

# THE CHANGELING PRINCESS by MARSALI TAYLOR

## CAST LIST

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN  
KING EDMUND  
QUEEN REGINA  
YOUNG PRINCE VICTOR  
YOUNG PRINCESS VANITY  
PRINCE VICTOR  
PRINCESS VANITY  
ROSALBA - the Changeling Princess

### **COURTIERS :**

RUFUS  
JUSTIN  
CEDRIC  
CONNOR  
AMABEL  
EUDOIA  
DAGMAR  
CHLOE

### **GODMOTHERS:**

FAY  
MONDIA  
WILLOW  
TAMAR  
MALVIANCE

MISS PRITCH - Rosalba's Governess  
MRS BUNDLE - the cook  
MISS MALKONET - -the butler  
FRED - the scullion  
LORD SID OF BATTERSEA - envoy from the King of Chavallia  
PRINCE HOWEL OF MINIMISCULA

### **BRIGANDS:**

CLEMENTO  
ANTONIO  
FALÇO  
JOSÉ  
RENATO  
GUISEPPE  
PAOLO  
ROBERTO

TWO BABY DRAGONS  
TWO ROYAL PAGES

+ VILLAGERS, ANIMALS, and THE DRAGON [as many as desired to make up these extras.]

Can be a cast of thousands! but could perhaps be done with as few as 20-25 using doubling. An ideal lower school play.

Full length. Approx one and a half to one and three-quarter hours long, excluding interval.

EXTRACT ONE

ACT ONE.

Scene 1.

*The gardens of the castle. The Lord High Chamberlain enters.*

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

Once upon a time, as all good stories begin, in a small country far away and long ago, there lived a King and Queen. The King was a good enough King as Kings go, and the Queen was beautiful and loyal, which is about as much as you can expect, and as Kings and Queens go they were pretty happy. They had two children, a boy and a girl, and thought that was enough. Which is where our story - or rather Rosalba's story - begins ...

*Enter King Edmund and Queen Regina.*

KING

You're what?

*The Queen lays her hands on her stomach.*

KING

Well, I won't have it. We've already got two - one of each. What's the use of another one? Unless there's a third kind .... is there?

QUEEN

No, dear. It's a straightforward choice - a boy or a girl.

KING

Well, you can't have another boy. You know the trouble that will cause when I die. Half the nobles will side with one and half with the other and the kingdom will be plunged into civil war.

QUEEN

Another girl wouldn't cause civil war.

KING

Another girl? You must be joking! One's expensive enough. When I think of the clothes she goes through and what I'll have to pay out in her dowry - that is, if I can find a Prince to marry her off to, with the state the kingdom's in.

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

Perhaps if your Majesty was on more conciliatory terms with your Majesty's neighbours...?

KING

I'm very conciliatory! I'm a man of peace! It's other people that are so difficult.

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

Of course, your Majesty.

KING

I warned Chavallia that if they ventured over our border we would retaliate. It's not my fault they wouldn't take a telling.

QUEEN

They weren't quite over the border.

KING

They nearly were. We had to act in self-defence.

QUEEN

And so now we're at war.

KING

I don't act unless I'm forced to. I believe in peace and democracy for all countries, especially us.

QUEEN *to the audience, proudly*

And he's willing to enforce it.

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

As your Majesty says.

KING

And now I have another drawback - a third child. It's very provoking.

QUEEN

How are we going to tell our little darlings?

KING

Oh, you do it. I'm busy.

*Young Victor and Young Vanity enter during the following narration. The King exits and the Queen makes a tableau with her two children.*

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN *to the audience*

And so the King went back to his war maps and battle plans, while the Queen broke the news to little Prince Victor and little Princess Vanity, that they were to have a new brother or sister.

YOUNG VICTOR *unfreezing*

A what?

QUEEN

A little brother or sister - won't that be nice?

YOUNG VICTOR

Well, so long as it understands clearly that I'm Crown Prince and it has to do as I say, because I'm going to be King one day. I might let it join in my games; Van's getting tired of being the defeated army.

QUEEN

You could let her win sometimes, dearest.

YOUNG VICTOR

I always win.

YOUNG VANITY

If this baby is a little sister, it's not to be as beautiful as me.

QUEEN

Of course not, precious. Big sisters are always more beautiful than little sisters.

YOUNG VANITY

I still think it's a really stupid idea.

YOUNG VICTOR

And so do I.

QUEEN

You'll like it when it comes, darlings.

YOUNG VICTOR

I won't. I'll beat it so often it runs away.

YOUNG VANITY

And I'll put mud on all its best dresses.

QUEEN

Now, now, darlings. Don't be nasty.

*She leads the children off. Enter Courtiers: Rufus, Justin, Cedric, and Connor.*

RUFUS

Did you hear that?

