cages are filled, with the BIRD PRINCESS in one cage, and ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT in the other. The BIRD PRINCESS is turned away from the audience, sitting on the cage bottom like a dancer stretching. ALENKA'S CAT and ALENKA are huddled together in the other cage, leaning against each other for support. Enter BABA YAGA dragging in the BRAVE YOUTH by the ear.)

BRAVE YOUTH
(Screaming.)

Let me go! Let me go! I'm the Brave Youth!

BABA YAGA

Be quiet boy, you bother me.

(To ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT.)

You two! Get out of there!

(She throws aside the BRAVE YOUTH and unlocks their cage, taking the key from an obvious place the BIRD PRINCESS can see. The servants rush away from the witch.)

I need this cage for my second dinner.

(She grabs the BRAVE YOUTH again, and throws him in the cage, and slams and locks the door.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Hey!

BABA YAGA

A princess and a plump boy; not a bad day's work--

BRAVE YOUTH

My parents are coming home for lunch! I dropped a trail of cabbage leaves through a hole in your sack! They'll follow them here. They'll come get me! They will--

BABA YAGA

Let them come. I always like to bite some feathers and fur after a baked boy.

(BRAVE YOUTH rattles the cage. BABA YAGA ignores him.)

Alenka, come here!

(The girl comes, straightens to attention without looking directly at the witch.)

BABA YAGA (cont.)

Start two pots of water boiling--one for the turnips and potatoes, and the other to scald my dinners clean.

(ALENKA nods and curtsies, sadly. The witch then addresses ALENKA'S CAT, now next to ALENKA:)

And you, CAT, get out my spices for stuffed boy and princess soup, and set out all my knives. Especially all the really big ones--

(She looks at the BRAVE YOUTH.)

I've got to go to the Blacksmith's to pick up another set of iron teeth. That old man I ate last night did that last pair in.

(She shows an animal trap with broken teeth. ALENKA'S CAT bows, looking down.)

ALENKA'S CAT

Yes, Grandmother.

BABA YAGA
(Harshly.)

And sharpen my blades too!

ALENKA'S CAT

Yes, honored Grandmother.

BABA YAGA
(Kindly.)

I do like it when you call me Grandmother.

(Harshly.)

Now get out of my way!

(She barges between the servants and pushes them in different directions with her hands, causing them to fall.).
hands, causing them to fall.)

Chicken Hut, Chicken Hut,
Bend your legs down to earth for me--

(She waits.)

That was smooth. The house didn't even seem like it moved.

Well, I'm riding of then! Lock the hall door after I leave.

(She hops out the door. You hear a loud clanking sound, as she rides away.)

ALENKA'S CAT

If only we could leave here, too.

(ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT are at the table, situated D. in front of the cages. ALENKA gets the vegetables and starts cutting them. The CAT also starts his tasks. They ignore the prisoners.)

ALENKA'S CAT

Ah, Alenka, I don't think I can live another day in this terrible place. And I get so tired of calling the old hag, grandmother. But it pleases her, and I don't want her to eat you.

(ALENKA shakes her head sadly, looking down, then up, exposing her face. The BRAVE YOUTH is rattling his cage, and the BIRD PRINCESS is cooing something between a human and bird cry. The sounds continue through the ensuing exchange.)

BRAVE YOUTH

You two--let me out!

ALENKA'S CAT

I can't even look at them.

(ALENKA covers up her eyes, pulls her fingers down to her mouth, physically sighs, and shakes her head again.)

Day after day, all these dinners. You know, when I was a young cat, and we lived with your mother and father, I used to catch forest mice. I'd chase their little grey tails, bat their little bodies with my paws before the kill. It was fun. But now that I know what it's like to be prey--I'll never eat a mouse again.

(ALENKA concurs.)

And we do get hungry around here too, living on just hard crusts of bread, but no one will ever say we turned to cannibalism. Never once have we eaten a person or cat.

(ALENKA cuts vegetables, sometimes stopping in despair, looking around, but not at the cages, except from the corner of her eye.)

Alenka, I can't do this again, listen to another evening of screams and boiling. I can't bear the thought of that poor boy, who's barely started his life, and that beautiful princess getting sliced into dark and white meat.

(ALENKA makes a "what can we do?" motion.)

What are our options? I know. We can't even get past the screaming skulls and she catches us. and I can't take another beating. I'm too old. And you're too young. Don't even look at them. You start cutting vegetables and I'll get the carving knives.

(Earnestly.)

Don't even look at them.

BRAVE YOUTH

Girl, come here, let me out. Cat, Kitty Kitty, let me free. I'm locked in here! I'm the Brave Youth! You must let me out!

BIRD PRINCESS

(Reaches through the bars toward the BRAVE YOUTH to comfort him. She speaks gently.)

Didn't you hear what they were saying? They won't listen to you. They can't. They're slaves, beaten down again and again by the witch, and afraid for their lives. If they let us out, the witch will likely eat them, too.

(ALENKA and ALENKA's CAT are listening, though they try not to.)

BRAVE YOUTH

But Id help me, if I was in their position. I'm brave, but I don't want to die. They must help us. How can I grow up to be a hero if I never get the chance?

ALENKA'S CAT

(Quietly, to ALENKA.)

Don't listen. Pretend they're not there.

BIRD PRINCESS

Well, lad, you certainly seem brave to me. We'll think of a plan. First, let's just try to stay calm. (The BRAVE YOUTH despairs of his agitating, and slumps, sullen in his cage. The BIRD PRINCESS tries to comfort him with her singing.)

The milk of grace, is wine.
The gift of grace is wings.
Grace fills my heart with song.
It's silent, then it sings.
It rains so coolly down,
and soothes just like a dream.
A dream encased in cloud,
or bright, like sunny beam.

(She continues to hum the tune. ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT, who have been listening more and more intently as the song goes on, begin to watch the BIRD PRINCESS. They confer, ALENKA miming and ALENKA'S CAT whispering in the little girl's ear, then break apart.)

ALENKA'S CAT

(Spoken.)

We really want to help you, we always do, but last time we let someone out we were black and blue for weeks, and Baba Yaga caught the captives again anyway. No good was done. Baba Yaga was more vicious than usual with those two.

BRAVE YOUTH

Just let us out, and we'll all escape together. We can all go to my house, and Papa Cat and Mama Sparrow will feed you cheese, black bread and borscht. And you'll be safe forever.

ALENKA'S CAT

No one's safe forever. We've tried so many times to get away. But the witch's yard is filled with spies, and the skulls that yell to the witch when we run. After the third time we tried to escape, she even put a spell on us. Every time we get past the bone yard in back, we turn to marble. Then Baba Yaga gets home and turns us back to flesh so she can beat us black and blue.

BIRD PRINCESS

How sad.

BRAVE YOUTH

But there must be a way to escape.

ALENKA'S CAT

The only reason we've survived this long is that Baba Yaga hates doing housework, and she loves having to someone to boss around. We should have been dead a long time ago.

BIRD PRINCESS

That's what I've heard about this place from the birds at night. Sometimes they watch you from the trees outside.

BRAVE YOUTH

Little girl, I'm asking you, too! Set us free. You've got to help me! I'll come back for you, and the Cat. I promise.

(ALENKA looks away.)

ALENKA'S CAT

She can't speak. Baba Yaga destroyed her voice years ago, the last time we tried to escape. Turned it into an amber stone and crushed it. She'll never speak again.

BIRD PRINCESS

(Sadly, to ALENKA'S CAT.)

How did you two come to this terrible place?

BRAVE YOUTH

Yes, how did you and the little girl come here?

ALENKA'S CAT

(He continues meal preparations.)

Well, Alenka and I used to live in a cottage not far from here. I was a young cat when Alenka was born. The food was plenty, but her mother and father were never kind. I lived in their woodshed. Alenka fed me scraps, and we played through many a day. But then frost killed the family's crops, and Baba Yaga scared away the animals, and there was no more food. I followed her mother and father when they led little Alenka out in the woods and left her there to starve. It's a shame, really. Families are supposed to love you.

(He looks at ALENKA takes her hands, and sings.)

You should have been like sweet cream butter
To your father's daily bread.
But while you slept, they made their plans
to leave you in the woods for dead.

