

ASTRID THE OSTRICH

A Musical Play for Young Audiences

Book, Music and Lyrics by David Warrack

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Astrid	An Ostrich
Henry	A Crow
Albert	A Kindly Old Zookeeper
Elsie	A sweet Little Brat
Sarge	A sour Flying Instructor
Oog	A Little Green Man
Mac	A Carnival Barker
Ilona	A Fortune Teller
Wally	A Circus Clown
Beautiful Assistant	A Knife-Thrower's Target
George	A Balloon Salesman
Carlotta	A Trapeze Artist
Manuel	A Magician
Juanita	An Eccentric old Witch

*** written for a cast of four. Astrid and Henry remain in their respective roles throughout. The other two actors play the remaining roles.

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Musical Score

Decisions	Astrid
Astrid the Ostrich	Albert
If I Could Fly	Astrid, Henry
I'm Free	Astrid, Henry
You're Not a Kite	Henry, Elsie
Did You See It?	Henry, Astrid, Sarge
I Don't Understand It	Astrid, Oog
There's a Circus In Town	Company
Everyone Loves a Balloon	George, Astrid, Henry
Juanita's Boiling Brew	Juanita
Astrid the Ostrich (reprise)	Company

SCENE 1 At rise, we observe an ostrich pacing back and forth in time to the music inside her small cage. This is Astrid. Perched on top of the cage outside is a very self-satisfied looking crow. This is Henry. The music stops suddenly, and Astrid marches to the front of the cage, which probably is a two-step march at the most!

ASTRID

Henry!?

HENRY

Caw? You cawled?

ASTRID

Is it time yet?

HENRY

Time for what?

ASTRID

You know what I mean, you crummy crow. Is it time for them to open the zoo?

HENRY

Caw. I cawn't say. How could a crummy crow know?

ASTRID

Alright, I'm sorry, but you just make me so mad sometimes.

HENRY

Caw. Cawm down, Astrid. You might as well get used to it. I'm a free bird, and I do as I please. Isn't that what gets under your feathers?

ASTRID

Well, do you have to be so cocky about it?

HENRY

Caw? Cawky, you say? Better than a big dumb bird who sticks her head in the sand every time someone comes near her cage.

ASTRID

But I keep telling you – all ostriches do that.

HENRY

Don't be silly. Awscar the Awstrich lived here for years before you came along, and never once did I see him stick his head in the sand.

ASTRID

Really? What did he do when people came to look at him?

HENRY

He sang.

ASTRID

A singing ostrich?

HENRY

Sure! As a matter of fact, we'd sing the odd duet now and then.

He sings. It's frightening.

CAWM TO ME MY MELANCAWLY BABY, CAWDLE UP AND ...

Astrid cuts in.

ASTRID

O.K., O.K., I'll take your word for it.

HENRY

Anyway, the point is, this sticking your head in the sand business is caw-razy.

ASTRID

Maybe so, but then what would I do with all those people looking at me?

HENRY

That's for you to decide, my fine, feathered friend.

ASTRID

But I can't ever decide on anything.

SONG #1:

DECISIONS

DECISIONS, DECISIONS,
I HATE TO HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO MAKE DECISIONS.
DECISIONS REQUIRE THOUGHT.

And as a thinker, I'm a stinker.

I'D RATHER PREFER TO NOT HAVE TO DO THE THINKING
WHEN THEY COME. I'D RATHER DEFER TO
A HIGHER AUTHORITY, YOU SEE.

I can't decide. I'd rather hide!

I'M EASY GOING.
I DON'T LIKE A COMPLICATED MIND.
IT GIVES ME A HEADACHE,
AND ANYWAY, I USUALLY FIND
THAT MY DECISIONS ARE WRONG ONES,
SO WHY NOT LET SOMEBODY ELSE
MAKE MY DECISIONS? THE STRONG ONES
WHO LIKE TO LEAD.

And leaders need someone to lead.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS,
THEY DRIVE ME INTO THE GROUND.

Literally!

I'M DECIDEDLY THE MOST INDECISIVE BIRD AROUND.

There's no one worse than I am. I just can't seem to make up my mind. Ohhhhh!

HENRY

Are you through?

ASTRID

Yes, I'm through.

HENRY

Cawngratulations.

ASTRID

For what?

HENRY

You just pulled off an Awscar performance.

ASTRID

What do you mean by that?

HENRY

Like Awscar the Awstrich, you sang for the people.

ASTRID

What people?

Henry points to the audience. Astrid turns slowly and takes them all in with ever-increasing shock and horror. Finally, she screams, and runs to the back of her cage (another two steps!) to bury her head in the sand.

HENRY

Caw. Cawm on, Astrid. They're not going to hurt you.

ASTRID

Pulling her head up quickly to speak, then putting it back.

How do you know?

HENRY

Ask them. What do you say, kids. Would you hurt Astrid?

Hopefully they say no. If yes, curtain, on to next town

There! What did I tell you?

Astrid slowly lifts her head out of the sand and approaches the front of the cage.

ASTRID

Hi. I'm Astrid, and ... uh, I'm an ostrich.