CONNOR *rapt, clearly looking elsewhere*

Yeth, quite plainly. It ith - I think - yeth, definitely - a red-footed warbler! Very early in the theathon too.

*He wanders off. Rufus stares after him in despair.*

JUSTIN

Rufus means, did you hear what her Maj said, Connor?

CEDRIC

About the child. Nasty, smelly things.

JUSTIN

My feelings exactly, Ceddie. Nasty smelly things. [*He shudders.*] Nappies.

CEDRIC *shuddering*

How very unpleasant.

RUFUS

Oh, don't be stupid. Another child, indeed! There are enough hangers on on the civil list already, without another squalling royal brat.

JUSTIN

Quite. Another brat to have to bow down to. And the two we have already are so horribly rough. Why, only yesterday the young Prince kicked poor Ceddie on the ankle.

CEDRIC

And the young Princess elbowed Justin away from the mirror.

CONNOR

No, it's a black-footed warbler. How dithappointing.

RUFUS

I wouldn't be surprised if she did it on purpose.

CEDRIC

Why should she do that?

CONNOR

Why should who do what?

JUSTIN

Oh, do 'thut up', Connor.

RUFUS

Well, the civil list. Each child gets an extra allowance - and who gets the spending of it? She does.

*Enter female courtiers: Amabel, Chloe, Dagmar and Eudoia.*

DAGMAR

Well, hello there! Fancy finding you here!

EUDOIA

Yes, fancy!

CHLOE

But you knew they were here. I wanted to go for a walk and you said, 'No,' until Amabel said, 'There's the men!' and then you said ... [*They all shove her.*] ... Ouch!

DAGMAR

Isn't it a lovely day? Though it would be so much cooler in the harbour - wouldn't it, Connor?

CONNOR

No - er - yeth - er -

DAGMAR

Exactly.

*She prepares to lead him off. Rufus stops them.*

RUFUS

Oh, never mind that now. Have you heard the news?

EUDOIA

What news?

JUSTIN

Her Maj's news. [*Meaningly.*] A teensy-weensy-baby piece of gossip.

*The Ladies register. It is obviously news to them....*

## EXTRACT TWO

*Menacing drum roll. Everyone looks up in alarm.*

KING *jumping to his feet*

To arms! Those dastards of Chavallia have seized their chance to attack! Man the barricades! Prepare the boiling oil!

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

If I may interrupt, your Majesty ... [*To the audience.*] Unfortunately, as always happens on these occasions, somebody got left out -

CONNOR

I thcribed everybody hith Majethy told me to -

JUSTIN

Well, don't look at me! I copied the list exactly.

CEDRIC

I made out invitations for every name on it.

RUFUS

I sent every one.

*Thunderclap. Flash. Enter Malviance.*

KING

Your - your witchiness... this is a most unexpected - er - pleasure ...

MALVIANCE

Oh, a pleasure, is it? I'm certainly unexpected, seeing as how you didn't bother to send me an invitation. I suppose you were too busy keeping in with the young - [*Looks at Fay.*] - your age is beginning to show, ducks ... and fashionable - [*Looks at Mondia.*] - to remember about me. Or was it on purpose? Don't think I haven't heard all that's been said in this castle these last months. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if you all wanted the poor mite to be struck down by a nasty curse before she got too old and too expensive. You hope I'll prick her finger with a spindle or turn her into a toad ... hah! Changeling princess indeed! [*Tickles baby's tummy.*] Well, what gifts have you given her so far?

FAY

I have gifted her a voice like a singing bird.

MALVIANCE

Uh-huh.

MONDIA

I have dowered her with style and fashion.

MALVIANCE

Spared her from dress-sense like yours, you mean?

WILLOW

I have summoned the ancient mystical harmony between all creatures to be revived in her.

MALVIANCE

So everywhere she goes she'll have a zoo following her. Great. Very helpful.

TAMAR

You can't tell me green fingers aren't a useful gift.

MALVIANCE

It'll be very handy when she's reduced to growing her own food.

TAMAR

And what are you going to give her that's so special?

MALVIANCE

I'll give her something that you don't have an ounce of between you. Princess Rosalba, I hereby endow you ... [*Waves her wand; magical effect.*] ... with common sense.

JUSTIN  
Common sense?  
AMABEL  
For a princess?  
ALL  
Well, what use is that?...

### EXTRACT THREE

[Missed out text shows how none of the godmothers' gifts are any use to Rosalba, as no one ever listens to her. She is bullied by her family and their cronies and has developed a stammer - far from the 'beautiful voice' which was one of her gifts. Below is a sample of this treatment.]

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN  
And as for Mondia's gift - a sense of style ...