They should have sent you to a warm house.
A spinster aunt might have taken you in.
But your mother's voice was like cold wind,
so I blew this way to be your friend.
I vowed I'd always be your friend.

We have no way to escape here, and
we're not wanted anywhere else.

and so I gues, we have found,
our frightening refuge here.

(Spoken.)

That's our story. We've been living here for years now. Though I'm not sure living here's much better than dying.

BIRD PRINCESS

(To ALENKA.)

You poor girl. You've never even had a warm mother to feed you butter pancakes in the morning, and weave blue ribbons into your hair.

(ALENKA motions no.)

I'll bet you've never even had a ribbon.

(ALENKA motions no.)

BRAVE YOUTH

My mother has a dozen ribbons; she would give Alenka one.

BIRD PRINCESS

Yes, Brave Youth, I'm sure your mama would. But until then, I have one I can give Alenka. That at least is something I can help with.

(THE BIRD PRINCESS pulls a blue ribbon from her hair or from around her neck, and offers it to the girl through the cage bars. ALENKA approaches her. THE BIRD PRINCESS weaves it into her hair tenderly. ALENKA'S CAT locates and hands ALENKA a hand-held mirror. The girl looks at herself. ALENKA then looks sadly at the BIRD PRINCESS and BRAVE YOUTH. The girl motions to ALENKA'S CAT. They confer again, ALENKA touching the hair ribbon. They reach an agreement.)

ALENKA'S CAT

(To BIRD PRINCESS.)

Alenka tells me that's the kindest a lady's ever been to her, and she wants us to set you free--and the boy, too.

BIRD PRINCESS

But the witch--she'll kill you!

ALENKA'S CAT

Like I said, there's not much difference between life and death around here. One of these days, she'll just eat us anyway. We might as well help you.

(Music cue.)

(To ALENKA.)

You know where Baba Yaga hides the cage key. The witch is coming! Get it now!

(The key's hiding place is made obvious each time the key is taken out or hidden.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Are you really going to set us free?

(ALENKA unlocks his cage, and they look significantly at each other.)

ALENKA'S CAT

Yes, but it's up to you to escape from her again. She'll be here any second!

(ALENKA unlocks the other cage.)

BIRD PRINCESS

Thank you! I will always remember your kindness.

BRAVE YOUTH

(Mainly to ALENKA.)

I'll come back to help you, Alenka, and you too, Cat! I am the Brave Youth!

(ALENKA looks at the boy, and quickly re-hides the cage key.)

ALENKA'S CAT

Go, go, you two! There isn't much time!

(The BIRD PRINCESS and the BRAVE YOUTH run out the hallway door. ALENKA'S CAT locks the hallway door behind the two escapees, then turns to ALENKA. They share a moment of unqualified dread.)

BABA YAGA

(She steps in, and looks angrily from the empty open cages to the guilty servants. She approaches them menacingly, and screams hysterically.)

YOU FOUL LITTLE SOUP BONES!!! HOW DARE YOU LET MY DINNERS FREE!

(Lights flicker and change. Thunder cracks outside. Things shake.)

You know how HUNGRY I get.

(She looks at them significantly.)

I'd eat you two if you had any meat on your bones. And I may, still--

ALENKA'S CAT

Please, please, Baba Yaga! Please Grandmother! We had to let them go. A giant--

(Pause. He thinks fast.)

a giant three-headed bear climbed up the chicken legs into the hut while you were gone, and he, um, had a giant axe in his paws. He charged at me and Alenka--

(To ALENKA.)

Didn't he, Alenka.

(ALENKA nods dramatically. Puts her hands up like a menacing bear. ALENKA'S CAT mimes the supposed bear's actions with a broom or axe.)

ALENKA'S CAT (cont.)

And then, he started spinning round and round with the axe in his paws, you know, like you do when you're mad.

BABA YAGA

(Sighs, disgusted.)

I'm listening. Get on with it.

ALENKA'S CAT

And, and, then, uh, the bear heads--all three of them--growled in unison and said

(He growls in a bear voice.)

"Let your prisoners go, or I'll chop you two to pieces."

ALENKA'S CAT (cont.)

(Pause, then quickly.)
So we did--let them go.

(To ALENKA.)

Wasn't that exactly what happened Alenka?

(ALENKA nods vigorously again, and puts her hands up like paws, opens up her mouth as if growling, mimes the story, then cowers again.)

BABA YAGA

(A great wind blows across the stage as she shouts.)

LIARS!

First of all, I've eaten every, single, bear in this forest--including all the three-headed ones. And secondly, not one of the bears in the Thirty-first Kingdom can speak. I've personally eaten every Russian talking bear 'round here for four hundred years.

ALENKA'S CAT

(Stammering.)

Um, he, uh, spoke with a distinctly Swedish accent.

BABA YAGA

(Wind and lightning continue.)

SHUT UP! I won't hear any more lies.

(She shoves ALENKA's CAT to the floor.)

It's lucky for you two that good servants are so hard to find these days.

(She shoves ALENKA.)

ALENKA'S CAT

Not Alenka! Push me, Grandmother, but not Alenka. She's just--

BABA YAGA

(With the deepest disgust.)

Oh, I'm sick of both of you. Get to the bone yard out back now! If you come up with twenty-seven extra large human thigh bones for my favorite bone stew, before tonight, I might not eat you and the girl. Otherwise, you two are the menu! Get to the bone yard quick, before I change my mind!

ALENKA'S CAT

(Running to the door, pulling ALENKA.)

Yes, Grandmother!

SCENE SIX

Setting: The Brave Youth's Hut. Evening.

(The CAT and SPARROW sit at the ends of the table. The BLACKSMITH and BRAVE YOUTH sit on the side facing the audience. The four characters are just finishing dinner.)

BLACKSMITH

Cat. Sparrow. Brave Youth. Thank you for the lovely dinner. This is my first time away from the forge for months.

CAT

Well, we know how much our boy likes you, Mr. Blacksmith, and we thought you'd like to celebrate his safe return with us.

SPARROW

(Filling the BLACKSMITH'S glass.)

When I think of how close he came to being cooked in Baba Yaga's oven, it makes me shiver! My little Brave Youth!

BRAVE YOUTH

I wasn't afraid of her. I--

CAT

In a forest like this, people need all the friends they can get. We must apologize for not inviting you over sooner. Our little boy--

BRAVE YOUTH

I wish you wouldn't talk like I wasn't here. The Blacksmith is my friend, and I'm not little.

(The CAT and SPARROW ignore the boy, while the BLACKSMITH sends a kind look to him.)

CAT

We've decided not to leave him alone for a while--until he understands the Rules of the Universe better. There's the rules about witch's iron teeth he keeps forgetting. Can I offer you some homebrewed kvass?

BLACKSMITH

Those are both good ideas: the kvass and the watching. I wouldn't want him to be put in danger by visiting me anymore. With your permission, I'll just come visit here instead.

(The BRAVE YOUTH feels betrayed by the adults and shows his disgust by walking away.)

SPARROW

I just can't get over how close I came to losing my little boy--

BRAVE YOUTH

I'm not a little boy! I'm the Brave Youth! And you'll see how brave and big I am when I go save the little girl at Baba Yaga's--

CAT

(Raising his voice.)

Brave Youth!

(There is a knocking at the door.)

SPARROW

Who's that, I wonder, on this wet, dark, night? It wouldn't be the witch!

BLACKSMITH

No, she hunted down a pack of wolves tonight; that's why I could come over.
Besides, she wouldn't knock, she'd just kick in the door.

(SPARROW opens the door, to reveal the ARCHER,
who is shivering.)

ARCHER

Madame Sparrow, I wouldn't normally knock on your fair portal, but I've been wandering the forest heroically for days, and the rain and wind are turning me into ice.

SPARROW

(Ushering him in.)

Sir, sir, come in; a weary traveler is always welcome here. This is the Cat. This is our boy, the Brave Youth, and this is our dinner guest and new friend, the Blacksmith.

(Everyone nods in greeting.)

CAT

Sit, sit down. We're about finished with dinner, but there's plenty left for you. The hunting was good today. And we just opened a bottle of kvass.

ARCHER

I couldn't!

CAT

You must!

ARCHER

I couldn't!

SPARROW

You must!

ARCHER

No, I'm just a wandering hero taking a brief repose from my quest. I won't be here long. Just give me a crust of bread and I'll eat it in the corner.

