



Belle

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Belle and the Rat

A Play in Two
Acts
by
Brian Wyvill

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A two act play set in the rural Albertan town of Eromnac. 20 years have passed since Alfred Rotter built his first chemical factory, ruining the valley of the river Wob. A few made vast profits from the company, and most people in the town are now committed to working for Rotter since he owns most of the local industry. Belle, his beautiful daughter is the most eligible spinster in town and much sought after. Book, her sister, is 4 years younger. There is a murky past and dark secrets surrounding the rise of Rotter chemicals. Now that Alfred nears retirement the question on everybodys' lips is who will succeed him?

Cast of Characters

Mr. Alfred Rotter

Owner and president of Rotter Chemicals. A capitalist, about 70 years old with two beautiful daughters and an evil past. He is obsessed with power and with running his company. He is ex-army. He married and ruled his wife, Grace. She died in an accident 20 years ago when Belle was 6. His goals are to retire and enjoy his riches but he wants to make sure the company goes to somebody he can trust to continue his milieu. He is very stern, straight, almost cruel in the way he sticks to his goals. He stops at nothing to achieve his ends provided that he keeps the family name clear of all scandal. He was brought up in England where his parents were factory owners and taught him that appearances were the most important thing in his life. He could do what he wants with the help (servants in the house) provided the family name was kept unblemished. A maid servant was dismissed after the 17 year old Alfred made her pregnant. The child's name was Chantelle.

Ms. Belle Rotter

Alfreds' senior daughter. About 26 years old, beautiful intelligent and very confident. A femme fatale and VP of Rotter Chemicals. She at first seems like her father but in her journey through this play we realize that she in fact takes after her dead mother, Grace. Belle is obsessed with her ability to attract rich and powerful men and has almost forgotten the teachings of her mother. As the play develops various incidents trigger her true values and we see her undergo a transformation. Initially her goals are to run the company, beat Book, make East fall in love with her. Later she realizes that it is the company that is ruining the town. She falls in love with East and together they want to destroy RCC.

Ms. Book Rotter

22 years old, not quite the beauty that Belle is. Book is very much daddy's girl. Without the influences of her mother she has become as power hungry as her father. Her goal is to take over RCC. She is also a bit of a family historian. She has been brought up to think the family name is very important.

Mr. B. East

About 42. Lives alone and is shunned and feared by the people of the town. He has been scarred by the explosion 20 years earlier at the factory. He started out as a young enthusiastic chemist, but while doing an industrial placement at RCC during his PhD degree he developed the chemical, Hairback and was subsequently caught in the explosion. He has spent 20 years as a recluse, but has always searched for the antidote to his affliction. He was an idealistic young man, he has become bitter and yearns to return to society but cannot overcome his deformity. He realizes that RCC are polluting the town but is too caught up in self pity to take any action. He is spurred on by Belle who promises to provide the antidote. His conscience pricks him and although he is unable to cure his affliction he realizes that he must take action against RCC.

Mr. Frank Cludge

One of Belle's ardent suitors. He wants to become VP of Rotter Chemicals. He is 31 years old, and ruled by other people's motivations and demands. He does not have many opinions of his own, he is easily led and not a man of vision. A controlling president might well want him to take on this role. He rock climbs, the only thing that he does for himself. He isn't that good but thinks he is. He is always trying to invent new pieces of gear, and he is a nerd. He comes from a good family and was dominated by his mother. Frank has managed to acquire 6% of the stock.

Significant Characters who don't appear in the play

Mrs Grace Rotter (deceased)

Dead these 20 years, she is talked about but does not take part in the play. Grace was forced into marriage with Alfred by her parents who were in Alfred's debt. Grace was much put upon by Alfred and resented the move to Canada. She was so tied up with bearing two daughters that she didn't take much notice of what was happening in the town until Belle was 6 and Book was 2. She undertook good works, tried to bring Belle up to care about the common people.

Ms. Chantelle Rotter (Candle) (deceased)

Candle was really Chantelle, the daughter of the maid servant made pregnant by Alfred, who followed him to Canada to discover who her real daddy was. Alfred took her in provided she did not breathe a word about who she was. He gave her 5% of the stock of RCC to shut her up.

Mr. Dennis Dunghill (busy)

One of Belle's ardent suitors. He also wants to become VP of Rotter Chemicals. Dennis won't stand up to Belle but is actually considerably more scheming and clever than Frank. Dennis has managed to acquire 5% of the stock.

Prologue

Outside the house of Mr. B.East

Three children dressed in Halloween costumes are outside the house of Mr. B.East. They are meant to be any kids in the town a day or two before Halloween. Kid1 is played by Frank, kid2 is played Book and kid3 is played by Alfred.

All Trick or treat, trick or treat,
Trick or treat, smell my feet,
Give me something good to eat.
Not too big, not too small,
Just the size of Montreal.

Kid1 Maybe he isn't here.

Kid2 My sister says we shouldn't come to this house.

Kid3 Cowardy cowardy custard, your face is covered in mustard.

Kid1 Stop it you two. If you wanna get the most candy of any kid in town we have to get it from EVERY house including this one.

Kid2 My sister says he's beastly, a real monster, I'm frightened.

Kid3 Scaredy cat. You're just a wimpy kid. There aren't any monsters or beasts except in the zoo. I'm going to knock on the door.

Kid1 Should we really be doing this tonight?

Kid2 She might be right, my dad says we should only trick or treat on Halloween.

Kid3 We can't wait that long, I need candy now. *(Kid2 knocks)*

Kid1 *(Without waiting for an answer)* Nobody there, let's go.

Kid2 I'm with you.

Kid3 Come on you two let's give it one more try.

All Trick or treat, trick or treat,
Trick or treat, smell my feet,
Give me something good to eat.
Not too big, not too small,
Just the size of Montreal.

(Mr. B.East comes to the door, the audience cannot see his face)

Kid1 He is a beast. I'm frightened.

Kid2 No, he's got a mask on.

Kid3 Take it off mister.

(Mr. B.East slowly takes off the mask. The kids scream and run off stage. Blackout)

Act I, Scene 1

The Rotter Mansion

The drawing room of the Rotter Mansion. The stage is simply set with two chairs and a telephone table. The phone rings and Belle picks it up.

Belle Dennis? Oh sorry it's you Frank. No I don't mean I'm sorry it's you, Frank. No of course I haven't been seeing Dennis. I don't even think about Dennis anymore. Why should I want to? (...) Frank, don't be silly I have always been truly devoted to you, you know that. Just a minute, Frank, there is a beep on the line., (*She pushes the button swapping between two calls*). Hello Dennis! What a surprise. (...) Of course pleasant, my love (*she makes a face*). Oh nothing, just counting my shoes, the usual! Can you hang on a moment I have something in my eye. (*She pushes the button*) Hi Frank, (...) oh nobody, (...) of course it wasn't Dennis, (...) no it was somebody selling ummm funeral services, yes that was it, Acme Homes for the Dead. (...) No, nobody is dead; you know, "Die with Acme, our funeral services are so good you don't even have to be dead!" Friday, I'll have to check, hang on. (*She pushes the button*) Frank, sorry Dennis, no of course I wasn't speaking to Frank I told you it was somebody selling funeral services. (...) Well I had something in my eye too. Just a minute there's somebody at the door. (*She pushes the button*) Errr. hi, er who is this? Oh Frank, I thought it was that funeral parlour man back again!

(Enter Book carrying a book and a Newspaper, the headline reads: Local Daycare in Trouble. Insufficient Funding Causes Closure.)

What ever gave you that idea, Frank, of course I'll come with you on Friday. (...) No I haven't arranged anything else. Would I lie to you?

Book Belle, the Halloween Ball is Friday night.

Belle Book, I am talking to a MAN. Friday, (...) no I don't think so, (...) what do you have in mind? (...) Dinner at that new very expensive French restaurant?

Book After the Ball. Daddy wants us to come to the executive meeting of Rotter Chemicals.

Belle (*She pushes the button*) Just a minute Dennis, I mean Frank, I don't know why I keep calling you Dennis, (...) oh it is you Dennis. (...) Dinner at that new very expensive French restaurant?