She falters, and runs back to stick her head in the sand. Before she can, Henry yells at her.

HENRY

Caw! Caw! Cawntinue, you cawrazy bird. Cawm on. Astrid. Cawntinue.

Astrid returns to the front of the cage.

ASTRID

Ummm, I want to thank you all for coming, annnnd ... I can't decide what to say next.

HENRY

Then get them to help you.

Astrid looks from Henry to the audience to Henry to the audience to Henry.

ASTRID

That's not a bad idea. That's not a bad idea at all.

She addresses the audience, getting more confident each moment.

How about it? Will you help me out? I can't ever decide anything for myself, but whenever I have to make a decision, I'll get you to help me, and that will make it so much easier! O.K.?

She turns her head and hold her ear to the audience.

AUDIENCE (with any luck at all)

O.K.!

ASTRID

I'll let you know when I need your help.

She turns to Henry again.

Good thinking, Henry. Maybe you're not such a crummy crow after all.

HENRY

Caw! Caw! Cawntain yourself. I cawn't stand gooey sentiment. Save it for Albert. I can see him coming now.

Albert, the zookeeper, enters in a slow, easy manner, humming to himself.

ALBERT

Good morning, Astrid. How's my little lady today? Hungry, I hope.

He enters the cage and fills up her trough with lettuce.

There! Go to it, girl.

He stands back with his hands on his hips, smiling, as Astrid approaches the trough. She takes a sniff, tries a small bite, and spits it out.

ASTRID

Phooey!

ALBERT

Astrid! What's wrong with you now?

ASTRID

You don't really expect me to eat this, do you?

ALBERT

Why not? There's nothing wrong with good fresh lettuce. I know, I know – you'd prefer a peanut butter sandwich.

ASTRID

For breakfast? What kind of a bird do you think I am?

ALBERT

Then what do you want?

ASTRID

A big cage.

Albert turns to her slowly and deliberately.

ALBERT

For breakfast? What kind of a zookeeper do you think I am?

ASTRID

No, no! I mean, I'd have a better appetite if I had a better place to live.

ALBERT

I know, Astrid, but these things take time.

ASTRID

How long do I have to wait?

ALBERT

I can't say. I've been asking for it, over and over, but I guess we'll just have to be a little bit more patient.

ASTRID

I don't want to be patient. I want it now.

ALBERT

Honestly, Astrid. What's gotten into you these days? You seem to be unhappy about everything.

ASTRID

I'm just bored with being a dumb old ostrich in this crummy cage.

She kicks the bars and stubs her toe. As she jumps around in pain,
Albert shakes his head and starts to sing.

SONG #2:

ASTRID THE OSTRICH

ALBERT

ASTRID THE OSTRICH, YOU'RE A FUNNY BIRD.
WHY DO I PUT UP WITH YOU, WHEN YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO?

I GUESS I'M WAITING FOR YOUR SMILE.
ASTRID THE OSTRICH, YOU'RE A FUNNY FRIEND.
WHY DO I KEEP COMING BACK WHEN YOUR OUTLOOK IS SO BLACK?
I GUESS I'M WAITING FOR YOUR SMILE.

WHERE DID IT GO, AND WHEN WILL IT RETURN.
I'D LIKE TO KNOW. IT'S CAUSING ME CONCERN.

ASTRID THE OSTRICH, YOU CAN MAKE MY DAY.
WHEN YOU'RE PLAYFUL, YOU'RE A GEM.
I'M A LITTLE BOY AGAIN, AND I WANT TO STAY WITH YOU ALL DAY.
ASTRID, PUT THE FROWN AWAY.

Music continues under the dialogue.

Come on, Astrid. Eat your breakfast and you'll feel better.

ASTRID

What's breakfast got to do with a crummy stubbed toe?

ALBERT

Well, it might help take your mind off it. Anyway, I think the crummy stubbed toe is the least of your problems.

ASTRID

O.K., O.K., forget the toe. I'll die of toeitis, and you'll be to blame, and everyone will say, "Oh, what a shame she had to die so young. If only she'd had a better breakfast in a bigger cage, she'd have been happy, and perhaps alive today!"

Henry, quite unnoticed for some time, suddenly lets out a loud sob and a big snuffle, and catches Albert's attention.

ALBERT

Well, if it isn't good old Henry. Are you the one that's responsible for all this nonsense?

HENRY

Still crying.

Of course not!

ALBERT

Oh, Henry – knock it off. You might fool Astrid, but I know you better. Those are crocodile tears.

HENRY

Caw! Crawcodile tears?

ALBERT

You know what I mean. They're phony.

ASTRID

You're just mad because Henry has my best interests at heart.

ALBERT

You don't think I do?

ASTRID

Prove it!

HENRY

You tell him, kid!

ALBERT

Oh, what's the sense.

YOU'RE NOT YOURSELF, THE ASTRID THAT I KNOW.
THAT'S WHAT YOU GET FOR LISTENING TO A CROW.