CAT and SPARROW

We insist!

(They seat the ARCHER next to the BRAVE YOUTH,
who looks at him with great curiosity.)

ARCHER

Well, thank you. I'll just have a bit, then. What? Is this Black Russian Mouse stew? Isn't this a specialty of the Thirty-first Kingdom?

SPARROW

(Proudly.)

Yes, and a specialty of my kitchen, too.

ARCHER

Well, I guess I can't pass up a chance to try that!

(He starts spooning eagerly.)

I'm not from around here, you know--

(He eats feverishly. The CAT and the SPARROW continue to fill his bowl and kvass glass.)

BLACKSMITH

So young man, What's your name? Where do you hail from?

ARCHER

(Breaks away from the bowl of food, and stands up, striking a dramatic pose.)

My name is Ivan Vladimir, Archer First Class for Czar Nicholas the Second. And Hero Extraordinaire.

(ARCHER sits again.)

BRAVE YOUTH

So you're a hero? You know you look like one.

ARCHER

Yes, I'm a hero, I know I look like one.

BRAVE YOUTH

I'm really sitting next to a real live hero!

ARCHER

You're really sitting next to a real live hero! I'm multiply decorated-- and heroically certified by the State.

BRAVE YOUTH

Have you saved maidens?

ARCHER

Six or seven.

BRAVE YOUTH

Fought twelve headed dragons?

ARCHER

A thirteen headed one, once.

BRAVE YOUTH

Fought in battles?

ARCHER

My side won every time.

BRAVE YOUTH

Wrestled black bears?

ARCHER

You should see my scars--

(He points, flexes a muscle.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Mama and Papa, you should see his scars!
Have you ever captured a Firebird?

ARCHER

Yes, my biceps still feel the burns.

(He hold up his hands.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Have you fought the great Koshchey the Deathless?

ARCHER

Yes, but he just wouldn't die!

BRAVE YOUTH

No one can make that guy die!

(Pause.)

You know I am going to be a hero. There's this little girl, Alenka, She saved me, so I want to--

ARCHER

(Interrupts him.)

And I, too, have a maiden I'm trying to save--

CAT

I can see where this is going.

BRAVE YOUTH

(Defiantly.)

I am going to go save Alenka from the witch, because she saved me!

ARCHER

That's exactly what I would do!

CAT

(Sharply to BRAVE YOUTH., who obeys.)

Boy, go to the corner a moment.

(Sung sternly to the ARCHER. All join in *The Parents' Protest song*.)

I have to ask you, sir, please do not encourage the boy.

BLACKSMITH

They're trying to teach him to, follow the rules of the Universe.

SPARROW

I have to tell you sir, he doesn't mind us now as it is.

CAT

And your influence here, it will only make things worse.

ARCHER

But, can't you see? The boy wants to be a hero! A boy like he, well, he should know, he should know what it's like to be gloriously brave as me!

SPARROW

Sir, we almost lost him to the witch just yesterday; and if he goes back to save that girl--

BRAVE YOUTH

(From corner.)

But I promised that I'd go back to save her! Archer! I wish you'd tell me more!
I wish you'd tell me more!

ARCHER

It's just something you must experience, my boy, the feeling of--

(Trio begins.)

PARENTS and BLACKSMITH

I have to ask you sir,
please do not encourage
the boy.

We want to teach him to
follow the Rules of the Universe.

I have to tell you sir, he
doesn't mind us now as it is.

And your influence here,
It will only make things worse.

I have to ask you sir,
please do not encourage the boy.

We want to teach him to
follow the Rules of the Universe.

I have to tell you sir, he
doesn't mind us now as it is.

And your influence here, it will
only make things worse.
Oh, please not encourage
the boy!

ARCHER

Heroism, A
chance to
be brave!

Quests to conquer
and maidens to save!

Heroism! Large
creatures to stalk!

Swords and arrows!
A proud hero's walk!

Heroism! A
chance to be brave!

Quests to conquer,
and maidens to save!

Heroism! Large
creatures to stalk!

Swords and arrows!
A proud hero's walk!
Heroism! Heroism!
Heroism!

BRAVE YOUTH

I'll be a hero,

just like you!

The aim of my spoon

will be true!

I'll save, the brave
Alenka, and her

Cat from the evil crone.

And then together, we can
begin to build a home!

The aim, the aim, the aim
of my spoon will be true!

BRAVE YOUTH

Papa Cat, I promised Alenka I'd come back--

CAT

(More gently, from the table.)

And normally I'd tell you to keep your promise, but not this time.

ARCHER
(To BRAVE YOUTH.)

I'd go back.

(The other adults look at the ARCHER, then ignore him. He goes back to eating stew hungrily, the SPARROW refilling his bowl.)

CAT
You stay in the corner, son, until you realize the dangers of witches.

BLACKSMITH
(To the CAT.)
You know, I think I know the little girl the Brave Youth is talking about. I've seen her working around the witch's hut, when Baba Yaga makes me do deliveries. She's a scrawny little thing, just bones and skin.

BABA YAGA
She's scrawny because Baba Yaga starves her.

BLACKSMITH
Baba Yaga has her chopping and lugging wood that weighs more than she does. And bringing out all those baskets of bones, after the witch finishes a meal. The little girl always seems so sad and silent.

BRAVE YOUTH
She's silent because Baba Yaga turned her voice into a stone, and then crushed it. Now Alenka will be voiceless forever.

ARCHER
Could I have more? This is delicious!

(The SPARROW refills his dish.)

BLACKSMITH
You know, that's something maybe I could help with. I don't just forge metal you know: I can forge almost anything. And while I was an apprentice, I learned a little metallic magic. I've got a few tricks up my sleeve even Baba Yaga doesn't know about.

(He walks to the BRAVE YOUTH and touches his shoulder.)
Brave Youth, do you know, exactly, which kind of stone Baba Yaga turned the girl's voice into?

BRAVE YOUTH
Amber, I'm sure her friend, the Cat, said amber.

BLACKSMITH
Yes, hmm, I'm certain I could locate some of that....

(The ARCHER is finally done eating.)

SPARROW
There, there, you must have been hungry. When's the last time you ate?

ARCHER

Well, I've already eaten once this week, and usually that's enough for a hero like me. But it's been busy month; I had to shoot a lot of birds for the Czar's feasts, and--

SPARROW

(Horried.)

You're a bird killer?!

(She moves away from him, quickly.)

ARCHER

Well, I officially am now, but I'll be giving the Czar notice soon. You see, I met this extraordinary girl recently in the forest, who's a princess half the time, and a bird the other half, and we fell in love. After we were separated, I swore I'd never kill or eat another bird again. And since that was my usual diet, I've been pretty hungry. Now my only goal is to find my true love--

BRAVE YOUTH

(Trying and failing to get the ARCHER'S attention.)

Archer!

SPARROW

(Hesitantly.)

Well, as long as you're in love with a bird now.

BRAVE YOUTH

Archer!

ARCHER

Well, she's an enchanted maiden who's a bird at night--

BRAVE YOUTH

Archer!

(The BRAVE YOUTH, tired of trying to enter the conversation, turns and stares out the window gloomily.)

SPARROW

Close enough. If your love is true, you'll give up your evil ways.

CAT

Yes, it's amazing what you can give up for love.

BLACKSMITH

(To CAT and SPARROW.)

I must admit, I've always wondered about your romance.

(As the CAT and SPARROW give each other a kiss and fond look, the BRAVE YOUTH begins to hum the BIRD PRINCESS' grace song. All fall silent for a moment to listen, and the ARCHER is visibly excited.)

ARCHER

Hey boy! Where did you hear that song?

BRAVE YOUTH

When I was captured by the witch, Baba Yaga, there was a beautiful maiden singing it.
I was trying to tell you.

ARCHER

Was she wearing a white feather cape and crown?

BRAVE YOUTH

Yes she was.

ARCHER

And was she kind, and radiantly beautiful?

BRAVE YOUTH

She was.

ARCHER

She wasn't--eaten--by that witch, was she?

BRAVE YOUTH

No, the Silent Girl and her Cat, Baba Yaga's servants, set us free.

ARCHER

(Rejoicing.)

Ah, what a relief--but, then, do you know where the maiden is?