Book Oh it's Dennis, I don't suppose the fact that he is as rich as Bill Gates makes any difference to you, Belle.

Belle Sorry there seems to be some interference on the line. Shhhhgrrrshhh. (*aside*) Book will you kindly go away, go and research your family history project, shhhhgrrrshhh, another planet would be quite suitable. (*to Dennis*) shhhhgrrrshhh. It's my cell phone ... shhhhgrrrshhh (*she makes interference noises*). (...) You didn't call me on my cell phone? Well I don't know how the phone company does that.

- Book** Have it your own way, Belle. But don't blame me when father has a fit. That meeting means a lot to him, it is something very special. I may happen to mention to father, casually, in passing that you have a date Friday and can't come. *(She exits)*
- Belle** *(She pushes the button)* Ok Frank, yes, yes I am sure the rock climbing was great. I am sure you were great too. I know dear. Hang on to that rope just a minute. *(She pushes the button)* Sorry, Dennis there must have been a cat dancing on the telephone pole. You'll bring your new Mercedes? The one with the drinks cabinet and the TV? Oh the one with the couch! How sweet. (...) Enjoy your golf, bye for now, see you Friday. *(She goes to put the phone down and then remembers Frank)* Oh Frank - I am so sorry, the cat jumped into the toilet and would have drowned poor dear if I hadn't rushed to its rescue.
- (Book rushes back in)*
- See you Friday. don't delay dear, do drag dear darling Dennis down doing decidedly dangerous dreadful doings with his Belle! (...) I mean Frank, Byeeee.
- Book** What was all that about, are you trying to get a job as a thesaurus?
- Belle** I'm improving my vocabulary dear, and today is a D-day dear. All my words, that is the important ones begin with a D. Yesterday was an S day. Silly, six, sax and sex all day! It got to be very tiring darling, I never thought I would tire of sex.
- Book** I came back to tell you father is on his way down. If I were you I would keep a low profile after yesterday's little adventure with that man who came to fix the roof.
- Belle** What do you mean? I didn't behave improperly.
- Book** Improperly! The poor man fell off his ladder.
- Belle** I was hot, I just unbuttoned my blouse a little.
- Book** A little? There was only one button.
- Belle** It was not my fault. Watching men who are physical makes me feel so good. Anyone who works with their hands and their bodies, I lust after them. I have to sit down!
- Book** Belle you are such a tease. What do you do with these men that are always hanging around? How can you possibly fall in love with all of them?
- Belle** Do with them? Why sister dear, I can have any man in this town. I can make them eat out of my hand.
- Book** What do you mean *have*?
- Belle** I can make them fall in love with me. A man in love has no mind of his own. All his attentions are concentrated on the object of his passion, and of course on his groin.
- Book** How vulgar!

- Belle** In that state he is helpless, he will do whatever his lover desires. That is what I mean when I say *have*.
- Book** You mean you are not in love with these men who work with their hands and their bodies?
- Belle** Book my dear sweet sister, you are confusing lust and love. Making a man fall in love with me is no problem but why should I fall in love and lose my free will to some love struck oaf? I value my freedom too much. I would rather die than lose my independence.
- Book** I don't believe you are that insensitive, Belle. There must be some man out there who has what it takes?
- Belle** For me to fall in love? Not in the town of Eromnac, sister dear.
- Book** You think the local men haven't the wit?
- Belle** It would be a very unusual man indeed to possess the charm, the intelligence, the sensitivity, the basic humanity...
- Book** Is that all? Intelligent, sensitive and human? It sounds like a song by Cole Porter.
- Belle** The real reason why this man could not exist, is that he would have to outwit me. I don't think there is such a man, do you sister, dear?
- Book** A man that could outwit you? Belle, I'm not talking about your attempt to attract youngsters like Frank, did you actually pick him up from the daycare when you had your evil way with him?
- Belle** Old enough to drink, old enough to think!
- Belle** That's a matter of opinion. Tell me Belle would you be prepared to back up your statement?
- Belle** That I would rather face death than slavery? Do you doubt me?
- Book** No. What about making any man fall in love with you. Can you really do that?
- Belle** It's simple as pie. I don't know why you haven't got it by now. It's trying to *stop* them falling in love with me that is the problem.
- Book** And you would be prepared to make a small wager that you could make any man in the town that I should name, fall in love with you?
- Belle** But of course, it isn't a problem, you would be throwing your money away. I told you, I can make any man eat out of my hand.
- Book** I bet you I can find a man in this town who will not fall in love with you.
- Belle** You aren't really getting this are you Book dearheart? It is not a problem, the sort of thing I could do while running daddy's company with my other hand!
- Book** So you would be prepared to stake something real?
- Belle** Real?

Book *(Book thinks about this and puts down her book)* Like your 15% share holding in Rotter Chemicals?

Belle Book my angel I am not that stupid but in view of the fact there is a very important board meeting coming up, and that daddy is likely to announce his retirement, I might be prepared to stake the voting rights on my 15% against the voting rights of your 15%. The winner only has to enlist the help of a minor shareholder like, Frank and they gain control of the company.

Book How perspicacious of you darling. That's a 'P' word if you would like to look it up after I am gone. All right, voting rights in my 15% against voting rights in your 15%, that you can't get the man of my choice to demonstrate his love for you, indisputably, in public, before midnight on the 31st of October.

Belle The Halloween ball, how dramatic of you to pick that night! But all is fair where love and money are concerned. It's a deal then,. Now put me out of my misery and tell me who is the poor wretch that is soon to fall in love with me?

Book Mr. B. East, I think his first name might be Brian. I have never stopped to find out.

Belle East? The recluse? The crazy old guy that people say has some hideously deformed face?

Book The same East the Beast they call him. They say he is a misogynist, that's an 'M' word, it means he hates women.

Belle Well, well. It will be too easy. You might as well hand over your voting rights now so that Frank and I can quietly take over the company!

Book I think we'll wait until the 31st my dear, I don't think your other endeavours have been very successful. Have you seen the The Eromnac Dealer? *(Reading)* Local daycare in trouble. Insufficient funding causes closure.

(She puts down the book and holds up the headline.)

Belle *(snatching the paper)* Damn it!

Book Weren't you doing a little fund raising for that excellent organisation ? Well I don't think you tried hard enough?

Belle *(Genuinely upset.)* Oh give up, Book, you know nothing about this.

Book Does making men fall under your spell come under a different category? I was just wondering about your skills in general.

Belle Skills are the work of man, I am a work of God!

Book I did read about you in the bible dear, the chapter on Jezebel I think it was.

(Enter Alfred Rotter)

Alfred I heard that, Book. What do you mean by insulting your sister like that, go to your room.

Book I will do no such thing. She is the one that should go to her room, but daddy dear I would check her closets first. The plumber has been missing for three days.

(Exit Book)

Belle Don't forget your book, Book. *(Book has already gone)..*

Alfred Isn't that Book's history project? I'll have to read it sometime.

Belle It's probably very boring.

Alfred You be careful, my girl. I don't like you attitude and I don't like the way you put yourself about the town. The family name means a lot to me, and I expect you to keep up appearances.

Belle Daddy, calm down, I wouldn't do anything to let you, or the family down. Please don't wave your gun in my face, it is very unnerving.

Alfred Sorry, I was just cleaning it. I like to be prepared. *(He places the gun on the table)*

Belle You keep it loaded? *(smiling)* Isn't that terribly dangerous, daddy?

Alfred I don't mess with live ammo. I just keep it loaded with blanks. That would scare an intruder off, I can tell you, that gun would make a very loud bang!

Belle Oh daddy, you do look after us so well.

Alfred Yes well, do my best, you know. I want to talk to you about Fridays' meeting. It is very important. The future of Rotter chemicals is at stake.

Belle Oh? How can I help?

Alfred I am going to announce my retirement at the meeting.

Belle You have been dropping strong hints about that for the last month, daddy.

Alfred The question is Belle, who do I trust to carry Rotter Chemicals through to the next century?