ASTRID THE OSTRICH, YOU CAN MAKE MY DAY.
WHEN YOU'RE PLAYFUL, YOU'RE A GEM,
I'M A LITTLE BOY AGAIN,
AND I WANT TO STAY WITH YOU ALL DAY.
ASTRID, PUT THE FROWN AWAY.

Well, what do you say, Astrid? Give it a try?

She looks him up and down, goes over and looks at the lettuce, and then addresses the general situation with great maturity.

ASTRID

Phooey!!

ALBERT

I give up.

He exits slowly, shaking a fist at Henry.

HENRY

In response.

Caw, caw, caw, haw, haw, haw!

He laughs so hard that he almost falls off the top of the cage,
and just catches himself in time.

ASTRID

Really, Henry, you don't have to get carried away.

HENRY

It's just nice to see the old coot get some of his own.

ASTRID

He's not an old coot. And anyway, what's he ever done to you?

HENRY

To me? Caw! Nawthing!

ASTRID

Then why don't you like him?

HENRY

Caw! Becawse – he keeps birds and animals caged up.

ASTRID

But some kinda like it that way. Look at me. I can't make decisions as it is, and on the outside, I kinda doubt that I'd be able to cope. Nope, just as long as I get a bigger cage, I'll be happy.

HENRY

Caw! I cawn't really believe that. But even if it s true, what difference would a bigger cage make?

ASTRID

I'd have more room!

HENRY

For what? You cawn't fly like other birds.

ASTRID

How do you know? I've just never had a chance.

HENRY

Astrid – Awstriches don't fly.

ASTRID

That's silly. I'm a bird, and everyone knows that birds fly. Why else would I have wings?

HENRY

Caw! Well, you've gawt a head, and all you ever do with it is stick it in the sand.

ASTRID

Well, if I could fly, I wouldn't have to do that anymore, because I could escape into the sky!

HENRY

Fat chawnce!

SONG #3:

IF I COULD FLY

ASTRID

You wait. I'll show you!

IF I COULD FLY, AND I'VE GOT A FEELING
WITH A LITTLE INSTRUCTION, I MIGHT,
I'D FLY SO HIGH, MY HEAD WOULD BE REELING.
I CLEARLY IMAGINE THE FLIGHT.

I'D BE A FAST AND FREE BIRD,
WINGING ALONG, SINGING ALONG TOO.
I'D BE THE LAST TO BE SEEN OR HEARD
ANYWHERE CLOSE TO A ZOO. OO, OO, OO.

HENRY

Caw! But you just cawnfessed you liked it in a zoo. Boy, what an indecisive bird. I cawn't stand it.

ASTRID

IF I COULD FLY, AND I'VE A SUSPICION
IT'S IN ME TO GET IN THE AIR,
I'D NEVER CRY. I'D BE TOO BUSY WISHIN'
THE REST OF THE WORLD WERE THERE.
IF I COULD FLY, MY DREAM COME TRUE,
IF I COULD FLY LIKE YOU.

Music continues under dialogue.

HENRY

Forget it, Astrid. I'm tawking to you. You cawn't do it!

ASTRID

How do you know for sure?

HENRY

Awsker the Awstrich tried it once in the middle of singing "Fly Me To The Moon".

ASTRID

And what happened?

HENRY

He fell and broke his helmet.

ASTRID

But I don't want to fly to the moon. Just ... to that cloud.

HENRY

Caw! Astrid – face the fawkts. How can I cawnvince you?

YOU'LL NEVER FLY, AND I'VE GAWT A FEELING
 THAT DEEP DOWN INSIDE YOU, YOU KNOW.
 WHY EVEN TRY? IT'S CLEAR THAT YOU'RE DEALING
 IN MATTERS BEST LEFT TO A CROW.
 A CROW HAS SUCH GRACE AND BEAUTY -
 SMART AS AN AWNT, NOTHING HE CAWNT DO.
 I FEEL IT'S MY PLACE, AND MY DUTY
 TO INFAWRM YOU THAT FLYING IS NOT MEANT FAWR YOU.

ASTRID

I take it back again. You are a crummy crow!

HENRY

YOU'LL NEVER FLY. IT WOULDN'T BE CLEVER.
 IF YOU ONCE GOT UP, YOU'D SOON FAWL.
 Anyway, HOW CAWN YOU TRY? YOU'RE LAWKED UP FOREVER.
 YOU'D SIMPLY BUMP INTO THE WAWL
 YOU'LL NEVER FLY. IT'S PLAIN TO SEE.
 YOU'LL NEVER FLY LIKE ME.

ASTRID

Sorry Henry. You are mightily mistaken. You watch. I'll show you.

I'M GOING TO FLY.

HENRY

YOU'LL NEVER FLY.

ASTRID

LIKE OTHER BIRDS.

HENRY

YOU MARK MY WORDS.

ASTRID

HENRY

I'M GOING TO FLY, WAIT AND SEE.

YOU'LL NEVER FLY LIKE ME.

HENRY

O.K. Astrid. You want to fly? Well, now's your chance to prove it.

ASTRID

What are you talking about?

