

Prince Ugly
A play for young audiences by Matt Buchanan

Characters (in order of appearance)

Storyteller
King Bruce
Royal Secretary
Prime Minister
Megan
Queen Daisy
Royal Midwife
Butler
Lady Betty of Purple*
Lord Charles of Pumpnickel*
Lady Rebecca of Steppington*
Postman*
Prince William Xavier Hopkirk the Third
Several Children*
Maurice, Royal Cook*
A Father*
A Mother*

*Ensemble roles.

(If a larger cast is desired, a few additional servants or courtiers may be added.)

Lights up on a fairy-tale Throne Room. Two large thrones—his and hers. The Storyteller, who is a very old woman, sits in a rocker in the DL corner of the stage, where she will remain for the entire play. She is very well-dressed in a fairy-tale sort of way. No one else is onstage. The Storyteller addresses the audience.

STORYTELLER

Once upon a time. . . Fairy tales always begin “Once upon a time.” It’s a rule. Once upon a time there was a peaceful little Kingdom. The name of the Kingdom was “The Kingdom.” Don’t look at me like that. I didn’t name it. The Kingdom was ruled with great enthusiasm and occasional competence by King Bruce. Everyone in The Kingdom loved Bruce and Daisy, and especially everyone who worked in the palace. Bruce and Daisy were—how shall I put this—very *casual* employers. Old Bruce made it a rule that nobody should ever have to work in the afternoon—except Maurice, the Royal Cook, of course, who had to get dinner. But HE didn’t even know HOW to play, so he didn’t mind a bit. Yes, life in the palace was usually pretty free and easy. But there was a time—well, of course it was a good thing, but it did make life for those in the palace a little more frantic for a while. I’m talking, of course, about the birth of the new baby. The King had always wanted to be a father, and he was a little—well, excited. There he comes now.

King Bruce *scurries in. We can tell he's the King because of his crown, but he looks anything but royal. He is in pajamas and a robe, and wears one bedroom slipper. As Kings go he's a fairly young man. He's not really looking where he's going, and he trips over a rug. He gets up, glares resentfully at the offending rug, and scurries off.*

QUEEN DAISY

(Off.) Bruce! Bruce!

STORYTELLER

That's Daisy. She's really sweet usually—honest!

QUEEN DAISY

(Off.) Bruce! Pickles and ice cream! Now!

KING BRUCE

(Off.) Coming, darling! Right away, sweetness!

King Bruce *scurries across in the opposite direction. His crown has slipped over his eyes, and he misses the exit the first time and has to disentangle himself from the curtain*

Oh, dear! I'm not ready for this! I don't know how to be a father! I—oh, bother!

He exits successfully.

STORYTELLER

Can you tell this is his first baby? Hers too, naturally. The whole Palace was topsy-turvy. Everyone was getting ready. A huge celebration—the biggest The Kingdom had ever seen—was planned for when the baby arrived. The Prime Minister and the Royal Secretary had their hands full with all the planning, let me tell you.

The Royal Secretary and the Prime Minister enter, deep in conversation. The Secretary carries an enormous list that overflows his grasp and trails behind.

ROYAL SECRETARY

(Reading.) . . . Flowers, balloons, tapestries. . .do we have tapestries?

PRIME MINISTER

In the basement.

ROYAL SECRETARY

Placemats, invitations. . .

The Royal Secretary stumbles over the same rug the King tripped over. He does not fall, but he stops.

(Hollering.) Megan! MEGAN!

MEGAN

(Off.) Coming! Don't have a cow!

Megan enters. She looks like a typical fairy-tale serving wench. She's in her early thirties, but looks older because of a life of hard work. She walks with an obvious limp but is otherwise healthy enough. She carries a pail and mop, and has a whiskbroom in her apron.

ROYAL SECRETARY

Megan, get rid of this rug! And clean this place up. It looks like a sty.

STORYTELLER

Stop!

Everyone but the Storyteller freezes. The Storyteller enjoys this power enormously.

Do you see any dirt? I never liked that one. By the way, keep your eye on Megan. She's the Maid-of-all-Work. She doesn't look like much, but she's important. Trust me. Go!

The action resumes as if nothing has happened.

MEGAN

Yes, Your Secretaryness. Right away.

The Secretary and the Minister exit L.

Mercy! You'd think it was the first time anybody ever had a baby!

Megan sweeps up imaginary dust with her whiskbroom, and then sweeps it under the rug. Then she picks up the rug and exits with it.

STORYTELLER

I hope that baby comes soon. Everyone's losing their heads.

QUEEN DAISY

(Almost a scream, off.) It's time! Bruce! It's time.

Queen Daisy enters, enormously pregnant, supported on one side by the King and on the other by the Prime Minister. The Royal Secretary follows behind, still trailing the list. They move as quickly as the Queen's condition will allow across the stage.

BRUCE

Hold on, my angel! Almost there, sugar dumpling!

ROYAL SECRETARY

Your Majesty, about those invitations. . .

QUEEN DAISY

Wait!