Belle Daddy, how can you doubt me? Your own Belle. I know just as much about running this company as you do. *(aside)* I also know that we are currently negotiating the biggest contract in our history, with the ministry of defense. Daddy, I will do my best as I always have done.

Alfred Do your best to achieve your own goals maybe. Do your best to see that Belle Rotter is at the top of the heap!

Belle What's good for Rotter Chemicals is good for Belle Rotter!

Alfred Possibly. I am worried Belle. Some people in this town think that Rotter Chemicals has turned Eromnac from a quiet mountain community into an industrial wasteland.

Belle Not true daddy. Why only last week we stopped dumping that horrible poisonous waste in to the river Wob.

Alfred We reduced our emissions by 20%, Belle. There is still enough of the stuff going into the river every 5 minutes to kill an elephant.

Belle Well maybe I can work on the problem. Form a committee to look into it? Besides, there aren't any elephants in the Wob valley.

Alfred Listen, it's not that important, Belle. The downstream towns get the waste, not us. The company is in trouble for financial reasons. We need that Government Defense contract or we go under. One breath of scandal and we are done for!

Belle I see. So will you pick me as president of the company?

Alfred Look at the company rules, Belle. It's a question of who gets voted in. Votes are given in accordance with the amount of stock held in the company.

Belle You hold 35% of the vote, effectively you decide who becomes next president, me or Book?

Alfred You have the charm of your mother sometimes. You take after her in many ways, like that darn charity work of yours. Do you know she used to cart you around the town while she did her *good works*. Complete waste of time of course. Book showed me the newspaper this morning. Perhaps Book has more time for the family business than you do. It's going to be a difficult job to decide between you.

Belle Daddy, can I ask you a question?

Alfred I can't promise I can answer it. What do you want to know?

Belle There's a crazy guy, lives in the town, his name is East, I think. Do you know who I am talking about?

Alfred No, and I don't want to.

Belle You've never heard of him?

Alfred No ... yes, all right, I know him.

Belle You know him?

Alfred He used to work for me.

Belle I see.

Alfred Why do you want to know?

Belle No reason. Is it a secret?

Alfred Nothing you should worry about. (*She gives him a Belle look.*) All right, I'll tell you. It involves your mother.

Belle East knew mother?

Alfred East came to work for me over 20 years ago. The most brilliant young pharmaceutical chemist I ever came across. He was still doing his PhD at the time. He invented Hairback, as you know our fortune is based on that.

Belle Yes it is amazing the vanity of men. They are prepared to pay anything to keep their hair, they think their youth and virility is on their heads. I look at their hands, it's true what they say, big hands, big ...

Alfred Steady on, Belle. The company is built on that same vanity. You know why the generals want the stuff?

Belle It's not fashionable to go bald into battle, I suppose?

Alfred Because, my dear girl, the army is aging young people don't want to join. You can't have platoons of balding, middle aged men going over the top. The enemy would laugh in their faces. So they give them HairBack and make them up to look young! But remember this is hush, hush. If any of this leaks out, or if there is any scandal associated with the factory, we lose the contract.

Belle I don't suppose this pending contract had anything to do with Colonel Cludge, Frank's uncle?

Alfred Are you beginning to understand the way business works, my girl? It's no coincidence that Frank now owns 6% of the company.

Belle You are avoiding my question about East?

Alfred I suppose you had to find out someday. It was an experimental batch at the new plant. East blames me, but actually it was he who wanted to try the effect of adding benzohydramamine. Hairback extreme, he called it. It was a new idea that East had to make Hairback even more potent than it already was. It did that all right. There was an explosion and the stuff went everywhere. Your mother and your babysitter, Chantelle were also in the building.

Belle Is that who I used to call Candle?

Alfred Yes, you were 6, you called her Candle.

Belle She was killed in the explosion?

Alfred Along with Grace, your mother.

Belle Was East hurt in the explosion?

Alfred East got covered with the stuff. It wasn't really ready yet. It goes through several intermediate metamorphic forms on the way to becoming Hairback. The added ingredient made it to go unstable. It had a strange and awful affect on him.

Belle What happened to him.

Alfred Let's just say it changed his appearance. He blamed me for everything.

Belle He still blames you? Is that why *you* stopped using Hairback on your own head?

Alfred Yes of course. You see I stopped the experiments. I didn't want anymore accidents with this stuff. The affect seemed to be permanent on East. He wanted to continue his work. He thought he could come up with an antidote. But I knew it was far too dangerous. Besides, the customers were happy with hairback Regular, why give them Hairback Extreme?

(Enter Frank)

Frank Belle, how are you? And you too, Sir.

Alfred Frank, come in. Glad you could make it. How's your uncle?

Frank Well, Sir, very well.

Belle Trust you to arrive just when daddy was telling me all his secrets.

Frank Is there something I should know, sir?

Alfred We were just talking about the shareholders meeting. I have to pick my successor, I have decided it will either be Belle, or her sister. I also have to decide who will become vice president. Perhaps it will be one of my two senior managers?

Frank I won't let you down, Sir.

Alfred I was thinking that Dennis DeGrotti would be a good man for the job.

Frank Oh yes, Dennis.

Belle *(with a smile)* Dennis!

Alfred He is older and more experienced than you, young feller, but it will be up to the shareholders, as will the election of the president. Of course, my 35% of voting shares have considerable influence. Think about it, let me know who you will support.

(Exit Alfred)

Belle Well Frank, you don't look too happy?

Frank Happy? My mother was right.

Belle Your mother? Is she after the VP job too?

Frank Belle I have worked for years for this job. Dennis is just there for his own personal power games. He doesn't care what happens to this company or the town.

Belle I thought you only cared about your climbing, Frank.

Frank Why don't you like climbing, Belle?

Belle Well you just use it as an expression of your ego.

Frank That's not fair. I ... I ... I'm quite good at it actually

Belle You see what I mean?

Frank I am designing some new equipment, a new sort of climbing nut, you jam them into cracks. They are a safety device. I have several, do you want to see my nuts?

Belle Not just now, thank you.

Frank Look, they are modelled after rhombic crystals, they cold weld to the rock.

Belle To get the VP job, you have to play golf. It's very like climbing.

Frank What do you mean? Golf is nothing like climbing.

Belle Well, golfers knock their balls about the course, and climbers jam their nuts into cracks, then you all come home with sore elbows. (*beat*) Do you care about anything else?

Frank Belle, I care for you, and of course I care about the company. Aren't I like family, Belle?

Belle Of course my Frankie, wankie. Would you like a marshmallow, they are your favourites.

Frank Oh thank you, my sweet. Marshmallow's are so wonderful, like you.

(Frank takes her offered hand and kisses it, kneels eating the marshmallow as he does so. Book enters and sees him eating out of her hand. Belle and Book exchange a look. She is a little miffed that Belle is so successful.)

Book Did Father leave already? Oh hello Frank, MacDonalds was closed was it?.

Frank (*embarrassed, standing up*) Hello Book.

Belle Well I see you two would like to be left alone.

Frank Not at all. Belle, please don't go, I haven't had a chance to talk to you.

Belle We'll talk later Frank, I have a small errand to run, (*she looks knowingly at Book*) byeeee.

(Exit Belle)

Book Frank, don't look so miffed, I am sure Belle will let you worship at her alter later on.

Frank She knows how to torture a man.

Book I didn't think a man could be tortured with a marshmallow. Come on don't be so sad, by Friday you could be the next vice president of Rotter Chemicals.

Frank Not if the old man has his way.

Book But maybe if you listen to your good friend Book Rotter.

Frank What do you mean?

Book Frank I know you have always paid all your attention to Belle. But I am a woman too, Frank. I have feelings.

Frank My dear Book, I had no idea that you were remotely interested in me. I don't know what it is about Belle but from the moment I saw her, I felt ...

Book Yes I know, men are always attracted to women who detest them.

Frank Belle detests me? I don't know what to say.

Book Say nothing, Frank. Just look into my eyes and tell me you care nothing for me.

Frank Book, you are a dear friend, but this is all a bit sudden.

Book How would you like to be the next VP of Rotter Chemicals?

Frank What do you mean?