HENRY

Caw! The gate! We had Albert so upset that he left without putting the lock on.

Astrid walks over and takes a look at it.

ASTRID

Oh, dear. So he did.

HENRY

Well, what are you waiting for? Push it open.

ASTRID

But if I do, Albert will get in trouble.

HENRY

And if you don't, he'll come back and lock you up again. Hurry up and decide.

Astrid paces back and forth.

ASTRID

Oh, decisions. I just can't seem to ... what! Of course. I don't have to make my own mind up anymore.

She addresses the audience.

Are you ready to help me decide what to do? Alright – what do you think? Should I take this chance to escape from the zoo, even though it might upset Albert?

Assume the majority say yes.

HENRY

Caw! There. What did I tell you? Come on, Astrid.

ASTRID

Well, if you really think I should ...

HENRY

You do wawnt to fly, don't you?

ASTRID

Oh, yes!

HENRY

Well, you awren't going to do it in there.

ASTRID

You're right, of course. Well, here goes.

She pushes the gate open tentatively, and steps outse, as if stepping into a warm bath. Once out, she looks all around her, and finally yells, exuberantly.

Henry!!! I'm free!!!

HENRY

Caw! Caw!!

ASTRID

But I'd better lock the gate so Albert won't take the blame.

She locks it.

HENRY

Caw! Quit stawlling.

ASTRID

And what's that supposed to mean?

HENRY

Yaw're free to fly, free to fl. Caw! Now, let's see you do it!!

ASTRID

But you can't expect me to just ...

HENRY

Are you an awstrich, or a chicken?

ASTRID

Oh, for heaven's sake. Well, here goes nothing.

The music starts as she flaps her wings. Nothing happens.

Maybe I need a running start.

She runs from one side of the stage to the other, back and forth, flapping her wings madly, to no avail.

I've got it! I need to try from a raised platform.

She hops up on a miraculously available stool, and the inevitable happens as she jumps off, flapping her wings, and falls. Henry starts laughing uncontrollably.

HENRY

Caw! Ha, ha, ha .. (etc)

But this time, he really does lose his balance and falls down beside Astrid, who breaks his fall.

ASTRID

Welcome to the club.

HENRY

That's hawrd on the crowfeet.

ASTRID

Oh, there must be someone, somewhere who can show me how to fly.

HENRY

Caw! And show me how to land!

ASTRID

What do you say, Henry. Will you help me find out?

HENRY

Of course. But we'd better get started before Albert returns.

ASTRID

Oh, no. Here he comes now. Hurry, Henry. Let's go.

They exit quickly as Albert enters from the other side.

ALBERT

Well, Astrid – how are you coming along with that breakfast?

He opens the cage and finds it empty.

Astrid? Astrid!?

He looks around, totally in shock.

How did she get out?

The younger audience members will tell him.

Oh, dear. Well, it's too late to worry about that now. I just hope she knows what she's doing.

SONG #3a: ASTRID THE OSTRICH (reprise)

ASTRID THE OSTRICH, DON'T BE GONE TOO LONG.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO, IF I COULDN'T CARE FOR YOU.

He looks around, shakes his head, and exits slowly as the lights fade to black.

SCENE 2 Upbeat music introduces this scene, and as the lights rise, we see Astrid and Henry bouncing along in time.

ASTRID

Oh, look Henry – what's that?

HENRY

Caw! That's a trin. Haven't you ever seen one of them before?

Sound of train whistle in the distance.

ASTRID

So that's what makes that noise. I always thought it was one of the other animals.

HENRY

You've got a lot to learn, kid.

ASTRID

Oh, look – there. Another train.

HENRY

No, no – that's a truck.

Sound of horn honking.

Caw! Look out!

Henry pulls Astrid out of the way.

Phew. That was a close cawl.

Astrid is undeterred, unaware of the danger. She jumps up and runs off to point in another direction.

ASTRID

Henry, look. What are those boys doing?

HENRY

Playing football. Hey, duck!

A football lands near Astrid. She goes over and looks at it, unsure what to do. She looks at Henry, then takes a run and kicks it back to where it came from, falling in the process. She stands up and dusts herself off, feeling obviously quite self-satisfied.

ASTRID

Hey, Henry. Look!

HENRY

What Where?

SONG #4:

I'M FREE

ASTRID

LOOK AT ME, I'M FREE, OUT ON MY OWN. WHAT A FEELING.
WHAT A WAY TO BE. I AM FREE.

HENRY

LOOK AROUND. YOU'LL SEE YOUR WORLD HAS GROWN.
NAWTHIN' STAWPPIN' YOU, DOIN' AS YOU PLEASE.
FREE AS A BREEZE.

BOTH

FREE TO COME AND FREE TO GO.
FREE TO SAY YES, AND FREE TO SAY NO.
FREE FROM BEING QUESTIONED WHY.

ASTRID

FREE TO TRY TO FLY.

LOOK AT ME, I'M FREE, OUT ON MY OWN. WHAT A FEELING.
WHAT A WAY TO BE. I'M FREE.

Music continues under dialogue.

HENRY

Caw! Caw!