*Enter Queen. Rosalba stands.*

ROSALBA  
M-m-mother?  
QUEEN  
What trouble are you in now?  
ROSALBA  
None, ma'am. I just w-w-wondered - since V-v-vanity is getting a new dress for the grand Court B-b-ball next week, if I might have one t-t-too? I know j-just what I'd like and it wouldn't cost so very m-m-much...  
QUEEN  
But whatever do you want a new dress for? You have lots of dresses.  
ROSALBA  
Yes, b-b-but they're all V-v-vanity's. I'd like a n-new one for me - one that was m-made specially for m-m-me.

*Enter Vanity with the four Court Ladies.*

VANITY  
Well, of all the ingratitude! I make you a present of my prettiest dresses and they're not good enough! Oh, no - not stylish enough for little-miss-sense-of-style!  
AMABEL  
Shocking!  
EUDOIA  
Unb-b-believable!  
ROSALBA  
It isn't th-th-that - it's j-just ...  
DAGMAR  
Still arguing!  
CHLOE  
The wretch!  
QUEEN  
Vanity is quite right. You're being ungrateful.  
ALL FOUR LADIES  
Very ungrateful!  
QUEEN  
Dear Van has offered you a lovely dress for the ball.  
ROSALBA *desperately - in one breath*  
It's bright blue and frilly.

*Queen and Vanity turn and glare at her.*

ROSALBA

With pink bows all over it!

*Queen and Vanity glare harder.*

ROSALBA *running out of steam*

Well, I j-j-just th-th-thought ...

ALL FOUR LADIES *giggling*

She th-th-thought!

QUEEN

One more word and you don't go to the ball at all! Now beg your sister's pardon.

ALL FOUR LADIES

Immediately!

ROSALBA

I'm s-s-s-sorry, V-v-v-van, I d-d-d-didn't m-m-mean to be r-r-r-rude....

VANITY *cutting in*

Princess Vanity to you, changeling. Really, she gets more difficult every day.

*Exit Vanity and the Queen.*

AMABEL

Quite impossible!

EUDOIA

Refusing Princess Vanity's lovely colourful dresses!

DAGMAR

So nice and bright.

EUDOIA

Sense of style, indeed!...

#### EXTRACT FOUR

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

And Malviance's gift of common sense? She was never allowed to use it.

*Enter the four male courtiers. Rufus brings on papers and gives them to the Lord High Chamberlain. Enter King, Queen, Victor, Vanity and the four female courtiers. Rosalba joins them. The Lord High Chamberlain gives the first paper to the King.*

KING

Prince Howel of Minimiscula - who does he think he is? Seen Van's portrait ... begs for the honour ... impudent upstart!

VANITY

Oh, do let him visit, Daddy!

KING

Presumption!

VANITY

My first suitor! [*She sobs.*] Don't be unkind, Daddy! I want to refuse him myself! [*Sobs again. Appealing to the Queen.*] Mama!

KING

Oh very well. [*To Lord High Chamberlain, who gestures directions to Connor.*] Tell him he can come.

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

The next note is the peace treaty with Chavallia. Lord Sid of Battersea, the special

envoy from the vanquished King of Chavallia, awaits your Majesty's pleasure.

KING

Well, show him in.

*Enter Lord Sid. He bows greasily.*

LORD SID

Your all-conquering Majesty ... your most gracious Majesty ... my lord Prince, of whose valour I have often heard ... my lady Princess - cor, you're even more beautiful than they say you are .... [*He stares at her raptly as he kisses her hand. Vanity bridles.*]

KING

Get on with it.

LORD SID

From my noble master, greetings. I come with his offer for peace - a fair offer, mind ... I wouldn't try to sell you short. One piece of land in good condition, one previous lady owner, well-cared-for, a bargain at the price! Do I hear any offers?

*He unrolls a map. The royals crowd around, including Rosalba.*

KING

Which bit?

LORD SID

That bit there, squire - the bit in pink. Good stretch of fertile land - just needs a bit of developing ... lovely prospect...

KING

Hmmm ... it seems a nice large piece.

LORD SID

A hundred and fifty square miles.

KING

What kind of land is it?

LORD SID

Lovely, lovely land, just crying out to be farmed.

VICTOR

What's on it at the moment?

LORD SID

Ah, you're a sharp one, Prince. I wouldn't want to try to pull the wool over your eyes. Just at the moment, it's a bit neglected - previous owner's been away, you see... but it's lovely fertile soil ... well watered...

ROSALBA

D-d-does that mean m-m-marshland?

ALL

Oh, be quiet, Rosalba!

LORD SID

Marshland? No, no, not a bit of it - a lovely piece of land. Tell you what - you drive a hard bargain, sirs, but to keep the peace, I'll throw in the caves up above it - up on the right here... excellent defensive territory- a natural barrier, these mountains. Now, what do you say? You won't get a better offer.

ROSALBA *at last getting a proper look at the map*

It's Dragon Marsh!