BRAVE YOUTH

No, we separated in the woods once she saw me home. It was really amazing--she was telling me how, as soon as the Night Horseman passed, she would turn into a bird, then just fly away.

ARCHER

(Distracted, then looking at the gathered adults.)

Well, what direction was she heading? I must find her! I'd do anything to find her! How can I find her?!

BRAVE YOUTH

They all know who could help you. They just won't say.

BLACKSMITH

Archer, the only one who can help you is the one who almost just ate your true love: Baba Yaga. She knows where everyone is, though she prefers to hunt them one at a time. And she knows a thousand secrets. In fact, she probably even knows how to break your Bird Princess's curse--

CAT

But the witch rarely helps anyone! Only one in ten heroes who stop by her hut for help on a quest survives.

(Pause.)

Oddly, it seems only the most obnoxious heroes succeed--

(Music cue.)

ARCHER

(Oblivious to the last remark.)

One in ten odds are good enough for me! My Bird Princess is alive! I must find my beauty, break her curse, and make her my bride!

ARCHER (cont.)

(to BLACKSMITH and CAT.)

How do I get to the hag's hut? What's it look like? And if you won't tell me, I'll find someone who will.

CAT

Well,

(Sigh.)

It's five leagues to the west through the forest, on the banks of the River of Fire, just beyond Firebird Bridge.

ARCHER

What color is the house? Is it on the left or right side of the street?

CAT

There isn't any street, and it's the only house in the world standing on chicken legs, surrounded by a fence of leg bones and glowing skulls. You can't miss it.

ARCHER

And she'll know where my princess is?

(He runs out the hut door.)

SPARROW

(Sadly.)

She'll know.

CAT

(Also glum.)

She'll know, but she'll likely eat you without telling.

BLACKSMITH

Poor young man.

CAT

Love is love, but stupidity is stupidity.

BRAVE YOUTH

I think he's brave.

SPARROW

Think what you want, but we're keeping you close from now on.

(Act ends, with the BLACKSMITH, CAT, SPARROW, and BRAVE YOUTH standing by the door, watching the ARCHER run away to the witch's hut.)

ACT TWO

Scene One

Setting: The Forest in late afternoon. Dozens of baskets filled with human bones cover the ground. In the distance are Baba Yaga's tall hut on chicken legs, and fence of bones and red-eyed skulls. This part of the woods is Baba Yaga's Boneyard, and it has a gloomy, cemetery feel.

ALENKA'S CAT

(Sadly gathering bones in a sack, with ALENKA.)

Look at all these remains.

(He sweeps his hand around.)

So many people; so many more bones.

We almost got cooked today--

(ALENKA nods, and direly runs a finger across her throat.)

This place gives me the shivers. I never get used to all this death. All these poor souls reduced to baskets of bones. Just because they wandered into the wrong forest.

(ALENKA sadly agrees.)

How many bones did she say we needed? She scared me so much I can't remember.

(ALENKA flashes her ten fingers twice, then seven fingers once.)

Twenty-seven? That many. Maybe you should start counting them.

(ALENKA ceremoniously counts the bones.)

I wish we could at least give these poor souls a Christian burial--but you know how Baba Yaga is about that.

(Imitating Baba Yaga's voice.)

No blessings are allowed at my house!

(ALENKA concurs, but still kneels down, makes a sign of a cross, and starts to pray.)

Yes, she's not watching, we can at least do that for them.

(He makes a sign of the cross, too, prays out loud with his eyes closed a moment.)

Dear Lord, bless these souls--

(He looks around, and makes another quick sign of the cross. ALENKA'S CAT pauses, looks at ALENKA, then sings.)

Here we are in the bone field,
with all that remains of Baba Yaga's feasts:
the bones of the children, the bones of the beasts.
Here we are in the bone field.

(The forest is filled with a surreal blue light, and the two act out the song as ALENKA's CAT sings it.)

Let's imagine that you're in a palace,
and you curtsy to me in a blue velvet gown,
and on your head is a blue sapphire crown.
And I say to you, "Is it really true
that you are the girl so silent and brave,
who stood all those cold years as Baba Yaga's slave?"

Then I would hand you a package

(He hands her his hat.)

ALENKA'S CAT (cont.)

filled with all the fine things in life that you missed:
a family to love you, a sweetheart to kiss,
and a voice to sing.
How I know you'd sing!

(Spoken.)

You know, the other night, I had a dream,
and in that dream, you were singing.
And what a beautiful voice you had,
not like my old cat's howling,
but sweet and pure, like struck silver.

(Orchestra, strikes silver. ALENKA smiles dreamily.)

Such a beautiful song you were singing. I remember every word.

(ALENKA'S CAT moves to the side of the stage to sing this song, leaving ALENKA to pantomime the images he describes. It is as if he has become her voice, though she does not mouth the words. Lighting should accent song images.)

ALENKA'S CAT
(Sung.)

When you walk through rain,
you can hear far oceans forming.
On an inkblot night,
you can hear the bright stars sing.
In the morning dew,
you can hear the sunlight glistening.
This is what I learned while I was listening.

When you swim through the sea,
you can hear the great floods rising.
When you till the soil,
you can hear the sweet seeds grow.
In a quiet room, you can hear a friend's heart beating.
This is what I learned while I was listening.

Talking, singing, shouting, laughing,
are hon'orable social conventions.
But the world's great mysteries only are heard
by girls who pay attention.

When you sleep by fire,
you can hear the burnt wood dreaming.
When you walk o'er the earth,
you can hear our great globe spin.
When you hold a dear friend's hand,
you can hear his sad soul quickening.
This is what I learned while I was listening.

(ALENKA'S CAT speaks from out of the shadows.)

That's what you would sing, wouldn't you, if you had a voice.

(ALENKA nods happily, and makes some happy movement like a spin or a dance.)

ALENKA'S CAT (cont.)

I wish I could give you your voice back, and set both of us free from Baba Yaga.

(ALENKA sighs silently, as if saying "oh well.")

But I'm just an old cat, an un-magic one at that. And all I can do is share my love and food with you.

(ALENKA takes a sack and starts putting in the bones she just counted, as ALENKA'S CAT sings a short reprise *In the Bone Field*, in a sadder mood now.)

Yes, someday you'll be wearing a blue velvet gown,
and we never again will be hungry.

And we'll build a little cottage around your shining crown,
and we'll use the sapphires for money.

Can you imagine the dinners we'd eat?

To be fat, instead of so scrawny?

I wish, my dear, I could give you that.

I wish, my dear, we could be both be fat.

(Spoken.)

Well, my dear, enough dreaming for today. Have you gathered enough?

(ALENKA nods, and pats the bone sack.)

Twenty-seven?

(ALENKA mimes yes.)

Well, we better get these bones back to our bony-legged mistress, eh?

(He grabs the sack with one arm, and offers her the other. They walk off, warmly together, obviously taking comfort in each other's company. THE NIGHT HORSEMAN passes. The stage grows darker.)

SCENE TWO

Setting: Baba Yaga's Hut. Night.

(BABA YAGA is asleep on her giant stove, snoring loudly. ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT sleep, huddled together, leaning against the wall.)

BABA YAGA

(Snoring, mumbling sleepily.)

I smell a Russian smell. I wonder if it's a human mouse I can torture before dinner....

ARCHER

(Kicks down the door, rushes in, and puts a knife to BABA YAGA's throat.)

Wake up grandmother! I am a hero, not a rodent! You won't be eating me tonight!

BABA YAGA

(Awake, but unconcerned.)

Fine, fine, not tonight. Maybe tomorrow. You must not take what you just heard seriously, dearie. I was just talking in my dreams. I would never harm a hero as luscious, I mean, as noble as yourself--

BABA YAGA (cont.)
(Aside.)

At least not until he's amused me, anyway.

(To the ARCHER.)

Tell me your tale. Don't spare the details. I always like a good appetizer before dinner.

ARCHER

I WON'T be eaten, and I won't be treated without courtesy.

BABA YAGA

I'm so sorry. Sit down. Take a load off.

(To ALENKA.)

Alenka, little slavey, can't you see we have a guest? Set the samovar to boil water for, uh, tea, and heat a bath for this tasty looking, I mean lovely, young hero here. He might want to clean up before we eat.