Book What I mean, Frank, is that I hold 15% of the shares, you hold around 6%, am I right?

Frank Yes, that's right.

Book If I found a way of getting hold of the voting rights in Belle's 15% we would, between us hold more than any single opponent.

Frank What do you mean opponent?

Book All is fair in love and business Frank.

Frank Why would Belle give you the voting rights in her shares? Book, I love her, she isn't my opponent.

Book I have to explain so many things to you Frank, dear. There is no time for that. Look at this. (*She shows him a photo.*) Do you know who that is?

Frank Looks like Disco era, is it your Aunt?

Book Very Good, Frank, sharper than an F in G-major!

Frank I beg your pardon?

Book Never mind, what do you notice about this woman?

Frank I told you, Disco clothes and she looks a bit like Belle.

Book She has the family mole on the neck, small but just discernable in the photo, a picture that, until a few moments ago, resided in my father's hitherto locked desk.

Frank You broke into your father's desk?

Book Not very nice, I admit but all is fair in love and business. She is the key to our success.

Frank I have no idea what you are talking about.

Book Frank, you leave everything to me, I'll see that things happen just the way we want them to.

Frank How do we want things to happen?

Book First off you need to re-think how you feel about Belle. If I were you, I would go and see what she and a certain Mr. B. East are doing together.

Frank East? Wasn't he the head chemist at Rotter Chemicals when we first started?

Book Do I have to explain every detail Frank? Time is precious you must get to East's house ahead of Belle and use your meagre little brain to stop her.

Frank What do you mean, meagre brain?

Book I wish you would stop asking me what I mean. I am sorry Frank, I didn't mean to offend you. Just go round to East's house and hide behind the curtains or something. Regard it like a difficult climb. Find out what you can and come back and report to me. If you do this there is a good chance I can give you what you want.

Frank I see.

Book Of course you do, off you go Frank, byeee.

(Exit Frank and Book propelling him out. To the photo:)

Now, Chantelle, you are going to help me put a little pressure on Daddy.

Act I, Scene 2

The House of Mr. B. East

The stage is more or less the same. A sign on a chair is reversed to read The House of Mr. B. East/.

Belle Hello? Is there anybody there?

East Who is it? What do you want? Go away!

Belle Oh thank goodness somebody is there. Help me please sir, I was being attacked by vandals, I ran to your house to escape.

East Vandals? In this town?

Belle Oh you don't know what we poor women suffer. There are strange people out there. Please help me or at least let me use your phone.

East Phone! I have no use for such things. Go away.

Belle Don't throw me out on the street, I implore you.

East Who are you? I know your face from somewhere?

Belle Why do you wear that mask?

East You belong to that infernal chemical company.

Belle I don't belong to anybody.

East For 20 years I have tried to get away from you people and now you come barging into my house, demanding help.

Belle What do you mean, you people?

East You expect me to believe that you don't know who I am? Perhaps you were too young. Now get out!

Belle Please, I have a confession to make, please don't throw me out yet.

East A confession? What do you mean?

Belle I do know who you are.

East Yes and now I remember who you are. So your father sent you to torture me further. Well I have had enough, now go!

Belle Please, Mr. East, hear me out.

East All right. You have 2 minutes. This better be good.

Belle Yes it better had. I came to you, Mr. East, because I knew you are the one person in this town who, like me, wants to see Rotter Chemicals destroyed.

East You want to destroy Rotter Chemicals? You will have to do better than that to convince me, young lady, one more minute.

Belle It's true. Do you think I can't see what's happening here? The fish are all dead, the river is so polluted we have to pay compensation to the downstream towns and there are no elephants left in the valley.

East Elephants?

Belle I have a plan that requires your help.

East You have the nerve to come to me for help? Let me show you something. Wait here.

(He exits. from the other side of the stage, unseen by Belle, Frank enters and swiftly hides behind a curtain). East re-enters)

East You see this bottle? One drop of this drug, one little smear and you too can follow my path. Twenty years of agony. Twenty years shut in this house, not daring to show my face except in this mask. All for what? So that your precious father can make his millions while I suffer and burn. Do you think I have not thought about a dozen ways I could destroy Rotter Chemicals? But Alfred Rotter has the antidote. At first I tried to persuade him, nay beg him, to give me the answer. But no, would he do that? Too dangerous, he said. I thought I could discover it for myself. I am at least as good a chemist as your father. For years I have worked in this house, searching for the formula. Trying dreadful experiments that have left me lying in agony for days. Destroy Rotter Chemicals, huh!

Belle I have thought of this, I know how to get my father to give you what you want.

East *(He seizes her)* Tell me now. I must know

Belle Let go of me. Mr. East, please.

East Just tell me what you have in mind

Belle You won't try and throw me out?

East No. Go on.

Belle My father is a very stubborn man.

East Stubborn! He'd as soon swim in our polluted river as change his mind.

Belle He does however, have one weakness.

East oh?

Belle The family name.

East What? Nonsense.

Belle I am serious. He would do anything to protect the family name.

East Anything?

Belle Suppose you came to our house. You confront Alfred and demand the antidote.

East It would get me nowhere. I would be thrown out on my ear.

Belle Not if I was there. Now suppose there was an ugly scene developing between you and father.

East An ugly scene! You underestimate the animosity we have for each other. It wouldn't be merely ugly, it would be a scene of such violence that you would not want to be within a hundred miles.

Belle That is not the way you will get what you want.

East All right. So there is your father, sipping tea on the couch. "How ugly you look today," says he. "Oh thank you", says I.

Belle I see you arguing, so I pull out a gun and shoot you.

East Yes of course, killing me would rid your family of quite a problem.

Belle Not quite dead, just mortally injured.

East Oh great! Thanks a lot, disfigured and now maimed and dying.

Belle The gun would be loaded with blanks.

East Well how do I get maimed then?

Belle That is the whole point. You won't be maimed, you just pretend to be. You keep a little pouch of tomato ketchup in your pocket and squeeze it over the supposed wound and fall down. I rush over, already regretting what I have done and threatening to call the police. Father, desperate to avoid a scandal, says the police won't be necessary, and offers the services of his own doctor.

East Won't the doctor detect the difference between ketchup and blood? All that training must be good for something.

Belle We don't really go to the doctor. I keep talking about giving myself up to the police. You, in your dying breath request the antidote so that you can die peacefully. Daddy could hardly deny your last request, gives you the antidote. You get up, and we all sit down and have tea.

East It sounds almost plausible.

Belle of course it is. We can't miss.

East I suppose I am desperate enough to try anything. What shall I say to him?

Belle Oh be dramatic. You pull out a gun and say, "Alfred Rotter, your time has come. Give me the antidote to this cursed affliction or prepare to meet thy doom".

East That is a bit dramatic, I'm no actor, are you sure he will believe me?

Belle He doesn't have to. He just has to believe that I believe you.

East Wait a minute, I'm confused. Doesn't he have to believe me?

Belle You have to believe that he believes that I believe you.

East Are you sure?

Belle Believe me, it's true.

East Then what?

Belle I pull out the gun and shoot you.

East Great!

Belle Mr. East. Or may I call you, Brian?

East Call me what you like. What I want to know is; what do you get out of this? Why are you so keen to topple your fathers' regime?

Belle I told you, I can't stand the way the town is being ruined.

East But why help me?

Belle Because I too value the family name. I don't want to live the rest of my life under the shadow of my tyrannical father. I don't want to have you, Mr. East, on my conscience. Besides, perhaps we could be friends?

(during a moment when East is looking away Belle takes the bottle from the table and puts it in her purse).

East Friends? You and I?

Belle Is that so much to ask?

East You want to be friends with this?

(He dramatically removes the mask)

Belle *(nonplused)* Is that all? For 20 years you cover up a slight skin problem?

(She goes to him, takes his head between her hands and kisses him gently on the lips, at first he is simply amazed, he smiles then his smile hardens into anger.)

East You aren't interested in me. Get out of my house!

Belle Oh but I am, Brian. If you want your antidote, be at Rotter Mansions at 10 tomorrow morning.

East Get out!

(She exits. East sobs and exits into the house the other side of the stage).