*She is ignored. She comes over to the Lord High Chamberlain.*

ROSALBA

S-sir! It's Dragon Marsh! The caves he's s-speaking of is where the dragon nests. It'll ruin our country. The fighting there has kept it away, but as s-soon as peace comes it'll be out.... [*Relapsing into thoughtfulness.*] ...though I've always w-w-wondered ...



LORD SID *to the King*

'Scuse me,. squire... that's the changeling, isn't it? Bit touched in the head, like?

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

Sire, if I may say so, it might be wise not to decide too hastily... to go and look at the land ... take it for a test drive, as it were ...

LORD SID

Now, Sire, would I cheat you? Would I?

KING *to Lord High Chamberlain*

Nonsense! You're getting past it - too cautious, that's your trouble. A real ruler has to be ready to grasp such opportunities.

LORD SID

Ah - that's what I like to see - a real king who knows his own mind. Sign 'ere, please.

*He produces a scroll. The lights fade as the King signs.*

## Scene 5

*The castle kitchen.*

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

In fact, there was only one person in the whole court who didn't call Rosalba a changeling, and he was the lowest of the low. I'd be surprised if the King and Queen even knew he existed...

*Enter the butler, Miss Malkonet, very dignified, polishing glasses by spitting on a cloth and rubbing. After a short pause, enter the cook, Mrs Bundle, who is carrying a rolling pin.*

MRS BUNDLE

Fred! Fred! Where is that lazy boy? Fred!

MISS MALKONET

I think I last h'espied him, Mrs B, making towards the larder.

MRS BUNDLE

In my larder, was he? I'll soon fetch him out of there! [*She storms off, returning immediately holding Fred by one ear.*] And what do you think you were doing in there?

No, don't answer. I can see plain enough. Stealing my jam tarts, were you? [*She whacks him with her rolling pin.*]

FRED

Ouch!

MRS BUNDLE *whacking him*

Idling about, were you?

FRED *as she whacks him*

Ouch!

MRS BUNDLE

Trying to avoid doing an honest day's work, were you?

FRED *as he is whacked again*

Ouch!

MRS BUNDLE

Well, sit down there and get on with polishing them shoes. And after that, you can lend an 'and with them dishes.

MISS MALKONET

And look lively, boy! H'l've another dozen glasses to polish and h'l'm expecting some 'elp once you've done your h'other chores.

FRED

I haven't had any dinner yet.

MRS BUNDLE

And won't get none neither until the work's done.

MISS MALKONET

That's the way, Mrs B.

FRED

I'm starving.

MRS BUNDLE

And starve you will, until all them boots are clean. Then we'll see.

*She thumps pastry about in a dish and puts cream on. Fred watches hungrily. Then Mrs Bundle picks up the mixing bowl and goes out. Miss Malkonet finishes glasses, puts them on a tray and exits, very haughtily. She pauses in the doorway.*

MISS MALKONET

And no slacking while we're h'out.

*She exits. Left alone, Fred looks round carefully, grabs a biscuit from the table and stuffs it in his mouth. He is obviously starving. He grabs a second one. He is in the act of stuffing a third in his mouth when Mrs Bundle re-enters.*

MRS BUNDLE

What? You wicked boy! Miss M! Miss M!

*Fred grabs a handful of biscuits and runs, chased by Mrs Bundle. Behind her, Miss Malkonet enters and joins in the chase. They run round the stage, round the auditorium, and back onto the stage, where Fred is cornered finally near the table. Fred grabs a biscuit and a pie from the table, pushes the biscuit into Miss Malkonet's mouth, where it sticks out, causing her to splutter, and throws the pie directly into the face of Mrs Bundle. Under the cover of their splutters and shouts, Fred exits at a run....*

## EXTRACT FIVE

VICTOR

Must you refuse him right now, dear sister?

VANITY

You're not suggesting I waste myself on a tiny kingdom like his?

VICTOR

Of course not! But why don't we send him off to tackle the dragon? If it kills him, it's no skin off our nose and if he kills it, you can refuse him then. We can't lose!

VANITY

Sounds good to me!

*They return to the throne.*

VANITY

Prince, now I come to think of it, there is one small favour you could do for me, which might lead me to pick you out from my other suitors.

HOWEL

Name it!

VANITY

A little matter of a dragon which lives out in the marshes. I fancy a dragon skin rug and I'm told this one is rather pretty colours.

HOWEL

Madam, it is done! *[He bows and exits.]*

VICTOR

Good, that's the problem sorted.

VANITY

And if he fails to come back, there's always our second option.

VICTOR

Second option?

VANITY

It was quite often done in the old days, I believe. You placated the dragon by feeding it a Princess.