(ALENKA starts her tasks while dialogue continues. When BABA YAGA isn't looking, ALENKA makes desperate motions for the ARCHER to get out of this place now. The ARCHER, as usual, is oblivious. ALENKA returns to her spot next to ALENKA'S CAT and the two servants watch the events that transpire, occasionally, and never too obviously, showing interest when the ARCHER is doing well.)

BABA YAGA
(Ominously.)

Even though I could eat you like a chicken right now,

(Sweetly.)

you caught me in a good mood tonight. So tell me everything. You can start with name, rank, and serial number.

ARCHER
(Standing.)

I am Ivan Vladimir, Bird Hunter First Class, for Czar Nicholas the Second. Veteran, and decorated hero extraordinaire. And I want information.

(ARCHER sits again.)

BABA YAGA
(Sweetly again.)

Well, Baba Yaga knows a thousand secrets.

(Harshly.)

YOU GET ONE QUESTION.

ARCHER
(Assertively, with a booming voice.)

First tell me how to find the beautiful Bird Princess again, and

Second, tell me how to break her curse.

BABA YAGA
(Incensed.)

That's TWO questions, you fool. Don't they teach heroes to count in the Imperial schools anymore?

ARCHER

(Brazenly standing up again.)

Help me, you old hag! Or I'll cut you down with my sword!

BABA YAGA

(Sarcastically.)

Well, that, indeed, is something to tremble at. (Music cue.)

(They wrestle. Because she has the strength of ten men, she tosses him out the door. Presently, he returns, brushing himself off and rubbing his jaw. He is now not quite compliant, but closer. He sits down at the table with BABA YAGA.)

BABA YAGA

I'll only tell you this once. Be polite or be pot roast for dinner.

ARCHER

(Hostile.)

All right! Polite.

Please, you big-nosed, bony-legged, iron-toothed, red-eyed, servant-starving, baby-eating, bone-sucking crone. Please give me the information I need to find and free the Bird Princess.

(The two characters have a silent stare-down, then, suddenly BABA YAGA laughs.)

BABA YAGA

I like that in a man--a nice change from all the trembling jellyfish I usually deal with. Quite amusing. I can help you, but these things have a cost. I scratch, you scratch, you know how it goes. Let's see, there is one problem that you could help me with.

ARCHER

(Wary.)

Yes.

BABA YAGA

I have hundreds of human skeletons in my bone yard out back, and I'm a practical witch; I like to put the bones to good use. I'm always looking for new ideas. Waste not want not.

ARCHER

(Horried but interested.)

What do you do with the bones now?

BABA YAGA

(Cheerfully.)

Well, sometimes I crack them open for bone soup. It's my favorite little treat before dinner. And you noticed my fence: fifteen feet high, made entirely of first quality extra large human leg bones?

ARCHER

Yes, I had to climb over it.

BABA YAGA

And the gate locks, made of jawbones that bite off the fingers of those breaking into my yard?

ARCHER

Yes.

(He wrings his hands together.)

they almost bit off my hand.

BABA YAGA

And the bone ladder up to my house, for my servants--

(She looks at him.)

and others who can't climb the chicken legs to get into my house.

ARCHER

(Nervously.)

Yes. Very handy.

BABA YAGA

So, my handsome hero, do we have a deal? If you tell me ways to use my bones, I'll give you information--and I won't eat you. If your ideas are thick-headed, you'll regret you ever came here. Sounds fair?

ARCHER

Hmm--

(He pauses to think.)

Yes, for an intelligent hero like me, that's fair enough. (Music cue.)

BABA YAGA

(Sung ominously.)

What can you do with a dead man's bones?

You can suck out their marrow after cracking them on stones.

You can put the skulls upon a stick and have them guard your home.

You can beat your servant girl with one until she screams and moans.

That's what you can do with a dead man's bones.

(Spoken.)

O.K. Hero. Tell me what I could do with a dead hero's bones. The category is: Musical Instruments.

ARCHER

(Stops short.)

You want musical uses for a dead man's bones?

BABA YAGA

(Angry.)

Yes, why not. What could I do with a dead hero's bones?

ARCHER

(Begins singing timidly, and becomes more confident.)

What can you do with a dead hero's bones?

You can use one like a bony stick, and bang upon a drum.

Or set one with a balance in a giant metronome.

You could set a dozen on a rack and make a xylophone.

That's what you could do with a dead hero's bones.

(Duet begins.)

BABA YAGA

What can you do
with a dead hero's bones?

You can use one like a bony stick,
and bang upon a drum.

Or set one with a balance,
in a giant metronome.

You can set a dozen on a rack,
and make a xylophone.

That's what you can do,
with a dead hero's bones.

What can you do
with a dead man's bones?

You can suck out their marrow
after cracking them on stones.

You can put the skulls upon a stick
and have them guard your home.

You can beat your servant girl with one
until she bleeds and groans.

That's what you can do
with a dead hero's bones.

You can rumble, you can fumble them,
with a pack of other crones!

There's nothing like playing with bones!

ARCHER

What can you do
with a dead man's bones?

You can suck out their marrow
after cracking them on stones.

You can put the skulls upon a stick
and have them guard your home.

You can beat your servant girl with one
until she bleeds and groans.

That's what you can do
with a dead man's bones.

What can you do
with a dead hero's bones?

You can use one like a bony stick
and bang upon a drum.

Or set one with a balance in
a giant metronome.

You can set a dozen on a rack
and make a xylophone.

That's what you can do
with a dead man's bones.

BABA YAGA

BABA YAGA and ARCHER

BABA YAGA
(Spoken.)

Good ideas. I feel beneficent today--I'll help you.

(ARCHER comes closer to listen to BABA YAGA.)

To find the girl and break the curse, this is the quest you must go on....

(She whispers into his ear. Blackout. As scenes change, and night passes to the next morning, DAWN, THE MORNING HORSEMAN passes, with his/her signature music. The lights rise, and we enter the next day.

SCENE THREE

Setting: The Blacksmith's shop. Noon.

(The BLACKSMITH is singing and hammering, He uses a delicate silver hammer in this scene, not his usual heavy black one. This interlude is sung more happily than his other solos.)

BLACKSMITH

One must use a silver hammer
with a handle made of pearl,
to forge a shiny, golden voice,
for a lovely little girl.

I see her quivering bony frame,
out in the cold, and chopping wood.
Perhaps, with all the ill I've done,
this time I'll do a bit of good.

Imagine her wandering
the glades of the forest
and opening into song!
Amidst the gloom of her days,
one less thing is wrong.

Although she will still be
the servant of Baba,
at least her voice will be free!
Alenka and Cat will sing praises
to honor me!

Ah, I know the pain I've caused
to those who feel the iron teeth.
This one act of kindness,
is small redemption for their grief.

I'll drape this gold around her neck,
that's centered with a magic stone.
And this metallic talisman
undoes the evil of the crone.

(Spoken, rhythmically, holding up necklace.)

I'll take this with me everywhere, 'til I see the silent girl, again.

(Lights fade out. Scene ends.)

SCENE FOUR

Setting: The Forest. Pre-dusk.

(The ARCHER stands with his accoutrements on the ground, and hanging from his belt--feathers, bell, sword, etc.)

ARCHER

Well, I completed my difficult quest--admirably I might add. Now I have everything I need to break the Bird Princess' curse. Except the Bird Princess. Let's see if this chant the old crone gave me works.

(He takes the Bird Princess' two feathers and waves them like a cheerleader, and does a bit of a dance. He chants.)

Red rubies burn the earth,
salty trout swish through the sea,
please send my true love
back
to
me.

(Music cue. Blackout, then swirling lights. The BIRD PRINCESS appears on stage, seeming sleepy; dazed.)

BIRD PRINCESS

Well, hello!

(She smiles, puts out her hand. The ARCHER kisses it chivalrically.)

ARCHER

Hello, dear princess.

(He bows.)

BIRD PRINCESS

I looked for you last evening after I escaped from the witch. I was so sad I couldn't find you, I flew all night to visit my kind uncle Romanov, Czar of the Twenty-ninth kingdom. While flying last night, I couldn't get dancing with you out of my head.

ARCHER

Neither could I. In my mind, we've been dancing together for days.

(They gaze at each other, then she snaps out of it.)

BIRD PRINCESS

Anyway, my Uncle let me sleep all day in my girlhood room. Am I still dreaming, or are we really here together?