ASTRID

Henry, what's that?

HENRY

A bus.

ASTRID

And that?

HENRY

A school.

ASTRID

And that?

HENRY

A swing.

ASTRID

And that?

HENRY

A swimming pool.

ASTRID

And that?

HENRY

Caw! Astrid. You may be free, but if you don't stop asking me so many questions, I'm going to start charging.

ASTRID

I'm sorry Henry. No I'm not. It's just that it's all so new and exciting.

LOOK AT ME. I'M FREE. I'M ALL AGLOW.
CAN'T IMAGINE HOW I MADE IT THROUGH
BACK IN THE ZOO.

HENRY

LOOK AND LEARN WITH ME. SO MUCH TO KNOW.
NOTHIN' STAWPPIN' YOU. GO WHERE YOU WANT TO GO.

BOTH

FREE TO WALK OR FREE TO RUN.
FREE TO TALK TO ANYONE.
FREE FROM BEING QUESTIONED WHY.

ASTRID

FREE TO TRY TO FLY.

HENRY

What, you?

ASTRID

Yes, me!

HENRY

Why not?

ASTRID

LOOK AT ME. I'M FREE. OUT ON MY OWN.
WHAT A FEELING. WHAT A WAY TO BE.

ASTRID

HENRY

I'M FREE.

CAW, CAW, CAW, CAW,
CAW, CAW, CAW, CAW, CAW!

ASTRID

Henry, quick.

She points up to the sky.

What's that?

HENRY

Oh no, here we go again.

He looks up.

That, Astrid, is a kite.

Astrid gets very excited.

ASTRID

But Henry. It's flying. And it doesn't even have wings!

HENRY

Dryly.

Amazing.

A young girl enters with a string that goes up offstage, as if connected to a kite.

No wings. Just strings.

Astrid watches, enraptured for a moment. Then, timidly, she approaches the girl.

ASTRID

Excuse me ...

The girl, having had her eye on the kite, hasn't even noticed Astrid or Henry. She jumps in surprise, almost losing her grasp on the string.

ELSIE

Hey, stupid. Don't scare me like that. You almost made me lose my kite.

She does a double-take at Astrid.

Hey, I haven't seen you around before. Where did you come from? Why are you on our playground?

ASTRID

Oh, we're, uh, just visiting from another school.

ELSIE

Oh yeah? What school? You look like you belong more in a zoo.

HENRY

Caw! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

ELSIE

Who's that ... crow?

ASTRID

Oh, that's my friend, Henry. And my name's Astrid.

ELSIE

I'm Elsie, if you must know. Now, if you don't mind, ...

She looks up and starts off.

ASTRID

Wait! Before you go, could you tell me how a kite flies?

ELSIE

How should I know how a kite flies?

ASTRID

But didn't you say that was your kite up there?

ELSIE

With attitude.

Yes, that's my kite up there.

ASTRID

Then you must know HOW it got up there.

ELSIE

The attitude goes up a notch.

Look. Focus. I run with it til the wind picks it up, and then it flies. Do you have a problem with that?

ASTRID

That's all there is to it?

ELSIE

That is all. Over and out.

Astrid turns to Henry.

ASTRID

Henry. Why can't I be a kite?

HENRY

Sure. And I'll be Little red Riding Hood.

ELSIE

You two are extremely weird.

ASTRID

Henry, I'm serious. If Elsie can get that crummy little kite up in the air, think how easily I could fly when I've got these big wings to help me.

HENRY

Caw! Who am I to argue?

ELSIE

You two are really strange.

She draws her kite in. Astrid approaches her.

ASTRID

Excuse me ...

ELSIE

What do you want now? Don't you know recess is just about over?

ASTRID

I just wondered if you'd mind doing me a small favour.

ELSIE

What do you want? Directions to the zoo?

This would be where Henry pretty much loses it. Astrid ignores him

ASTRID

I want you to help me fly.

ELSIE

I was wrong. You're not from the zoo. You are from another planet.

ASTRID

You made the kite fly. Why not me?

ELSIE

You are certifiably nuts. What school did you say you came from?

ASTRID

Please. Can't we just try it?

ELSIE

Looking around to see if anyone is watching.

O.K. O.K. Hurry up and put this string around your neck.

Astrid does, in a flash, before Henry can stop her.

ASTRID

I'm ready.

ELSIE

Shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders.

Here we go.

Madness. They all run around the stage. Astrid flaps her wings. Henry puts his beak between the rope and Astrid's neck. They all tumble and fall. Elsie cannot stop laughing. She turns to Henry. He lasts about one second before he joins her.

ASTRID

That didn't go as well as I had hoped. Well, it was just a thought.

Elsie and Henry lose it.

HENRY

Very entertaining though.

ELSIE

You two should pop around more often.

Somehow, she high fives a crow and an ostrich.

ASTRID

Right. Cuz schools are where you learn. I have learned that discovering what you are not is every bit as important as discovering you are!

HENRY

Well sadi.

SONG #5:

YOU'RE NOT A KITE

ELSIE

WHAT'S THE MATTER?