*Rosalba looks alarmed, shakes her head and sneaks unobtrusively - to Victor and Vanity - out.*

VICTOR

A Princess? Dear sister, never would I ask you to make such a sacrifice.

VANITY

Not me, stupid! There is another Princess here - in name at least.

VICTOR

Another Princess?

EUDOIA

That changeling.

JUSTIN

The - er - Princess Rosalba, your royal highness.

VICTOR

Of course! Rosalba! Where is the girl?

LADIES

She was just here -

VICTOR *shouting*

Rosalba!

*Blackout.*

## Scene 8

*The Palace Courtyard. Re-enter Rosalba dressed in boy's garb, a knapsack on her back. She pauses centre stage, not sure where to go. Enter Fred.*

FRED

Hey! What's going on?

ROSALBA

I'm off. There's a rather nasty tradition that, to shut a dragon up, you feed it a Princess - and guess who's been volunteered!

FRED

They wouldn't dare.

ROSALBA

Oh wouldn't they? I'm getting out while I'm still in one piece. [*Pause. Thoughtfully.*] It's a funny thing about dragons, though. You'd have thought ...

FRED *interrupting*

And dressed like that!

ROSALBA

I nicked an outfit from Victor's page's room.

FRED

And your hair?

ROSALBA

Cut it off. I think it looks far better short anyway.

FRED

You'll never fool anyone. Your voice is too high.

ROSALBA *lower*

I'll remember to speak lower.

FRED

But you can't just go.

ROSALBA

I can't just stay either. Somewhere - somewhere, there must be a place for me.

MRS BUNDLE *off*

Fred! Where is that dratted boy?

FRED

Have you got something to eat? Here - [*Gives her a handful of biscuits from his pocket.*]

MISS MALKONET *off*

Fred! You come 'ere this h'instant!

ROSALBA

You'll have to go.

*Enter Howel.*

HOWEL

Hey, boy! Yes, you!

*Both Fred and Rosalba turn. He is talking to Rosalba.*

ROSALBA

Yes, sir?

HOWEL

One of Prince Victor's pages, are you?

ROSALBA

Yes, sir. Well I was, sir .... Looking for new employment now, sir.

HOWEL

Do you know the marsh where this dragon lives?

ROSALBA

It's a bit of a journey, sir...

HOWEL

That doesn't worry me.

ROSALBA

Well, sir, you set out across this road here and towards the forest - across the wasteland - and its lair is up in the mountains - look, it's a really awkward road and I'm heading that way anyway. Why don't I show you? Two are safer than one on lonely roads.

PRINCE

Well that's true enough. But look here - I mean - one reason I have to marry is that I've no money - I mean, I can't pay you much.

ROSALBA

A page's wages aren't much. Twopence a year and my keep.

PRINCE

And you don't mind a bit of danger?

ROSALBA

Sounds safer than palace life.

FRED

But you can't ...

EXTRACT SIX

*Malviance's cottage. She's on stage, stirring a cauldron. Rosalba and Howel re-enter.*

HOWEL

Look, a light!

ROSALBA

It's a cottage. Shall we ask them if they'll put us up for the night?

HOWEL

It may not be what you're used to.

ROSALBA

Us pages sleep on the floor outside Prince Victor's bedroom.

HOWEL

Yes, but ...

ROSALBA

More to the point, it won't be what you're used to.

HOWEL

I keep telling you, I'm not a posh Prince. My country's so small you can only see it on the big size Ordnance Survey maps. A floor will do me fine.

ROSALBA

Does not being rich mean you can't offer to pay for a night's lodging?

HOWEL

Well - yes.

ROSALBA

That's all right. [*She hammers loudly on the door with the end of her staff.*] Hello there! Is anyone in?

MALVIANCE *entering with a lantern*

That depends who's asking. What do you want? I'm busy.

ROSALBA

We're in search of a night's lodging and willing to work for our keep. We'll gather wood, dig the garden, split kindling, anything you like.

MALVIANCE

Hmmm. Well, let's have a look at you. [*She raises the lantern.*] Oh, it's you, is it? You've not grown up quite as I'd have expected.

ROSALBA *alarmed*

Ssssh! I'm Fred, the Prince's page.

MALVIANCE

Oh, are you indeed? And is this the idiot who's saving young Victor a dangerous job?

Always one to wriggle out of things, he is.

ROSALBA

Can we stay? We'll be very helpful.

MALVIANCE

I suppose you can. Not that there's room in the house, mind, but you can huddle down beside the fire.

HOWEL

What do you want us to do?

MALVIANCE

What can you do?

HOWEL

I'll have a go at anything you like.

MALVIANCE

At least that shows willing. The woodpile's over there, with an axe beside it. Get chopping. [*Exit Prince Howel.*] And you, young lady ...

ROSALBA

Ssssh!

MALVIANCE

Think you've got him fooled, do you? And what's your sister, Van, going to say about you running off with her Prince?