Frank What a monster! So my darling Belle, you would betray your father, Rotter Chemicals and me! Book will be most interested in this development.

(Exit Frank, smiling grimly)

Act I, Scene 3

The Rotter Mansion

Again the stage is more or less the same., the sign is changed. Alfred's gun lies where he left it on the table. East enters, looks at the gun picks it up feels it in his hand plays with it, checks the cartridges are blanks. He hears Belle coming and places the gun back on the table and hides behind the curtain. Belle enters, she picks up the gun feels it in her hand, plays with it in exactly the same way East did. She hears noises off, she puts the gun in her purse. She places her purse carefully on a chair. talking on her cell phone.

Belle Oh hello Dennis. (...) No I don't want to play golf, Dennis. Did you make a decision on our little business deal? (...) Dennis that is nothing to do with business. (...) Dennis, do you care anything about this town? (...) Oh I like golf, it's just golfers I don't like. You dig up all that land, fertilize the hell out of it, throw all the water the town will let you have on it, and knock a stupid ball around for the three months of the year when the course is not covered in snow. You don't even get any exercise; you **drive** over your precious grass. Do you really think somebody who plays that game actually cares? (...) Dennis? Dennis? He hung up on me! What about the deal Dennis? (*Closing the phone, and speaking to herself.*) Shi... I shouldn't have done that. I must remember that golfers are people too, in future I will be a little more careful what I say to Dennis. I hope I haven't blown the deal.

Enter Frank.

Belle Hello Frank.

Frank Hello.

Belle How are you, feeling?

Frank Well.

Belle Are you excited about the upcoming board meeting?

Frank Yeah.

Belle Frank? Are you miffed about something?

Frank Uh huh.

Belle Can you make an intelligent noise other than a grunt or monosyllabic articulation?

Frank Uh huh.

Belle Frank!

Frank (*Sigh*)

Belle I have to guess what it is?

Frank (Grunt)

Belle Was it something I said?

Frank Nope

Belle Was it something I did?

Frank Uh huh.

Belle Was it somebody I went to see?

Frank Belle, what were you doing with that monster?

Belle Oh Frank, what are you talking about?

Frank Don't lie to me, I saw you with East.

Belle Appearances can be deceptive, now you know the board meeting is coming up and some of us have to do our duty.

Frank Duty?

Belle Frank, I have work to do, why don't you go and get your climbing gear and show it to me later?

Frank Ok, but Belle ... (*she exits*) She's gone!

(*Enter Book*)

Book Frank, are you all ready for the Board meeting tonight after the Ball?

Frank Hello.

Book What's up Frank? You look lost. How are you feeling?

Frank Well.

Book I understand, it's Belle, isn't it?

Frank Yeah.

Book Can you say anything sensible?

Frank Uh huh.

Book Frank!

Frank Sorry.

Book Why don't you snap out of it and we'll plan our strategy. Now who sits where?

Frank I don't understand these weird family traditions. Why have a board meeting after midnight?

Book Daddy is a little eccentric.

Frank The seating is also bizarre.

Book It's another one of those traditions.

Frank I object to sitting scrunched up in a baby chair just because I only hold 6% of the stock!

Book Dear Frank, after 20 years you still don't understand how valuable these traditions are. Look I shall sit here, there I'll put my purse on the chair. Now you can sit next to me.

Frank Eccentric! It's a good thing there isn't a full moon tonight.

Book You do seem to be in a bad mood, Frank. Has Belle been bad to you? What happened at Mr. B. Easts' house?

Frank You were right. She was trying to seduce him. And now she is going to shoot him!

Book Slow down Frank, be a little more precise, I don't know what you are talking about.

Frank Belle is going to shoot East with blanks then father will feel obliged to give him his dying wish, the antidote to his dreadful purple hairy zebra thing.

Book Now if I understand you right, our Belle will pretend to shoot East to arouse father's sympathy. No wait a minute, more than that, father will have to save the family name! Now I see her little game.

Frank Do you think she is just trying to win Easts' support, I think he has shares too,

Book Well Frank, the matter requires a little thought.

Frank She kissed him, that monster! It was as if she actually likes him. No, more than just liked him, it was a tender kiss!

Book Oh Frank, you do believe in what you see.

Frank What do you mean?

Book That little phrase again. Oh Frank you don't understand much about the world do you, you are always asking what people mean.

Frank I understand that Belle is actually fond of that East person.

Book Do you have a gun?

Frank Of course, you can't be too careful these days. As a matter of fact your father gave me one, after my first year with the company. He assured me of its quality, same as his own he said.

Book Then you have bullets for it? Do you keep it loaded?

Frank Of course.

Book Be a dear, run home and bring back your gun.

Frank Bring back my gun? You don't think that East will bring a gun do you?

Book As you say Frank. You can't be too careful.

Frank It's outside, in my car. I'll go right away, my Belle might be in danger.

Book Your Belle? Forget Belle. Don't you think you should side with me on this? She has betrayed you.

Frank I will have to think about it. Belle and I are really very close.

Book Well maybe I can persuade you otherwise. Now run a long and get your gun. Belle might be in danger.

Frank Right away. Thanks Book, I would be lost without you.

Book Yes, you would. See you later.

(Frank Exits and reappears almost immediately with his gun)

Book That was quick!

Frank I was parked in the kitchen.

Book Doesn't the cook object?

Frank I don't know, I think I ran over the cook on the way in.

Book *(Makes an exasperated sound)*. What?

Frank It was a joke, I read it in a book, Book. How to win the heart of your lady. There was a whole chapter on humour.

Book Give me the gun. Are you sure it's loaded?

Frank Certain. *(He hands over the gun)*

Book Now where can I hide this?

Frank Well if you want it for protection just put it in your purse.

(He picks up Belle's purse and hands it to her)

Book No that's Belles purse, here's mine. *(They are identical)* They were a gift from daddy. What is this?

(She finds Belles' gun)

Frank Looks like Belle needs protection too.

(Book places Frank's gun in her own purse)

Book Never mind let's go and take a look at the poor old cook shall we?

Frank I told you, it was a joke.

Book Let's go.

Frank What about Belle?

Book What *about* Belle?

Frank She asked me to get my climbing gear.

Book Go and get it, she musn't know anything is wrong.

Frank Is there anything wrong?

Book Let's go.

(She carefully places her own purse where Belle's had her purse. She puts her purse on a different chair They exit. East emerges from behind the curtain. Chuckles and carefully swaps the two purses. Enter Belle on her cell phone holding Book's book and the newspaper, reading the headline. East hides as she comes in..)

Belle Dennis, I am so sorry I was so horrid to you about golf. I was only teasing. (...) Yes of course you knew that. You know why I called? (...) You'll take them all? (...) That is so awfully good of you. (...) Well thank you. (...) I try. (...) See you Friday, you are a darling.

(East confronts her.)

East You are a bit obvious, Belle. Stringing us all along. How terribly shallow.

Belle Appearances can be deceptive, Brian. You came to the Rotter mansion, does that mean you want to go through with my plan?

East I need the antidote, Belle, I would do anything to get it.

Belle Father says you were involved in an explosion at the factory 20 year ago?

East How do you think I got to be like this?

Belle He also says that our mother and our servant, Candle were killed in the same explosion?

East I know you were only six, Belle, but surely your father told you something about your mother's death?

Belle Not much, perhaps he confides more in Book.

East I worked at the factory, actually I invented Hairback.

Belle So father said.

East What was all that about "doing your duty" that you mentioned to Frank?

Belle Frank was upset that I went to visit you, I was just trying to make him feel better.

Frank *(Frank is heard off)* Belle, are you there?

Belle Oh no it's Frank, he probably wants to show me his nuts.

East I beg your pardon?

Belle No, no, he has a problem with them.

East He's so young. Is it testicular cancer?

Belle Quick, hide, he's coming.

(East hides behind the curtain. Enter Frank.)

Frank Belle, you are here.

Belle What can I do for you, Frank?

Frank Belle, I have to show you my nuts.

(He shows the climbing gear)

Belle You poor boy, your obsessed with this problem.