HENRY

FEELING FOOLISH?

ELSIE

YOU SHOULD SEE YOUR FACE.

HENRY

ONE COULD SAY, IN FAIRNESS, THAT WAS FOOLISH.

ELSIE

QUITE THE HOPELESS CASE.

HENRY

ANYONE MUST SURELY SEE

ELSIE

THERE ARE THINGS YOU'LL NEVER BE.

ELSIE, HENRY

FOR THOUGH YOU'RE LIGHTER THAN AIR,
AND THOUGH YOUR FEATHERS ARE WHITE,
YOU'LL NEVER BE A KITE.

ASTRID

I hear you.

HENRY

YOU CAN BE A CHICKEN, ACT LIKE A DONKEY,
OR EAT LIKE A HORSE.

ELSIE

YOU CAN SWIM LIKE A FISH DOES, CLIMB LIKE A MONKEY,
OR TAKE A FOXY COURSE.

ELSIE, HENRY

BUT ANYONE WHO'S GO HIS WITS SHOULD KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT QUILTS.
FOR THOUGH YOU'RE LIGHTER THAN AIR,
AND THOUGH YOUR FEATHERS ARE WHITE,
YOU'LL NEVER BE A KITE.

ELSIE

YOU CAN BE A PIGGY.

HENRY

WOLF YOUR SUPPER.

ELSIE

LAUGH LIKE A HYENA DOES.

HENRY

YOU CAN GIVE A BEAR HUG.

ELSIE

ROMP LIKE A PUP,

HENRY

OR BE QUIET AS A MOUSE.

ELSIE

YOU CAN BE BUSY AS A BEE,

HENRY

BUT THERE ARE THINGS YOU'LL NEVER BE.

ELSIE, HENRY

FOR THOUGH YOU'RE LIGHTER THAN AIR,
AND THOUGH YOUR FEATHERS ARE WHITE,
YOU'LL NEVER BE A KITE.

As the song ends, a school bell rings offstage.

ELSIE

Oops – there's the bell. Gotta run. I have to say, this was a memorable recess!

She looks at Astrid and giggles.

Oh, boy. A kite. What next? Love it!

She's runs off, waving good-bye and laughing.

HENRY

Noticing her kite.

Caw! Hey, Elsie. You forgawt something.

He grabs the kite and runs off after her.

ASTRID

What do they know? So I can't be a kite. I accept that. At least I tried! And if I keep trying all the possibilities, I'm sure to find some way that I can fly.

She gets up and starts to walk. As she does, a small mobile desk appears from one side of the stage with a sign on the front – “Learn to fly.” A scowling man with a flying jacket is seated behind the desk. Astrid stops.

I don’t believe it!

She reads the sign slowly.

Learn to fly! This must be my lucky day! Oh, but look at the face on that man. I don’t know that I’d want to trust him with such an important thing as learning how to fly. Oh, if only Henry would come back and tell me what to do. What’s taking him so long. Where did he get to, anyway?

To audience.

Well, I guess I’ll have to ask you to help me again. What do you think? Should I register for flying lessons.

They know their role. They will answer in the affirmative.

You really think I should? Well, alright then.

She turns and marches up to the desk.

Excuse me, but I’d like to apply to learn how to fly.

SARGE

Oh, yeah? You don’t look like a flier to me. For one thing, you’re a dame. And for another ...

He looks her up and down.

Hey, what kind of a weird bird are you anyway?

ASTRID

Never mind that. Will you teach me to fly?

SARGE

You? You wanna learn to fly? What a joke!

ASTRID

Really – I’m a very fast learner. Albert used to say that ...

SARGE

Never mind. Look, you ... whatever you are. I don't know if you're from the zoo or that circus up the street, but I do know that I couldn't teach you to fly.

ASTRID

Why?

SARGE

What would you operate the controls with? Your beak?

He laughs.

ASTRID

Controls? What controls?

SARGE

The controls on the airplane, stupid.

ASTRID

Airplane? Oh! I thought you could teach me how to fly with my wings. I don't want to fly an airplane. I want to fly me.

SARGE

Are you serious? Go on, beat it, bird. Go fly a kite.

ASTRID

But I've already tried that, and it didn't work either.

SARGE

Will you get outta here before I ...

He gets up from behind the desk just as Henry hops on.

HENRY

Caw! Astrid! Caw! Astrid!

ASTRID

Henry, what is it?

HENRY

I wish I knew.

SARGE

Hey, what are you talking about?

HENRY

You mean you don't know? You didn't see something flying overhead?

SARGE

Aw, there's always something flying overhead – a bird, a plane, a weather balloon.

HENRY

Caw! Caw! You don't understand.

He turns to Astrid.

Astrid!

SONG #6:

DID YOU SEE IT?

DID YOU SEE IT FLYING ALL AROUND?
MY, OH ME, I'M SURE IT SCORCHED THE GROUND.
WITH INCREDIBLE SPEED AND FLASHING LIGHT,
IT CAUGHT MY EYE. WHAT A FRIGHTENING SIGHT.
DID YOU SEE IT FLYING OVER TOWN?