ROSALBA

I'm not running off with him! It's not like that at all. I've got a theory ...

MALVIANCE

Have you indeed? Something to do with dragons, is it? Awfully big to fly with such little wings?

ROSALBA

Am I right, Godmama?

MALVIANCE

You might be. Well, get on and be useful. That garden of mine could do with a bit of help. Let's see if that Tamar's spell is any use....

## EXTRACT SEVEN

*Howel gives her a leg up into tree and climbs up himself. As soon as they are there there is a huge crash and, through every available entrance, the brigands burst in. They are large, threatening, and armed to the teeth. If desired, they can have Mafioso accents.*

ALL BRIGANDS

Got you! ... Where? ...

CLEMENTO

Where have they gone?

FALCO

They were here, boss, I swear it. I heard them, just ahead of us.

RENATO

They must have passed us.

JOSE

Well, they didn't come out this way, so you needn't suggest it's my fault.

MARCO

No?

JOSE

Put 'em up!

ANTONIO

Quit it, Jose. You're sure they didn't double back, Falco?

FALCO

Positive. I heard their footsteps ahead, then pouff! - nothing!

CLEMENTO

I want them found.

GUISEPPE

Perhaps they're hiding.

ANTONIO

They must be hiding!

CLEMENTO

Search every nook and cranny. If you don't find them, I'll feed you all to the dogs.

ALL

We're looking, boss, we're looking!

FALCO

Pity it's so dark. I can't see any prints.

CLEMENTO

Find them!

*They spread about the stage, looking. In the confusion, Marco grabs Jose.*

MARCO

I've got one.

CLEMENTO

Grab it! We can torture it until we find the other one!

*Others help Marco by leaping on Jose, pushing his head down. Muffled squeaks from Jose.*

CLEMENTO

Now, you pipsqueak, tell us where your friend is, or else! Give me a light, someone.

JOSE

Boss... boss... it's me!

ANTONIO

What are you doing, pretending to be a traveller, Jose?

JOSE

I wasn't pretending, stupid! Marco grabbed me.

CLEMENTO

Let him go, Marco. Don't try to deceive us again, Jose. We know who you are.

GUISEPPE

Perhaps ...

ANTONIO

Keep quiet, you! How can we listen for them stirring with you yapping in our ears?

FALCO

Yes, you're still on probation - don't push yourself forward.

GUISEPPE

I just thought ...

CLEMENTO

I do the thinking round here. You just keep looking.

FALCO

There's not a sign of them.

GUISEPPE *looking up*

But they're ...

ALL

Quiet, you!

JOSE

Or we'll slit your throat and leave you to the buzzards.

ANTONIO

We can get them on the way back from the dragon's lair - if they do come back.

CLEMENTO

I make the plans here. We'll get them on the way back. Very well, men, follow me.

*Exit brigands noisily, with much crashing of feet. Long silence. Finally, animal eyes reappear.*

HOWEL

Phew! I thought we'd had it there.

ROSALBA

So did I. [*They climb down.*] That was very interesting, don't you think?

HOWEL

I'd have used words like scary and terrifying, but interesting doesn't spring to mind. Don't tell me ... it's something to do with your theory.

ROSALBA

It is actually.

HOWEL

Okay, I'll buy it. What is your theory about dragons?

ROSALBA

It's just common sense really. You know how huge they are - with little tiny wings.

HOWEL

Yes - and?

ROSALBA

Well, how could something that big fly with those - unless it was somehow made of air, like a glorified soap bubble contained inside a lizard skin? Air that ignites as it breathes out?

HOWEL

You might have a point.

ROSALBA

And if it is just a lizard-skinned soap-bubble, then it can't possibly carry off cows and

sheep, can it?

HOWEL

I wouldn't have thought so.

ROSALBA

In that case - who is doing all the damage? And who's letting the dragon take the blame?

HOWEL

I'll give you three guesses.

ROSALBA

You can save two of them for later.

HOWEL & ROSALBA *pointing off*

Them!

ROSALBA

They're the ones that have been stealing and destroying. How are we going to stop them?

HOWEL

We?

ROSALBA

Well, you don't need the dragon skin now. It's not the dragon that's doing the damage.

HOWEL

That doesn't matter. I'm on a quest. I promised the princess Vanity I would get the dragon skin and I'm going to, or die trying. Which way is it?

ROSALBA

But you can't! You can't go killing it when it's not doing any harm! Not just for its skin! Van has plenty of carpets.

HOWEL

Princess Vanity to you, page!

ROSALBA

Princess Vanity, huh!

HOWEL

I forbid you to be insulting about the lady I love!

*Rosalba sticks her nose in the air and turns her back. Howel copies her. They are back to back. Silence. Slowly, Howel turns back.*

HOWEL *gently*

Were - Was - Princess Rosalba very unhappy back there?