Frank I started years ago, with small ones. Then they got bigger and bigger. They keep growing into different new shapes. If things continue like this I might just leave Rotter Chemicals, my nuts are taking over my life!

Belle Frank, listen, you must face this problem like a man. Don't give in to it. Your work is important to Rotter, stay with it, man.

Frank You are right, Belle, I believe in the company. Will you dance with me at the ball?

Belle Of course, now run along and put your nuts away.

Frank I feel so much better. Thank you, Belle.

(Frank Exits. East emerges from behind the curtain.)

East You have a compassionate soul, Belle. Is there any hope for him?

Belle There is hope for us all, Brian.

East Poor Frank, I guess he hasn't got long.

Belle You really care, don't you?

East I have suffered enough myself, I don't want to see others in pain. Your mother understood this, Belle. She of all people tried to repair some of the damage done by Rotter chemicals. You were always with her, but I guess you were too young to remember.

(There is a tender moment between them)

Belle Are you ready to carry out our plan, Brian?

East I don't like this gun business, Belle.

Belle (Noises off) Quick, hide.

East hides as Enter Father followed by Frank, Book and Belle.

Alfred Book, where the hell is my gun?

Frank You are welcome to borrowow (*Book kicks him*)

Alfred Is there something wrong, young feller?

Book Your gun, father? Why do you want your gun?

Alfred I was cleaning it earlier, I must have put it down somewhere. Frank, please check the kitchen for me, will you?

Frank Yes, Sir.

(Exit Frank)

Alfred Belle and Book I want to talk to you both about Fridays meeting.

Belle What is it?

Alfred Now I want to discuss the seating arrangements at the board table. We have a long tradition of being scrupulously fair, and not favouring family members.

Belle Well I shall sit where I always sit.

Book This is a formal meeting, Belle, you can't just squat on the floor.

Belle I'll sit here.

Alfred Will you two stop this bickering? This is a serious problem.

Belle Daddy, maybe it's time to change the company tradition?

Alfred Change a company tradition? Do you know what you are saying?

Belle Well some people think that the ancient family business tradition of the higher you sit the higher your worth to the company is very out of date.

Alfred My great grandfather started that particular family tradition at his mill in Yorkshire over a hundred years ago.

Book (*Taking Belles' purse*) Well I shall sit here. (*Placing the purse on the seat*).

Belle Oh no sister dear, that's my place, here is yours. (*She places Books' purse on a different chair, puts her own purse in her hand and sits down. At that moment East appears from behind the curtain.*)

Book I wonder who that could be? (*They all turn to East. Book swaps the two purses and sits down.*)

Alfred Good gracious, it's East.

East *(gun in hand)* Alfred Rotter, your time has come. Give me the antidote to this cursed affliction or prepare to meet thy doom! *(He looks at Belle for confirmation that he said the right thing. She smiles, shakes her head and rolls her eyes.)*

(Enter Frank)

Frank Hello everybody. Is there anything wrong?

Belle Daddy, he has a gun. *(She takes the gun from the purse in front of her, points it at East)*

Alfred Let's all calm down and talk this over.

Belle Put that gun down or I'll shoot.

East What do you mean, put it down?

Belle You asked for it.

(She fires the gun. East staggers forward, ketchup squirts from beneath his shirt, he falls to the floor.)

Alfred Belle, what have you done? *(He goes over to him)* East, talk to me.

❧ *End of ACT I* ❧

Act II, Scene 1

The Rotter Mansion

(A few moments later)

Alfred Are you still alive, East?

East *(Gasping)* Don't let me die like this give me the antidote.

Book Oh dear, is he going to die?

Belle Oh Mr. East. I better call the police, give myself up.

Alfred Steady on, it's not that serious. There could be a scandal.

Belle Not that serious! Daddy I've killed somebody.

Alfred You were trying to save me, Belle. Let's just call the family doctor.

Belle I was just doing my best, daddy.

Alfred Perhaps you are the right choice for the company president, Belle.

East What about the formulae?

Belle Quiet, later.

Book I had my gun too, daddy. I wouldn't have let anything happen to you.

Belle I was the one that saved his life!

Book Daddy knows that I am devoted to him, don't you daddy?

Alfred Now, now you two.

East Look, a) I am about to die, b) I want the formulae for the antidote to this accursed hairyneck and c) can you please stop arguing I have a headache.

Belle Oh do shut up, we are having an important conversation. Look daddy, you should know that we are both totally devoted to you, but when it comes to the crunch, when it really matters, I am the one who will take control.

East Excuse me.

Book Control! She can't even control her temper!

East Hello.

Belle Book dear, why don't you run upstairs and play with your thumbscrews.

East Remember me I'm the one that's dying!

Book and Belle Oh do shut up!

Alfred He's right, a body in the middle of the living room floor is so inconvenient.

East Doh!

Book What about burying him in the rose garden? The roses are so lovely in the Springtime I'm sure East would like it.

Alfred I think we should wait until he is thoroughly dead.

Frank We could try Acme funeral services; apparently you don't have to be dead.

Alfred Just take East upstairs where he isn't so noticeable.

Belle Come along East, lean on me. Daddy help me with him, I'll put him in my room.

Book He won't be the first man to face death in that room!

East Don't let me die without the formulae?

Alfred All right, since you are dying anyway I'll get it.

Belle Oh do help a bit East, you can at least wait until we get you upstairs before you die.

East *(Groans in pain.)*

(Exit Alfred, and Belle helping East)

Frank Do you think Belle will be all right? She won't really tell the police will she? They could lock her up!

Book It's ok Frank. Don't worry. I'll fix it.

Frank Fix it? What do you mean?

Book Well Frank the police don't have to get involved. East won't be missed and we have plenty of places to hide the body in the cellar.

Frank Body? He's not really dead, she shot him with blanks.

Book I thought you said your gun was loaded with live bullets?

Frank My gun?

Book Yes, she picked it up in mistake for her own.

Frank Does that make me responsible?

Book I suppose it does. Still if we hide the body...

Frank Is that wise? What if somebody says something?

Book Whom? You? Belle? Daddy? We are all accessories.

Frank Accessories!

Book Yes accessories.

Frank I'm done for, ruined!

Book Frank, why don't you just sign this paper awarding the voting rights in your shares to me then I will make sure not a shred of scandal is attached to your name.

Frank No scandal? No police?

Book No, of course not. All you have to do is sign the paper.

Frank I can't. It would be betraying Belle. She loves me you know.

Book Loves you?

Frank Yes, she loves me. Doesn't she?

Book Frank, forget Belle. She loves nobody but herself. Before she killed him I would have said she was quite sweet on Mr. B. East. But anyway she certainly doesn't love you.

Frank I don't believe it.

Book Perhaps I will just have to show you. Come along; let's find out what is happening in Belle's bedroom.

(They exit)

Act II, Scene 2

Belle's Bedchamber

Belle and East are in bed. East is busy reading the experimental notes given to him by Alfred. Belle wants to make love.

Belle You do love me don't you darling?

East I agreed to go to bed with you. That is not the same thing.

Belle But I saved your life?

East The gun was loaded with blanks, I hurt myself when I fell over, that's all.

Belle Well it was a very convincing act. My sister thinks you are dead and buried.

East Your father and I made a deal. He gave me all his notes on the antidote formulae and I promised I wouldn't bug him or engage in any silly pranks with you.

Belle You do love me don't you darling?

East Look I have a real chance of finding the antidote to this terrible affliction. Let me read these papers.

Belle Does hairy beast want to cuddle his Belle?

East The chloro-flouro carbons held in suspension for 23 minutes at 159 degrees centigrade, 25Mega Watts UV light into the atomic neutralizer.....

Belle I could tickle your tummy, you like little Belle tickling your tummy my hairy man.

East For goodness sakes, Belle, I am trying to concentrate. Let me see, $\text{CH}_2\text{OH}+\text{HCL}+\text{HCN}+$...

Belle Men never can resist my tummy tickles!

East Bubble the oxygen through the container whilst feeding in the hydrogen, make sure the non-holonomic constraint pass is *(he turns a page in the notes)*...