Astrid shakes her head, bewildered, as Sarge answers.

SARGE

IT WAS A BIRD. IT WAS A BIRD.
YOUR STORY IS ABSURD.

HENRY

Caw! That was no bird!

DID YOU SEE IT IN THE WESTERN SKY?
MY, OH ME, IT SURE WAS FLYING HIGH.
WITH INCREDIBLE CONTROL, IT HOVERED THERE.
NO HELICOPTER - NO, SIR!
DID YOU SEE IT IN THE WESTERN SKY?

ASTRID

Are you sure it wasn't a kite?

SARGE

Nah!!

IT WAS A PLANE. IT WAS A PLANE.
DON'T TALK LIKE YOU'RE INSANE.

Boy, what a day! A bird that wants to learn how to fly herself, and another bird that's been seeing Martians.

HENRY

DID YOU SEE IT BEFORE IT DISAPPEARED?
MY, OH ME, IT'S SOMETHING TO BE FEARED.
WITH INCREDIBLE SPEED, IT FLEW OUT OF SIGHT.
IT WASN'T A PLANE, AND IT WASN'T A KITE.
DID YOU SEE IT BEFORE IT DISAPPEARED?

SARGE

Look. IT WAS A BALLOON. IT WAS A BALLOON.
THEY'LL REPORT UPON IT SOON.

ASTRID

BUT WHAT IF IT WASN'T A BIRD AND WHAT IF IT WASN'T A PLANE?
WHAT IF IT WASN'T A WEATHER BALLOON? HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN
THE THINGS THAT HENRY SAW THAT FRIGHTENED HIM SO?

HENRY

Caw! What if it was a U.F.O.?

SARGE

A Flying Saucer? Impossible!

ASTRID

But what if it was?

HENRY

Caw! What if it was?

Sarge begins to wonder.

SARGE

WHAT IF IT WAS A SHIP FROM OUTER SPACE?
COULD THIS MEAN THE END OF THE HUMAN RACE?
WITH INCREDIBLE EASE, THEY'LL WIPE US OUT.
THAT COULD BE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT,
IF IT WAS A SHIP FROM OUTER SPACE.

He looks at both of them, then up at the sky, and suddenly bolts for the exit, racing through the audience, while mysterious forces disappear his desk, sign and chair from the stage.

Lemmee outta here!!!!

HENRY, ASTRID

DID YOU SEE IT – THAT U.F.O.?

Henry and Astrid laugh at Sarge's mad exit.

ASTRID

Henry, surely you're not serious. Did you really see a U.F.O.?

HENRY

Well, not exactly. Elsie said she did, but I know better.

A little Green Man enters behind Harry.

There's no such thing as a flying saucer.

35.

ASTRID

Seeing the little Green Man.

W...w...w...well, what about a l...l...l...little green m...m...m...man?

HENRY

Caw! They only exist in people's imaginations.

ASTRID

Then I've g...g...g...got quite an imagination.

HENRY

What are you babbling on about?

Astrid points behind Henry. He turns around. He jumps at the sight.
Then he shakes his head, gathers himself, and turns quickly back to
Astrid.

Caw! There's nawthing there. Don't be silly!

ASTRID

But Henry ...

OOG (the little green man)

There's nothing to be afraid of.

HENRY

See, I told you.

Two beats.

Who said that?

OOG

I did.

ASTRID

Are you really a Little Green Man from Outer Space?

Oog laughs. Henry slowly turns around.

OOG

Well, I suppose that's as good a description as any.

Henry faints.

ASTRID

Henry!

OOG

Oh dear. Here – put this under his smelling thing.

ASTRID

We call it a nose.

OOG

I knew that.

Oog hands Astrid a small container with some liquid in it. She places it under Henry's nose, and he wakes up with a jolt.

ASTRID

Wow. That did the trick. What is it?

OOG

Journey juice. A special recipe from Mars that we use to keep us awake on long journeys.

ASTRID

Totally living in the moment.

Boy, it must be exciting to fly all over the Universe.

OOG

It is. I meet so many interesting people.

ASTRID

Oh, I'm sorry. We haven't even introduced ourselves. I'm Astrid, and that's Henry.

OOG

How do you do? I'm Oogalakitackyrigamowwadamadee!

Astrid and Henry immediately drop their heads and begin to snore.

Oh, no – I did it again. Why do I always forget?

She speaks to the audience. Yes, she. Role played by female. Don't ask.

I don't understand why, but every time I say my name, people fall asleep. I guess they get bored because it's so long. However, I've found out that it only lasts one minute, and I can wake them up sooner by saying my name backwards. Watch.

She turns to Henry and Astrid.

Eedamadawomagirykcatikalagoo.

They both wake up, stretch, and yawn.

HENRY

What happened?

OOG

I'm sorry, but my name put you to sleep. I had to say it backwards to wake you up again.

ASTRID

Boy, you have to be careful where you say it!

OOG

I know, but I'm so forgetful. In fact, I just crash-landed my flying saucer because I forgot to keep an eye on the controls.