The procession stops. Queen Daisy points a finger at the Secretary.

You. Come here.

The Secretary approaches. Daisy, still clinging to the King for support, grabs a big handful of the Secretary's shirt and pulls his face to hers.

Say that again.

ROYAL SECRETARY

(In considerable pain.) Your Majesty? Er. . .invitations. . .

QUEEN DAISY

Invitations? INVITATIONS? I'm standing here about to deliver what I'm sure is at least a forty-pound baby and you talk to me about INVITATIONS?!?!

ROYAL SECRETARY

Er. . .

QUEEN DAISY

Bruce!

She releases the Secretary, who falls gasping to the floor. The King and the Prime Minister help her off. The Secretary straightens himself out as best he can, musters what dignity he can find and exits in the opposite direction. A moment later he re-enters and retrieves the list he left behind. He exits. A moment later King Bruce enters, pacing furiously. He has lost his crown, and one tail of his bathrobe

is tucked into his pajama trousers. He sits on his throne, but can't sit still. He paces some more. He casts pointed glances offstage. He paces some more. Finally, after an agonizing wait, we hear the wail of a newborn. Almost instantly the Royal Midwife charges on.

ROYAL MIDWIFE

It's a girl! It's a girl!

KING BRUCE

A girl! A daughter! I have a daughter!

The King leaps up and dances a furious jig, pulling the Royal Midwife into a spin with him.

STORYTELLER

Stop!

Everyone but the Storyteller freezes.

You know, I think the infant-princess-under-a-curse motif had been done to death in fairy tales, don't you? I mean, come on. . . Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel. . . I've had it with helpless females. BACK UP!

King Bruce and the Royal Midwife reverse their dance.

KING BRUCE

(Sitting down.) Retaud a vah I! Retaud a! Lrig a!

ROYAL MIDWIFE

Lrig a stih! Lrig a stih!

The Royal Midwife rushes off backwards.

STORYTELLER

STOP! FORWARD!

The Prime Minister rushes on again.

PRIME MINISTER

It's a boy! It's a boy!

KING BRUCE

A boy! A son! I have a son!!

The King leaps up and dances a furious jig, pulling the Royal Midwife into a spin with him. He is about to dip her when he realizes what he's doing.

Oh. Excuse me. Oh, what the heck! I have a son!

The King does dip her. Then he plants a big kiss on her cheek and lets her go. She blushes and exits.

QUEEN DAISY

(Off.) Bruce! Come meet your son!

The King rushes off. As the Storyteller speaks, the Royal Secretary, the Prime Minister and Megan (along with other servants if desired) enter and begin decorating the Throne Room for a gala party. They exit when finished.

STORYTELLER

Joy reigned throughout The Kingdom. They named the baby Prince William Xavier Hopkirk the Third--but he was the first one ever to have that name. The King proclaimed a national holiday, and everybody had a whole week off. Preparations were completed for the big celebration. Important guests from all over The Kingdom would soon arrive with gifts for the new Prince..

The King and Queen enter, she with the baby in her arms. The King, while still a little sloppy, is dressed in proper Kingly fashion, and the Queen is positively radiant. The baby is placed in a cradle between the thrones. The Prime Minister and the Royal Secretary enter and stand at the King's left, and the Butler enters and stands SR to announce the guests.

The first guest to arrive was Lady Betty of Purple—Her Majesty's oldest friend.

BUTLER

(In his most pompous voice.) Lady Betty of Purple!

Lady Betty enters R and approaches the Royal Family. She is impeccably dressed, which makes the huge tricycle she is carrying all the more incongruous.

LADY BETTY

Daisy!

She tries to embrace the Queen, and they both become hopelessly entangled in the tricycle. The Prime Minister rushes forward to rescue the gift, putting it to one side, and the pair embrace properly. Lady Betty absently kisses the King.

Bruce.

KING BRUCE

(Not especially enthusiastic.) Betty.

LADY BETTY

Now, where is the little Prince? Oh, how precious! Goo! Goo! *(etc.)*

QUEEN DAISY

Come away, Betty, dear, before you wake him.

KING BRUCE

(Under his breath.) And give him the fright of his life!

The Queen punches the King on the arm, but she doesn't really mean it.

LADY BETTY

Now, lead me to the buffet!

The Prime Minister escorts her off L, then returns to her place at the King's side.

STORYTELLER

The next guest to arrive. . .well, he'll tell you.

ROYAL SECRETARY

Lord Charles of Pumpnickel!

Lord Charles strides on R, slapping the astonished Secretary on the back as he passes him. He is a big, boisterous man in hunting tweeds. He carries a gift-wrapped bag of golf clubs.

LORD CHARLES

(Much louder than necessary.) Bruce, you old dog! Well done!

He rushes the King, dropping the golf clubs unceremoniously in front of the cradle. The King leaps to his feet, and the pair engage in an incredibly elaborate secret handshake, involving

considerable physical movement as well as sound effects.

KING BRUCE

Good to see you, Chuck.