ARCHER

You are here! I used a magic spell to bring you to me. It was very complicated.

(Eagerly.)

Are you glad to see me?

BIRD PRINCESS

(Shyly.)

Why, yes, Ivan, I must admit I am. But it will be nighttime soon. I'm starting to get the transformation jitters.

(She starts to hop and twitch like a bird.)

Within minutes, I'll be in danger of arrows. Small, and feathered, and not human. A night creature, flying, gloriously flying, but always cold and afraid.

ARCHER

(Excitedly.)

Well, that's why I brought you here! I just went on a long, arduous, life-threatening quest for you, and I know how to break your curse! You'll never have to fly again!

BIRD PRINCESS

(Aside. Skeptical about this loss, but interested.)

Hmm. That's something to think on. Flying, or dancing. Love, or skies.

ARCHER

(Rapturous.)

You'd be a beautiful girl twenty-four hours a day, and, I hope--

(He goes on one knee, then embarrassed.)

You know, for all we've talked, I never did get your name.

BIRD PRINCESS

Nikita, my name is Nikita.

ARCHER

Dear Princess Nikita, I hope you'll give me your hand in marriage.

BIRD PRINCESS

Could I think about that a minute?

(Pause.)

Tell me about this quest, what did you have to do? Was it dangerous?

ARCHER

(Wounded.)

Of course!

BIRD PRINCESS

Strenuous?

ARCHER

Certainly.

BIRD PRINCESS

Did it require all your vigor and manly strength?

ARCHER

What other sort of adventure would I go on?

BIRD PRINCESS

(Gently, but a bit impatient.)

Well, aren't you going to tell me about it?

ARCHER

(Glad she asked. To illustrate the song images, a DUMB SHOW takes place behind the lovers, where an Archer-costumed Brave Youth, and a Princess-costumed Alenka act out their older counterparts' actions, with props--rabbits, eggs, etc. The ARCHER sings.)

First I crossed o'er the River of Fire,
on Baba Yaga's flying steed.
Then I rode o'er the mighty ocean,
and violent waves crashed under me.
Then, I landed on the Island of Booyan,
beneath a giant oak tree.
And I knocked down the oak with my manly strength,
found a chest where she said it would be.

BIRD PRINCESS

(Spoken.)

How exhausting! How long did that take?

ARCHER

(Spoken.)

About an hour--

BIRD PRINCESS

Hmm. Well, what happened next?

ARCHER

(Sung.)

I cut the trunk's chains with my sword, expecting--
I remembered each word she had said--

That in the chest would be a hare.
Inside the hare would be a duck.
Inside the duck would be an egg.
Inside the egg would be a bell,
the bell that would break your curse.

BIRD PRINCESS

(Spoken.)

Like Something like Matrushka dolls--

ARCHER

(Spoken.)

Yes, I see you get the picture.

(Sung.)

So I tore the rabbit's fur open,
to reveal a duck inside.

BIRD PRINCESS
(Sung.)

Ripping a rabbit! Isn't that mean?

ARCHER

No it's not. These things must be done.
I saw the yellow duck in the rabbit's innards.
It jumped free, and waddled away,
so I quickly aimed and shot her.

BIRD PRINCESS

Did the bird quack in pain when you hit her?

ARCHER

I just stunned her. Does it matter?
The egg with the bell was inside her;
the bell that will help set you free.

The egg dropped out of its mother,
and rolled into the sea.
And plop, it fell into the ocean, and sank
A THOUSAND FEET DEEP.

BIRD PRINCESS

So far?

ARCHER

Yes, so far.

BIRD PRINCESS
(Impressed.)

What did you do?

ARCHER

Well, I sucked in my breath and I dove.

BIRD PRINCESS

A thousand feet deep?

ARCHER

Yes, to show that I am true.
And I carried it up from the bottom, back to you.

(He opens up a Russian ornamental egg, and out falls a
bell to his hand.)

BIRD PRINCESS
(Spoken.)

Was that all?

ARCHER
(Spoken.)

What do you mean, was that all?
Of course there was more.

ARCHER (cont.)
(Sung.)

Then I scaled, with my bare hands, a mountain,
a peak that was higher than sky.
There I cut down a twelve headed dragon,
and made each of his scarlet heads die.
Then I pulled this gold collar off his neck,
I was told we'd need for the spell.
Then the flying horse and I, leapt back into the sky,
and flew all the way back to you.

BIRD PRINCESS
(Spoken.)

Where's the horse?

ARCHER
(Spoken.)

He had to be returned.

BIRD PRINCESS
Hmm. Well, I am impressed. You'd have to be strong and brave and wise to succeed during
such danger.

(ARCHER brightens.)

But--

(Gently.)

I need to know who you really love. Me? Or Heroism?

ARCHER
(Hurt.)

Why, you of course.

(Shyly.)

Nikita, the first time I saw you, a feeling entered my heart and soul: an electric charge, like
lightning. Pure love.

BIRD PRINCESS

I know.

ARCHER

And suddenly, all I'd ever lived for--honor on the field, the death of the bad guys, the maintenance
of my hair and armor, all my other manly disciplines--it just seemed, yes, hollow, empty.

(Sung.)

When I think of loving you, I've had my fill of hero's blood.
And when I kiss your soft, white hand, I've had my fill of hero's bread.
And when I think of your dark eyes, I've had my fill of sun and moon.
And when I hear your love's sweet song, I've had enough of warrior's tunes.

Let me be your feather shield.

BIRD PRINCESS
(Sung.)

I'm your lover from the clouds.

ARCHER

Let me cover you in robes.

BIRD PRINCESS

Shoot love's arrow through my heart.

ARCHER

Drink my love like cool red wine.

BIRD PRINCESS

Let me be your golden apple.
Oh, let me kiss you in these roses.
Oh, let us rub our Russian noses.

Fair Moon, please tell me why
the heavens split themselves in two,
when I flew down to this forest, to become your bird so true.

ARCHER

The woods are fair when they're just green,
but now they're haunted by my dove.

BIRD PRINCESS

And your dove's a haunted girl, who flew your way in search of love.

ARCHER

My feathered love has touched the clouds.

BIRD PRINCESS

My hero's strength has roamed the earth.

ARCHER

I need a love as white as snow.

BIRD PRINCESS

I need your strong arms at my hearth.

ARCHER and BIRD PRINCESS

A bird without its mate,
is like a hero without a heart.

BIRD PRINCESS

(Aside.)

Oh, let me kiss you in these roses.
Oh, let us rub our Russian noses.

(She twitches. Speaks.)

I'm not going to last much longer. It must be nearly sunset. I'm starting to feel the feathers grow.
Say, do me a favor. Before I turn back into a bird, will you get down on your knees and ask me again?

ARCHER

(He kneels, looking up eagerly as he speaks.)

Nikita, my dear princess,

ARCHER (cont.)

My life is just arrows in the cold, dark forest without you. Please be my bride.

BIRD PRINCESS

I'd be honored.

(They are about to kiss, when the NIGHT HORSEMAN is dancing in the corner of the ARCHER's eye. The NIGHT HORSEMAN is taunting them, for as soon as he crosses, the frustrated BIRD PRINCESS will transform. The PRINCESS is waiting for her kiss, which she doesn't get.)

ARCHER

The Night Horseman is about to cross! We haven't got much time! The curse-breaking spell must be performed before nightfall!

BIRD PRINCESS

Well, what must we do? It's only moments before I transform.
Do you remember the spell?

ARCHER

(Speaks earnestly, not cockily. He attaches the collar to the BIRD PRINCESS's forehead, and she sticks the feathers into the ARCHER'S ears during the first stanza of this chant.)

Yes, my darling. First, we take the dragon's collar, and fasten it to your lovely brow.
Then you stick your two feathers in my ears, and you hold the egg bell in your toes.

(He hands her the bell, and she slips off her slipper.)

And I hold you tight in my strong arms. And you must ring the bell with your feet
the moment the Night Horseman passes. Are you ready?

BIRD PRINCESS

I'm ready.

(They do the spell actions and kiss, just as the teasing NIGHT HORSEMAN passes. What is notable is not that the BIRD PRINCESS' spell is broken--she does not turn back to a bird--but that she and the ARCHER's lover's kiss is long, rapturous, and magically lit. The NIGHT HORSEMAN sticks around to watch the event.