Belle Tickle, wickle, ickle

East Warm gently over a slow heat and add the green peppers ... what the hell is this?

Belle Oh sorry, you must have got mixed up with my recipe book.

East Good grief woman I shall have to start again at the beginning.

(There is a knock at the door)

Belle It's father. Pretend to be dead. I'll say I'm keeping the corpse warm.

(Enter Frank and Book)

Frank This is awful, she's in bed with a dead man.

Book Dead? She probably thought he was an Englishman.

Frank Belle, you must be sick.

Belle Why Frank, I was just trying to revive him with the warmth of my body.

Frank Revive him? He's dead. Don't you understand, no longer a member of the human race, even you cannot bring the dead back to life!

Belle I don't know about that, it's worked with you on several occasions.

Book You see Frank? Now do you still think she is your Belle?

Frank She could be telling the truth?

Book She has never loved you, Frank.

Frank All right. Perhaps I'll help you. I need time to think.

(Exit Frank)

Book We'll know when he starts thinking, blood will come out of his ears. So, I take it Mr. East is not quite as dead as you would have us believe?

East Madam, I am perfectly well.

Book How did you achieve that? I swapped the guns myself.

Belle I swapped the guns back again.

Book Dear sister, I saw your every move. I made sure it was Franks gun you used.

East That's what you think.

Book What did you do?

East That's for me to know and you to guess.

Book You really are quite clever aren't you Mr. B. East. Why are you in bed with her?

Belle How dare you come barging into my bedroom like that. I shall tell father.

Book Yes and I shall tell father that having failed to kill our guest with firearms you try and bore him to death with your sexual fantasies.

Belle That is it. Get out! Sister or not, leave us now!

Book All right, I am going, but if I were Mr. East I would look for ulterior motives in this woman's devotions, she is not everything she seems.

Belle That is not playing fairly, that is below the belt and outside the terms of reference of our agreement.

Book

But Belle, it was you who told me that all is fair where love and money are concerned.

(Exit Book)

Belle

Brian. You really are quite clever aren't you?

East

The chloro-flouro carbons held in suspension for 23 minutes at 159 degrees ...

(Blackout)

Act II, Scene 3

The Halloween Ball

Some ballroom music plays lightly in the background. There is the sound of many guests. Everybody wears a mask. Belle and Book are both looking devastating in their best and fanciest dresses. The lights come up revealing Alfred and Book in conversation. They have masks.

Alfred Book, is that you? Take off your mask, my dear.

Book Hello Daddy. Can I ask you something?

Alfred What can I do for you?

Book Are you going to vote for me at tonight's meeting?

Alfred Well that's for me to know and you to guess.

Book I thought so. I think you might want to change your mind. Take a look at this photo.

Alfred Where did you get this?

Book I came across it in my family history research, I think this is a picture of Chantelle, or Candle as Belle used to call her. Candle snuffed it in the explosion with mummy.

Alfred Yes, quite right, what of it?

Book Look at her, Daddy. Look at the mole on her neck, I know who she is.

Alfred I'll be dam....

Book I've been looking in the records. You told everybody she was some orphan girl that came to work for you, but she's your illegitimate daughter, isn't she, daddy?

Alfred What of it?

Book A skeleton in your closet like this could mean the difference between a military contract or no military contract. If you vote for me tonight this information could go no further.

Alfred No daughter of mine is going to blackmail me, young lady. Publish and be damned, I say! Without that contract there will be no company for you to inherit!

(Alfred exits. Book stamps her foot turns and exits. Frank and Belle enter from the opposite side.)

Frank Belle, are you sure it's wise to be seen out so soon? What if somebody finds the body?

Belle Frank, this is the Halloween Ball. We came here to enjoy ourselves. Now put on your mask and let's have some fun.

(They don their masks)

Frank I feel so silly.

Belle You look great, Frank. Like an angry lion!

Frank Belle, now that we are alone. There is something I have been meaning to ask you.

Belle What is it, Frank dear?

Frank It's probably something that Book made up, it's just that, well....

(Enter Book)

Book Hello, are you two having a good time? Frank, be a dear, fetch me a drink I'm just dying of thirst.

Frank Of course, Belle, can I get you anything?

Belle Later, thank you.

(Exit Frank)

Book Why Belle, what an interesting mask. I can hardly recognise you, you look so much better like that.

Belle Why thank you, my dear sister. *(She takes her mask off and puts it on the chair)* I must also compliment you on your costume. You look so sweet when you dress like a barmaid.

Book Thank you Belle, dearest. Tell me, how are you getting on with your Mr. East? Will he declare his love before midnight?

Belle You doubt my abilities Book, my flower. After experiencing what I have to offer there will be no doubt.

Book Of course that touching little scene in your bedroom. So many men do comment on how much they enjoy you.

Belle Yes it must be awful to be ignored so much, sister sweet.

Book And how is the love making going? Will our Beast be announcing the love that he has for you? You only have until midnight you know.

Belle Don't worry your pretty little head, sister, he will demonstrate his love as promised.

Book I'll be most interested to see it my dear.

Belle Well I must go and mingle, I'll see you at the grand unmasking ceremony, and my Beast will be there.

(Exit Belle Book sees Belle's mask she puts her own down and puts on Belle's.)

(Enter Frank)

Book Hello Frank.

Frank Belle, my darling, alone at last. Now I can talk to you.

Book I'm not Bel..., b..., busy, talk to me, how nice to see you.

Frank Belle you sound er.. different? Is there anything wrong?

Book No of course not, Frank. It's just this mask. What do you want to say to me?

Frank What I was trying to say earlier is that, I know that you aren't really in love with East.

Book In love with East?

Frank Yes Book tried to persuade me that you are in love with East and that I should vote for her at the board meeting.

Book Frank, how could she say such a thing? Look you know I have always loved you. I want you to vote for me at the board meeting.

Frank Of course I will my love.

Book Why don't we make it a commitment Frank? Just sign these papers.

Frank Sign? Papers? Er...

(Enter East)

East Hello Book? Has anybody seen Belle?

Frank This is Belle?

Book What a wonderful Beast costume. Would you dance with me?

East I haven't danced for a long time.

Book I'll show you. Sign the papers Frank. I have something to say to this man.

(They Exit)

Frank Belle, wait! I haven't signed...who was that man in the hairy costume? He looked just like the late Mr. B. East. I don't think I'll ever understand the Rotter family.

(Enter Alfred)

Alfred What's up Frank? You look like you have seen a ghost?

Frank Hello Sir. I just saw a man dressed to look like that monster, East.

Alfred Monster? I wouldn't worry about it. Dead men don't generally come to the Halloween ball.

Frank Halloween! I had almost forgotten. But they do!

Alfred What are you talking about?

Frank It's the one night of the year that the dead come back to haunt their tormentors in life. And to think he was killed with my gun!

Alfred I think you need a drink, lad. Stay here I'll get you one.

(Exit Alfred)

Frank Don't go Sir! What am I saying? Ghosts! I should control myself. They can't possibly exist.

(Enter East)

East Hello Frank. You poor boy, how do you feel? Do *they* hurt much?

Frank It's East's ghost. Keep back. I didn't know she would use my gun.

East Frank, I'm Brian East.

Frank *(drops to his knees)* Don't hurt me, I'll be a better person, I'll go to church every Sunday from now on.

East Whatever is the matter with you?

Frank It's bad enough confronting a beastly excuse for a human being, but dead as well!

East I must admit I haven't been too well lately, but I am not as ill as all that. Get up man.

Frank Don't touch me! Who knows what happens when a dead person touches you.

East Frank? What are you talking about? I am definitely not dead.

(Enter Book)

Book That's not what Belle told me. *(She has on the correct mask)*

East Hello Book, what did Belle say to you? What was all that about on the dance floor?

Book It's time to unmask. Take off your mask, let's see what you really look like.

Frank I'm finished with mine. There, this is what I look like.

Book Charming, I know what you look like, Frank. Here am I unmasked. *(She takes off her mask)* Now what about our Mr. East?

East My mask is off. This **is** what I really look like!

Book Look at him Frank, what a pity! Poor old East.