ROSALBA *cheerfully*

She's probably dead by now. She was their next hope, you see.

HOWEL

Their next hope?

ROSALBA

For feeding to the dragon to keep it quiet.

HOWEL

Feeding her to the dragon! His own sister! He wouldn't!

ROSALBA

Oh, wouldn't they?

HOWEL

They! You'll never tell me that beautiful creature would do such a thing!

ROSALBA

You wouldn't believe it if I did tell you.

HOWEL

You must have misunderstood.

ROSALBA

I'm not stupid.

*Silence.*



ROSALBA *gently*

You do realise that even if you get the skin, she still may not accept you.

HOWEL *stubbornly*

I made a promise.

ROSALBA

Well I said I'd go with you, and I will. I want to see the dragon. But if you kill it, I'll never speak to you ever again.

HOWEL

That's fine by me.

*They walk off in silence - stop at the edge of the stage, start laughing, link arms and walk companionably off...*

*Blackout.*

EXTRACT from Production Notes

## **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

### INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS

Set in the fairy-tale world of princes, princesses, fairy godmothers and dragons, 'The Changeling Princess' is a different take on a number of old themes. There is a modern feel, primarily through the informality of the language, which gives a refreshing comically light atmosphere to the play.

The wicked sisters of tradition have become a revolting elder brother who is a bully and an equally bullying elder sister who is aptly called Vanity. Their characters give rise to the main theme of the play, which is that of bullying and the results of it, which is the main character, Rosalba's, lack of self-confidence.

Another theme is 'not to judge on appearances.' Thus, Vanity's beauty for a time blinds Howel to her evil. Malviance, who seems to be the archetypal bad fairy of so many fairy-tales - thunderclaps, not being invited to the christening, black cauldron, etc. - is the only one of the godmothers who is truly helpful to Rosalba. And dragons are not what they're cracked up to be; the brigands use the dragon's reputation to cover all their criminal activities.

### CHARACTERS

LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN, often the storyteller, sets the lightly satirical tone of the piece. Speaks directly to the audience and needs a strong warm voice to make a sympathetic link with them.

KING EDMUND stereo-typical harrassed father - complaining about expensive daughters and so on, with the added extra of being a king to make him even more harrassed - worrying about the cares of a kingdom. Warlike and argumentative on all levels, hence his interest in war and his need to go often to war with his neighbours.

He needs a strutting, tense way of moving, betraying his irritable nature. He is rather apoplectic, given to bursts of temper. A voice that is hectoring and over-loud, close to a shout much of the time, would help. A tendency to interrupt, clipping the end of the Queen's speeches, for instance, also helps give a sense of the character's

impatience and bad-temper.

QUEEN REGINA at first she seems kind, but once Rosalba has been born she shows her true colours and becomes as nasty as the rest of the family towards her youngest child. In the first scene, her soft voice should reveal her weakness. Her dreadful elder children run rings around her and she has no control. Any attempts to curb their nastiness are swamped. Disappointment at Rosalba's less than princessly charms prevent her from being any kind of mother to her. Moreover, her time is too taken up by the demands of the dreadful Victor and Vanity.

She needs to contrast with the King, by having a rather wet 'oh-dear-ish' kind of voice. Rather tentative helpless hand movements and way of walking would help convey her essential weakness.

PRINCE VICTOR [both young and older] A revolting bully, horribly spoilt. He is mean, boastful and, in his own way, as vain as his sister. His voice needs to clearly identify him as a baddie from the beginning. Both voice and actions can be broad and stereotypical.

PRINCESS VANITY [both young and older] As her brother, she is a baddie and must be throughout. She too is horribly spoilt. She is cruel and should take obvious delight in her cruel plans. A false sickly-sweet tone of voice is often called for. She is used to getting her own way in this manner - by a sweet voice and fluttering eye-lashes, sickly simpering smiles - consciously 'look-at-me-aren't-I-pretty' gestures and facial expressions. When foiled, her face and voice need to change in a flash to reveal the real nastiness underneath.

ROSALBA. She is the heroine. She is a no-nonsense type of girl, who has had to win through despite a hard upbringing. The first part, where she stammers [only when with her family and the court] is the hardest part to act. Make sure that the stammer doesn't become so extreme that it masks what she is saying - which is often important and sensible. Keep the stammer slow - words which are slowed down and a struggle to say in this manner will be listened to. Otherwise, especially when she is with her friend Fred and acting as a boy, she should have a more confident way of moving - a swagger when pretending to be a boy, though even as a girl, she should be as normal as possible - not prettily-feminine in the way she behaves. However, her voice should be pleasant when not stammering [one of the gifts she's been given.]