ARCHER and BIRD PRINCESS look lovingly at each other. Then, as an afterthought, the ARCHER speaks.)

BIRD PRINCESS

(Still stunned by kiss.)

Some things are better things than flying.

ARCHER

Hey! The spell worked! No more bird wings!

(They kiss briefly once more and walk hand in hand.)

BIRD PRINCESS

Isn't it wonderful how we found each other--

ARCHER

And fell in love.

BIRD PRINCESS

You know, if a kind, silent girl hadn't freed me from Baba Yaga's dinner cage--

ARCHER

Yes, and if a heroic young boy hadn't started me back on the path to you--

BIRD PRINCESS and ARCHER

we'd never have found each other again.

BIRD PRINCESS

I wonder how those two are doing now?

(They walk offstage, holding hands and leaning against each other, like new sweethearts.)

SCENE FIVE

Setting: Brave Youth's Hut. Early evening. The BRAVE YOUTH'S bedtime.

(The BRAVE YOUTH is in his bed, a table bench transformed to a bed. The CAT and SPARROW are around, him tucking him in. Noticeable in front of the bed should be a knapsack with the BRAVE YOUTH'S spoon on it and a little boy's dagger. A lit lantern should also be in the room.)

BRAVE YOUTH

I am going to save the silent girl.

CAT

No boy, you're going to stay right here.

SPARROW
(Gently.)

We know how brave you are, but you can't save her, not really.

CAT

The Blacksmith said every time they try to escape, Baba Yaga beats them black and blue. And then there's that spell that turns them into stone when they get past the bone yard.

BRAVE YOUTH

Well, we won't leave the witch's forest then. I'll just get Alenka out of that hut, and we'll hide in the woods and be safe.

SPARROW

My dear, Baba Yaga will just smell you out then, and eat you for dinner.

BRAVE YOUTH

Well, I'll just go kill that witch then--I'll chop off her head, and she'll die.

CAT

That doesn't work. Old Bayan, the baker did that, and she just put her head back on again. Then she ate him.

BRAVE YOUTH

Then I'll catch her in an animal trap.

SPARROW

My sweet one, she'd just use her magic and open it, then go hunting for you.

BRAVE YOUTH

Well then I'll push her into the River of Fire.

CAT

That's the best plan yet, for I've heard she'd burn, but others have tried and just ended up on her coals.

BRAVE YOUTH

So that girl and her cat are just left there, and you're not going to do anything. I think that's wrong.

SPARROW

(Tired.)

You're right. It's very wrong. But I'm tired of arguing. We know you're brave. We're just trying to protect you. Now try to go to sleep. Go to sleep.

(They crouch by his bed. They stroke his hair and soothe him like a little boy, singing a lullaby.)

SPARROW

Don't wake a sleeping twelve headed dragon.

CAT

Don't climb a giant cabbage up to heaven.

SPARROW

Don't ever swim in the River of Fire.

CAT

Don't be cruel to a three-eyed girl.

CAT and SPARROW

And don't get caught, in Baba Yaga's iron teeth.
For these are, these are, these are the Rules of the Universe.

CAT
(Spoken.)

Good, he seems to finally be asleep.

(They move a bench by the fire and sit down together by it.)

SPARROW
(Spoken.)

I don't know where he gets his stubbornness from.

CAT
Or his courage. Certainly not from me or you.

SPARROW
If only he would realize the danger he's in.

(They fall asleep, leaning against each other by the fire. The BRAVE YOUTH silently moves out of his bed, putting on a jacket, grabbing his knapsack, his dagger, and his SPOON. He makes a quiet sign, his finger to his lips to the audience. He sneaks silently out the window by his bed. Curtain closes.

In front of the curtain, the BRAVE YOUTH reappears, and crosses the stage SLOWLY in the dark. In this scene and the next, his spoon hangs from his belt like a weapon or good luck charm, along with his dagger. He hums a frightened version of the HEROISM song, holding the spoon, high, like a hopeful beacon.)

BRAVE YOUTH
(Sung.)

Heroism, a chance to be brave.
Baba Yaga to conquer, Alenka to save.

Heroism, large creatures to stalk.
The strength to fight witches.
A brave hero's walk.
Heroism!

(Spoken.)

Mama, I've got the lucky spoon;
tonight, may it help me do what I swore I'd do!

(The BRAVE YOUTH disappears offstage.)

SCENE SIX

Setting: Baba Yaga's Hut. Night.

ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT are in the same cage, sleeping. The BRAVE YOUTH enters. BABA YAGA is absent.)

BRAVE YOUTH

Alenka! Wake up! It's the Brave Youth! I've come to rescue you! Where's that cage key again?

(ALENKA motions where, but the BRAVE YOUTH can't understand her directions.)

I can't find it. I guess I'll try picking the lock with my spoon. Maybe you should wake up the Cat.

ALENKA'S CAT

(Yawns, stretches.)

Mee-ow, mmhh. Oh. It's you.

BRAVE YOUTH

Where's Baba Yaga?

ALENKA'S CAT

She's out stalking prey, my boy. You know she likes to do her butchering by moonlight. I'd get out of here, now, before she returns from hunting.

BRAVE YOUTH

But I'm here to save you!

ALENKA'S CAT

Save yourself.

BRAVE YOUTH

Quick Cat, my spoon isn't working in this lock; could you tell me where the cage key is?

BABA YAGA

(Sneaks up on him.)

Ah, the little rabbit has returned to the hutch. Come to me, my little dinner!

BRAVE YOUTH

I'm not little, I'm the Brave Youth! You don't scare me-- (Music cue.)

(BABA YAGA and the BRAVE YOUTH engage in a chase and combat interlude. They spar and shout taunts at each other.)

BABA YAGA

Oh, fiery dumpling!

BRAVE YOUTH

You've got rusty teeth!
I'll feed you to the wolves!
Can't you see that I've brought my spoon!
You stink like old cheese.
I'll punch out your red eyes.
I'll use your nose to row a canoe!

BABA YAGA

How I love the fiery ones!

(BABA YAGA eventually throws the BRAVE YOUTH into the cage with ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT.)

BABA YAGA (cont.)

I will put your skull on my fence of bones. I like to reward my bravest dinners.

BRAVE YOUTH

Let us out, you-- you--

SPARROW

My boy! My boy!

CAT

Hag, we're here for these prisoners!

BABA YAGA

I thought I'd have
just a little snack--
now I shall have a feast!

BLACKSMITH

Free those souls, Baba Yaga! Can't you have mercy even one night!

BABA YAGA

(To BLACKSMITH, impressed.)

Blacksmith! After so many years, you show a bit of fight.

(To BLACKSMITH, CAT and SPARROW.)

You all certainly are making it easy for me this evening.

(Chanted.)

So many heroes, whose courage clouds their brains.

(She throws the SPARROW in an empty cage.)

CAT

Unhand her now!

BABA YAGA

Little messiahs, who need someone to save.

(She throws the CAT in the same cage.)

SPARROW

Please, let him go!

BABA YAGA

What can I do? When you just offer yourselves to me?

(She throws the BLACKSMITH in the same cage.)

BLACKSMITH

Hey, that hurt.

BABA YAGA

Why on earth, would I set a supper free?

(Spoken sarcastically.)

If only you'd followed the Rules of the Universe.

BLACKSMITH

How can you live with yourself? Killing, killing, killing?

BABA YAGA

Are you a vegetarian? How could I live without it?
All my life, I've had a simple, uncomplicated code.
I've even got it on display, in a fine bone frame:

(She points to a framed motto on the wall.)

Search and Destroy. Search and Destroy. Well, I've got to get cooking.

(She starts making dinner preparations.)

SPARROW

But wait--what about--kindness?

CAT

Compassion?

SPARROW

Charity to your neighbors?

BABA YAGA

Ha! How about this: I request the honour of your presence at dinner! How's that for neighborly?

ALENKA'S CAT

Oh Grandmother, Grandmother. Alenka, Blacksmith, and I--we've served you faithfully for years--and even we're nobodies to you. Doesn't anyone mean anything to you?

BABA YAGA

Well, I must admit, you all mean something to me. (Music cue.)

(Sung.)