Frank Yes, what sort of a man are you?

Book And you think Belle has any interest in you? You are no more than a pet poodle to her.

Frank Belle loves me! She wouldn't go near you.

East I don't think I really want ...

Belle Frank, Book! Leave the man alone, he has more humanity in his little finger than you two put together. Leave us!

(They go, slightly ashamed)

East Thank you Belle, I was not coping with that very well.

Belle They have ulterior motives, Brian. I cannot stand to see a man tortured like that. Will you dance with me?

(They dance, they hold each other, the music carries them into each other's arms)

East Belle, why did you help me then? You didn't have to.

Belle I told you I ... no there is something more, something I don't understand. I want to be ... I want to be with you?

East You really care about me, don't you?

Belle I ... yes I do?

(The music stops, Alfred enters followed by Frank and Book)

Alfred What is this Book? Why have you dragged me away from the bar?

Book Because, father dear, Belle has something to announce to us all, don't you dear? It is very nearly midnight.

Belle Thank you sister for pointing that out. Brian there is something Book wants to ask you?

Frank What is going on? I don't understand.

Belle & Book Oh shut up Frank.

Book Mr. B. East Do you love my sister?

Belle Tell her, Brian. Tell her we love each other.

East Belle, you have indeed been an excellent friend. You have taken me out of my dreary house. I have come back into the light of society. I feel like a human being again, but Belle, I ... I could never love somebody as beautiful as you, when I am so ugly, so different.

Book So, that is your loving friend. Well Belle, it is almost midnight, the voting rights in your shares if you please!

The clock chimes midnight. Black out.

Act II, Scene 4

The board meeting

Alfred sits at the head of the table. Book and Frank on either side.

Book Well daddy, shall we start?

Alfred My dear, we are quorate and I declare the 21st annual general meeting of Rotter Chemicals, open. The first item on the agenda is

Book Let's skip the minutes shall we?

Alfred We do things properly or not at all! Does anybody have any comments or changes to the previous minutes? Do I hear a motion to accept the minutes of the 20th meeting?

Book Proposed.

Frank Seconded.

Alfred For the motion? *(pause)* Against?

All Aye.

Alfred Carried nem con. We now move on to the next item, election of officers to the board. Traditionally voting is carried out in a non-democratic manner, we don't adhere to one man one vote here. We award one share one vote.

Book Person, daddy.

Alfred What?

Book It's one person, one vote.

Alfred Ah, that's where you are wrong! It's done by the percentage of common shares that you hold in the company.

Book I know that, all I am saying is we don't say one man, one vote, we say person. It is less offensive to the women members present.

Alfred I see. Sorry to have caused offense. Where was I? Oh yes so I would like to move on to the election of the post of President of the company. I propose Belle as the president and here's my 35% to back it up.

Belle I second that.

Alfred Are there any other proposals?

Book Yes, I propose myself.

Alfred And do you have a seconder?

Book Well, Frank?

Frank I am sorry, Belle. Seconded.

Alfred All right, let us proceed to the vote, Belle?

Book She no longer has a say in the matter, I hold the voting rights in her shares, with my own 15% makes 30% for Book Rotter.

Frank You have my 6% Book.

Alfred We have 35% for Belle and 36% for Book, it looks like Book gets the presidency.

(Enter East)

East Wait!

Belle My Beast. You have come to save me.

East Save you? I see now what you and your family are doing. You were not interested in helping me, just helping yourself. And as for you Book Rotter, if it hadn't been for some fast action on my part, I would be a dead man now.

Book I wondered how you survived that one.

Belle So *you* swapped the guns around, Brian?

East I found Frank's gun in his car, I loaded it also with blanks.

Belle My clever, Beast.

Alfred Listen, East, only shareholders are allowed at this meeting.

East Oh but I am a shareholder.

Alfred That's impossible. All the shares are accounted for.

East Not quite. You always thought I was having an affair with your wife, grace, didn't you Alfred.

Alfred Well I ...

East Well I was not. It was Candle who I had gone to meet at the factory. Grace disapproved, she tried to intervene at the wrong moment, then there was the explosion, the rest you know.

Book I don't know. Tell us how it was, Brian.

East Candle and I met because we were disillusioned with the way Rotter Chemicals was turning out. Even back then the Wob river was a mess and the hillside where the Hairback agent was quarried looked like a disaster area. Grace wanted nothing more to do with the company. It was she who gave me her 15% shareholding.

Book How will you cast your vote in this instance, Mr. East.

East My vote. To Book who would see me dead, or Belle who feigned love to further her ends?

Belle Such intelligence. You outwitted us all. You are wrong about one thing. I do love you, Brian. After years of playing with the affections of men, I finally found somebody who was worth loving.

East You expect me to believe that?

Belle No. I have other insurance. *(She pulls out her cell phone and dials a number.)*
Come on, stupid phone.

Alfred Face it, Belle, it's all over.

Belle Wait! I forgot to hit send. Dennis, yes, now is the time to tell Daddy. *(She hands the phone to Alfred.)*

Alfred Hello, (...) Yes Dennis. (...) She did what! (...) All of them? I see, thank you, goodnight. Dennis apologises for not being here, he says that Belle has no shares because she sold them to him. He casts his vote for Belle and backs it up with her former 15% plus his own 5%.

Book Belle, you cheat! Why did you do that?

Alfred She used the money to pay the debt of the Eromnac Daycare.

East Belle, I underestimated you.

Book You think you'll do a better job than I of running this company?

Belle No. That's why I went into the laboratory last night and found this bottle of benzohydramamine. This company has polluted the Wob River for the last time.

Alfred Careful with that stuff, it's very explosive.

Belle Let's go Brian. My car is just here we can free ourselves and the town from the tyranny of Rotter chemicals forever.

East You are right. Let's go!

(They jump into the first of two cars in fact carefully arranged chairs, and speed off. East makes engine noises).

Frank What the hell is going on?

Alfred Have they gone mad? I do believe they mean to blow up the factory.

Book Quick into my car.

(They jump into the second group of chairs, Frank makes the engine noises)

Frank There they go.

Alfred Look out for the big bend.

Book I can manage, daddy.

(They all lean into the bend)

Frank Book, the lights are red.

Alfred Watch out, there's another car.

Book Geronimo!

Alfred That was close, you'll get us all killed.

Frank The devils! They've doubled back!

(They all get out turn their chairs round and drive off in the other direction.)

(Frank suddenly has trouble making the engine noises)

Alfred What's wrong with the engine?

Frank It's overheating needs water.

(Alfred hands him a glass, he drinks it he starts the engine noises again, they continue)

Book They've doubled back again!

(They all get out turn their chairs round and drive off in the other direction.)

(Throughout this the actors ad lib car chase noises)

(There is a huge explosion. They throw themselves flat on the floor.)

Frank We're too late. The factory is gone.

Alfred All that work, gone.

Book My chance for real power, gone.

Belle You are all free! No more Rotter Chemicals. No more pollution, no more dirty town.

East I know about your problems, Frank. You know, *(whispers)* with your nuts. You can live out your remaining days in peace.

Frank What is he talking about? There is nothing wrong with my nuts. In fact, I have a letter from a company keen on manufacturing them. Belle, I know we were never meant to be, but now that my fortune is assured, Book, with your business sense and my nuts we would be good together. Will you marry me?

Book Marry you? I suppose, nothing worse can happen to me after this.

Belle Now my Beast, do you love me?

East I told you. I could never love somebody as beautiful as you, when I am so ugly, so different.

Belle So you could never love somebody as beautiful as me, when you are so different. In that case there is only one course open to me.

(She holds up the bottle that she stole from East. It contains the drug that will turn her into a Beast)

Frank What is it?

East It's HairBack Extreme, it will make her the same as me.

Frank Don't do it, Belle.

Alfred What the hell is going on?

Belle You see, my Beast. I do really love you.

(She swallows the drug it has a startling affect on her)

East I do believe she really does love me.

(Belle gets up, she too is hairy).

Belle I feel ghastly.

East You look ghastly.

Belle Do you love me now?

East Oh Belle, I love you.

(Blackout, curtain)

The End