LORD CHARLES

How's he treating you, Daisy?

QUEEN DAISY

(Dryly.) Hello, Charles. Interesting gift for an infant.

LORD CHARLES

Oh, he'll use 'em one day. I see this charming person is trying to hurry me along. See you at the reception, Chuck.

Indeed, the Prime Minister is trying to hurry him along, and she escorts him off L. As the Butler is speaking the Royal Secretary moves the golf clubs aside.

BUTLER

The Honorable Francis. . .

STORYTELLER

Stop!

Everyone but the Storyteller freezes.

You don't need to see all this, do you? Anyway, it's really not so important who came. What's important is who DIDN'T come. At least at first. Lady Rebecca of Steppington. The sorceress. The Queen's SECOND oldest friend. Lights!

The lights go down on the Throne Room and come up on a corner of the stage. (Lights stay up on the Storyteller.) Lady Rebecca enters, dragging a Postman by the ear. She is dressed like a traditional fairy-tale sorceress, but she is not unattractive.

LADY REBECCA

Look harder! I know it's there!

POSTMAN

I'm telling you, lady, there's nothing for you today!

LADY REBECCA

There has to be. I know Daisy sent me an invitation. *(Darkly.)* She wouldn't dare not to.

POSTMAN

I'm telling you. . .

LADY REBECCA

Shut your trap or I'll turn you into a turnip!

STORYTELLER

She would, too.

LADY REBECCA

Give me that bag!

She seizes the Postman's mailbag and empties it on the floor. She drops to her knees and begins going through the letters. She picks them up one at a time, checks the address, and throws them over her shoulder. The Postman scurries around gathering them up as they fall.

No. . .Not this one. . .nope. . .(etc.)

STORYTELLER

Don't blame the Queen. They met at school.

Lady Rebecca comes to the last letter. It's not for her either. She crumples it in her hand as smoke comes out of her ears. The hapless Postman tries unsuccessfully to get the letter away from her throughout the following.

LADY REBECCA

It's not here. IT'S NOT HERE! I can't believe it! How dare they leave me out! I'll tear them apart! (To Postman.) Are you still here?

POSTMAN

Er. . .the letter. . .

LADY REBECCA

Here! Now GET OUT! Before I feed you to my wolverine!

The Postman exits hastily. Lady Rebecca builds herself a raging head of steam.

They won't get away with this! Nobody snubs Lady Rebecca of Steppington! NOBODY! I MAKE the rules! THEY'LL RUE THE DAY THEY EVER CROSSED ME! I'LL TURN THEM ALL INTO FRUIT FLIES! I'LL SQUASH THEM LIKE BUGS! I'LL DESTROY THE WHOLE LOT OF. . .

STORYTELLER

Stop! Before you hurt yourself.

Lady Rebecca freezes.

Lady Rebecca was in Theatre at school. Meanwhile, the Queen was wondering what happened to her second oldest friend. Wondering and worrying. Lights!

The lights go out on a frozen Lady Rebecca and come up on the Throne Room, where the Prime Minister is playing with the baby in the cradle and the King has gone to sleep, and snores loudly. The Butler still stands in his place, but he has grown bored and is knitting. The Royal Secretary has gone, as have all the guests.

QUEEN DAISY

Dear? Dear! BRUCE!

KING BRUCE

(Starting awake.) Off with his head! Er. . .what?

QUEEN DAISY

Did you see Becky?

KING BRUCE

No. And believe me, I'd remember. Why? Did you invite her?

QUEEN DAISY

Yes, I'm sure I did. I hope I did. Stephen!

The Royal Secretary enters, munching on a chicken leg.

ROYAL SECRETARY

(His mouth full.) Your Majesty?

He tries frantically to hide the chicken leg.

QUEEN DAISY

Did you send an invitation to Lady Rebecca?

ROYAL SECRETARY

Lady who?

QUEEN DAISY

Lady Rebecca of Steppingford! Pay attention.

ROYAL SECRETARY

Sorry. Er. . . I think so. If your Majesty had been more attentive when I tried to check the list with you. . .

QUEEN DAISY

I wouldn't finish that sentence if I were you.

ROYAL SECRETARY

I mean. . . I'm not sure.

QUEEN DAISY

Oh, dear!.

PRIME MINISTER

Your Majesty, don't panic. Maybe she got the invitation and just couldn't come.

QUEEN DAISY

(Becoming increasingly alarmed.) No. Becky wouldn't miss the chance to show off in front of the peasants. She didn't get it. What are we going to do?

STORYTELLER

You know, I bet he did send it. The post office around here has never been too swift.

KING BRUCE

Why do anything? So she wasn't invited. I never liked her anyway.

The Queen grabs his face and speaks directly into it.

QUEEN DAISY

Have you taken leave of your tiny mind? We're talking about Lady Rebecca of Steppington! Don't you know what that means?!

KING BRUCE

Oh. *(Suddenly in a full panic.)* OH NO! What are we going to do? HIDE THE BABY! Never mind that—HIDE ME!