You look like leg of man, stuffed sparrow, and catgut stew!
You look like, baked boy, broiled kitty, and girlie cordon bleu!

I have to start feeding the fire, there's so much cooking to do.
I must stoke the fire higher,
and I will feast 'fore the night is through.

You look like leg of man, stuffed sparrow, and catgut stew!
You look like baked boy, broiled kitty, and girlie cordon bleu!

Oh, what a bloody choir you'll be when we
start singing the knife song!
The great conductor is me, when we're
singing the knife song, singing the knife song!

I'm the Queen of Cannibals, they say, those
lucky few who get away.
but tonight, my secrets here will stay.

(She rubs her stomach.)

You look like leg of man, stuffed sparrow, and catgut stew!
You look like baked boy, broiled kitty, and girlie cordon bleu!

(ARCHER and BIRD PRINCESS enter, and both strike
a pose, as last verse is sung.)

ARCHER
(Interrupting the song.)

Halt! We go here!

BABA YAGA
(Ecstatic)

Will the buffet never end?

(To ARCHER.)

You should have been here to help your little brother earlier.

ARCHER

What?

BABA YAGA

Junior Hero here; he put up quite a fight.

ARCHER

Well, certainly--I taught him everything I know.

BABA YAGA
(She comes up to him almost sexually.)

And how much is that, darling?

BIRD PRINCESS

Ivan, I think--

CAT

Archer! Princess! How did you find us? Why did you find us?

ARCHER

Well, we went to your house to announce our engagement--you're the first to know.
Then we read the note on your door: "At Baba Yaga's. Help!"

SPARROW

I put up that sign.

ARCHER

Well, you know me, I--

BIRD PRINCESS

Ivanoushka. Perhaps we should talk about this later.

BABA YAGA

I haven't had this good a night since that band of drunken troubadours serenaded me last year.
Such fun to silence them; they sounded worse than howling cats.

(BABA YAGA looks at the two CATS, then speaks to
the ARCHER and BIRD PRINCESS.)

You two, I hope you don't mind; I may just tie you up for now. My slaughtering pens are full at present.

BIRD PRINCESS

Ivanoushka!

ARCHER

Uh hum. Baba Yaga, you are a cunning and worthy opponent. I challenge you to a duel.

BABA YAGA

A duel! Why it's been years! I guess I'm up for a bit more exercise to further whet my appetite.
(Childlike.)

Can I choose the weapon?

ARCHER

Of course.

BABA YAGA

(She opens a cupboard arsenal.)

Let's see here: knives? sabers? swords? whips? chains?

ARCHER

You get to choose, but this has to be a fair fight.

BABA YAGA

Fair?

ARCHER

Yes, meaning I get the same weapon as you.

BABA YAGA

Ha, you think that's fair? Well, so you can pretend you still have a chance, I choose--sabers.

ARCHER

(He pulls his saber. They take combat position.)

Shall we dance? (Music cue.)

(As BABA YAGA and the ARCHER fight furiously, the BIRD PRINCESS runs to where the cage key is, and quickly unlocks both cages. She motions to the six freed characters, who they unify as a group as the ARCHER and BABA YAGA fight near the witch's giant stove. The ARCHER gracefully opens the door to the fiery oven, and steps aside while fighting. The mob of others then all rush in and push BABA YAGA into the oven. The BRAVE YOUTH is first in line, and pushing hardest. BABA YAGA screams as she tumbles in head first, and the oven door is shut. Everyone chants the following line with the music.)

BRAVE YOUTH

She's in!

SPARROW

She's burning!

You caught her!

ALENKA'S CAT

She's dying!?

BIRD PRINCESS

She's in!

BLACKSMITH

She's roasting!

CAT

We're heroes!

ARCHER and BRAVE YOUTH
(Arm in arm.)

She's frying.

ALENKA'S CAT

(The female characters all gather, ear to oven door.)

Can you hear anything?
A heartbeat, or a scream?

BIRD PRINCESS

Keep guard of that door!
Don't move from that door!

SPARROW

Even Baba Yaga can't withstand fire
she's got to be dead by now!

CAT

My darling, it worked! Our plan worked!

BIRD PRINCESS
(Spoken.)

Ah, it was your plan, my fierce one. Shall we get on with our announcements?

ARCHER
(Happily.)

Yes, you two, what's this news!

CAT

My dear, what a beautiful bride you'll be. You know, I heard you were a bird...

SPARROW

Yes, well...

BIRD PRINCESS

Alenka! She's dead Alenka! You can leave from here now!

BRAVE YOUTH

(The two young people hug each other. ALENKA tries to speak, yet still is mute.)

Ah, Alenka! You're still silent! I thought--

BLACKSMITH

Dear girl! I've been carrying this for you, waiting for a chance--

(As he ceremoniously presents ALENKA the necklace the others gather around the girl.)

I've forged a voice for you. It's in this magic amber necklace. All you have to do is put it on.

BIRD PRINCESS

Here, Alenka, I'll help you.

(ALENKA puts the necklace on, and vocalizes. The singing is not glamorous but stilted by lack of use. Then the singing gains in surety, the girl humming a line from *While I was Listening*.)

ALENKA

La. La. La.

(Speaking, almost stuttering.)

It's been so long. Years. Oh Cat! My own dear Boris! And Brave Youth! Blacksmith! Princess! Thank you.

BIRD PRINCESS

We've more to say, my friends. I sent a bird companion with a message about all of you to my Uncle Romanov, Czar of the Twenty-ninth Kingdom.

(She pulls out a parchment.)

By my feathered courier, he sent back this decree:

(Officiously.)

"I, Czar Roman Romanovich Romanov the Third, firstly formally invite all my niece's new friends to her wedding, in gratitude for all they have done for her. Secondly, I say, that they all are welcome to come stay in my castle for as long as they like, even forever."

ARCHER

Her Uncle's house has a hundred rooms.

BIRD PRINCESS

(To Blacksmith.)

I'm not done! Smith, this concerns you:

"Thirdly, I declare, that since the my own personal blacksmith, Old Vitaly, was killed last week by an arrow, the Smith you described in your letter has been appointed Royal Imperial Blacksmith for me, the Czar, starting immediately."

BLACKSMITH

No more River of Fire!

(Pause.)

BIRD PRINCESS

All of you, look around. This could be any Russian hut. Who would think it the scene of so many horrors.

(*Finale begins.*)

ALENKA

Oh, to know that I am leaving here,
this wretched place, of butchery and shame.

ALENKA'S CAT and ALENKA

So many bones to bury, and bring to grace.
So many souls to set free, from her embrace.

ALENKA'S CAT, ALENKA, BLACKSMITH

We must leave here, and ne'er return.
We'll send a priest with water, for blessings.

ALL (but BABA YAGA.)

Oh, to know that we are leaving here!
This awful place of misery and blame.
So many bones to bury, and bring to grace.
So many souls to set free, from her embrace.
We shall flee here, we've seen enough.
We'll go to a kingdom of dance, and laughter!

ALENKA'S CAT
(Spoken.)

Yes, Alenka, remember dance and laughter?

(Sung.)

When you walk through rain,
you can hear far oceans forming.

ALENKA

On an inkblot night,
you can hear the bright stars sing.

ALENKA and ALENKA'S CAT

In the morning dew,
you can hear the sunlight glistening.
This is what I learned, while I was listening.

SPARROW
(To BIRD PRINCESS.)

In a new bride's eyes, I can hear church bells ringing.

MEN
(To BRAVE YOUTH.)

Of a brave youth's deeds, many stories will be told.

BIRD PRINCESS
(To ALENKA.)

And a castle full of love, can silence years of longing.

ALL (but BABA YAGA.)

This is what we learned,
oh, this is what we learned,

oh, this is what we learned
while we were listening.

ALL (but BABA YAGA cont.)

(ALL proceed happily offstage, patting each other
on the back, laughing, etc. Lights dim but don't
go to black. A red light comes from the oven and the
door opens.)

BABA YAGA
(Sung.)

There's a thousand Baba Yagas, and a thousand chicken huts.
And a thousand little girls who are sent to me to die.
And a thousand wand'ring boys, who need me to find their fortune.
And the good, and the brave and the lucky, get past me.
The rest, they die.

(BABA YAGA jumps out of the oven. At the final
chime, the lights focus on the anvil Lights out. Play
ends.)