The COURTIERS and court ladies are all self-seeking and not very pleasant characters. Their loyalty to the Royal Family is all basically insincere: they are only after what they can get in the way of position and honours. They are differentiated briefly as follows:

RUFUS the one who's most on-the-ball. Self-seeking. Voice should be impatient when with the other courtiers.

JUSTIN Rufus' side-kick. Rather wetter than Rufus. Voice could be light, verging on the camp - but not over done like Cedric.

CONNOR a lisp, highly exaggerated. Obsessed with birds and nature, which should make him endearing, but only succeeds in making him comically vague and dithery.

CEDRIC perhaps a little camp in mannerisms and voice. A coward with a dislike of any violence.

AMABEL silly, vain, and snobby. She likes to make a lot of her relationship with the Royal Family. Should exaggerate a posh accent.

EUDOIA rather the boss of the ladies. Sets the tone for each section, such as trying to

preserve one-upmanship against the men or criticising the Queen bitchily, and so on.

DAGMAR After Connor, Man crazy. A bossy tone of voice.

CHLOE not very bright and constantly the butt of the others in consequence. Should show visually on stage, that she cottons onto jokes a few lines further on than anyone else - always out of rhythm - this will give an extra comic touch.

The FAIRY GODMOTHERS owe more to Walt Disney comedy than to traditional fairytales. They are modern, each with a particular comic slant.

FAY - the most traditional and the oldest of them. She is written as having a strong country accent as well. Strong no-nonsense moves.

MONDIA - dressed in up-to-the-minute fashions. Her voice should be sharp and pointedly fashionable and walk and movements should be self-conscious, fashion modelly, posey.

WILLOW - vague and New-Age-y. Wafty movements and a fluttery other-wordly voice.

TAMAR - a good solid farm-girl with a voice to match and a stumping way of walking. Tendency to plant her hands on hips, etc.

MALVIANCE - not a baddie, despite the name. Her movements should be strong and entrance dramatic, so that others react to her as if she is the baddie. Her voice should likewise be strong and loud - as if she is cursing - but the audience should quickly realise she is not a bad character.

MISS PRITCH, Rosalba's Governess. Like everyone else, she bullies Rosalba. She cuts off the end of her sentences, doesn't listen and uses a sharp severe way of speaking, Movements too, should be angular and sharply impatient.

MRS BUNDLE the cook - preferably large, flour-up-to-the-elbows type traditional cook character. Needs an accent - perhaps East-end too. She is fond of boxing ears and making blows count for more than words.

MISS MALKONET, the butler. She has given herself airs and covered up her original accent with an exaggerated posh one, pronouncing 'h's where there are none, and so on. A slow, precise way of speaking, a supercilious expression, looking down the nose and a dignified but comic way of walking - as if with poker up backside.

FRED, the scullion. Rosalba's only friend and therefore a goodie. Should be as normal and sympathetic as possible. He is positive and helpful to her, acting rather like a kind elder brother might.

LORD SID OF BATTERSEA - the greasy professional conman type. His voice is East London, his mannerisms are Uriah Heep/ car salesman. He speaks the language of estate agents - sounds good, but covers a multitude of traps.

PRINCE HOWEL OF MINIMSCULA The other goodie. Pleasantly humble [not smarmily so] and at the same time down-to-earth. Speaks in a matter-of-fact way. Should sound normal compared with other characters. Stands straight and moves in a forthright, definite manner.

All BRIGANDS are uniformly stupid, bullying, brawling individuals. There is not a lot to choose between them. However, CLEMENTO is the leader of the brigands and

GUISEPPE is the only one with a tiny bit of sense. Try to differentiate the others through different sizes [Jose small for instance] and different levels of voice - matching a large sized brigand with a high voice, for instance.

## SETTING

This play has a multitude of settings and many of the scenes are very short. Aim for rapid movement from scene to scene by keeping settings simple.

Here is a list of the different settings asked for:

Act 1, Scene 1 - the castle garden.

Act 1, Scene 2 - starts out the same, but changes part way in to the throne room.

Act 1, Scene 3 - the castle garden

Act 1, Scene 4 - the throne room.

Act 1, Scene 5 - the castle kitchen

Act 1, Scene 6 - the castle garden

Act 1, Scene 7 - the throne room

Act 1, Scene 8 - the palace courtyard

Act 2, Scene 1 - wasteland

Act 2, Scene 2 - Malviance's cottage

Act 2, Scene 3 - In the forest

Act 2, Scene 4 - On the way to the mountain - then inside the dragon's cave

Act 2, Scene 5 - The brigand's hideout in the forest

Act 2, Scene 6 - Another place in the forest

Act 2, Scene 7 - the throne room

Act 2, Scene 8 - somewhere outside the castle

Many of the changes can be achieved by lighting and movement. Look at the page by page break-down later on for full suggestions...