HENRY

Caw! How could you forget something like that?

OOG

Well, there's a circus just up the street, and I was so interested in watching the juggler there that ... I just forgot.

ASTRID

That makes you almost human.

OOG

I have been told that before.

HENRY

Your English is very good.

OOG

I have been told that before as well. I'm very much like a human being in many ways.

ASTRID

Really?

SONG #7:

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT

WHY ARE YOU ALL DRESSED IN GREEN?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.
YOU'RE THE STRANGEST BEING I'VE SEEN.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.
HOW DO YOU MAKE A SAUCER FLY?
I BET YOU'RE IN DEMAND.
WHY DID YOU MAKE US FALL ASLEEP?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
WHY? WHY? TELL ME WHY. I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

OOG

WHY AM I ALL DRESSED IN GREEN?
IT'S ALL THAT I HAD LEFT TO WEAR.
TRY AS I MIGHT TO KEEP THINGS CLEAN,
MY CLOTHES ARE ALWAYS IN DESPAIR.
HOW DO I MAKE A SAUCER FLY?
I SIMPLY TURN THE KEY.
AND YOU FELL ASLEEP WHEN I SAID
OOGALAKITACKYRIGAMOWADAMADEE. Oh, dear!
EEDAMADAWOMAGIRYKCATIKALAGOO.

ASTRID

WHY? WHY? TELL ME WHY? I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

WHERE COULD YOU BE COMING FROM?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.

I HOPE THAT YOU DON'T THINK I'M DUMB,

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT.

DO YOU COME FROM OUTER SPACE,

OR JUST ANOTHER LAND,

AND WHY ARE PEOPLE AFRAID OF YOU?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

WHY? WHY? TELL ME WHY. I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

OOG

WHERE COULD I BE COMING FROM?

ANOTHER SOLAR SYSTEM

AND NO, I'D NEVER THINK YOU'RE DUMB.

ASKING'S THE ROAD TO WISDOM.

I ONLY HAPPENED HERE BY CHANCE.

IT REALLY WASN'T PLANNED.

AS TO WHY PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF ME?

EVEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

ASTRID, OOG

WHY? WHY? I WONDER WHY?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

Henry has been watching the two of them in fascination.

HENRY

The Ostrich and the Alien. I smell a tour.

They do "aw shucks" bows.

Caw! But I can tell you why people are afraid of you, if you really want to know.

OOG

Please.

HENRY

Quite simply, because you're different. That's it in a nutshell.

OOG

But I don't mean to harm anybody.

A man, Big Mac, sneaks onstage behind Oog with a net.

ASTRID

Oog! Behind you!

BIG MAC

Gotcha!

OOG

Run, both of you, run.

All freeze except Astrid.

ASTRID

Oh, no. Another decision! Do I run to save myself, or fight to try and save Oog>

She turns to audience.

Run or fight.

She hears what she wants to hear.

Fight it is. Charge!

Astrid takes a run at Big Mac. It doesn't end well. She falls flat in a heap upon impact. Big Mac laughs heartily as he drags oog offstage. Astrid, dazed, yells after them.

Don't worry, Oog. We'll find some way to help you!

HENRY

Are you out of your mind? He's from outer space. He can fend for himself.

ASTRID

You don't know that.

HENRY

And may I mention, the guy that nabbed him was bigger than all of us put together.

ASTRID

I don't care. We have to do something.

HENRY

What? Risk our lives so he can teach you how to fly?

ASTRID

Henry. I wasn't even thinking of that. What a great idea. Come on!!!

She runs offstage after Oog and Big Man, with Henry following at a less harried pace.

HENRY

Caw! How did I ever get myself involved in this mess? Awskar the Ostrich, where are you? Your replacement is cawrazy!! Caw!

Blackout.

SCENE 3: The lights rise on what is obviously a fairground. Astrid and Henry enter from one side, and a balloon salesman and a unicycle rider enter from the other side. All are singing.

SONG #8: THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN

COMPANY

THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN AND WE'RE GONNA HAVE FUN.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN. GO AND TELL EVERYONE
TO COME AND JOIN US – DON'T DELAY.
BET YOUR BRITCHES, YOU'LL HAVE A HAPPY DAY.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN FOR THE YOUNG AND THE OLD.
YOU CAN LAUGH AT A CLOWN OR HAVE YOUR FORTUNE TOLD.

STAY A WHILE, WIN A PRIZE. PUT A SMILE IN YOUR EYES.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN.

Balloon salesman and unicycle rider exit.

ASTRID

THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN. NEVER SEEN ONE BEFORE.
AS I WANDER AROUND, I ENJOY IT MORE AND MORE.
WITH EVERY STEP COMES A NEW DELIGHT.
THOUGH I'M WALKING, I FEEL LIKE I'M IN FLIGHT.

HENRY

THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN AND IT'S HARD TO STAY CALM.
IT TURNS A SMILE TO A FROWN ON KIDS OR DAD OR MOM.

ASTRID, HENRY

IF YOU'RE EIGHT OR EIGHTY-TWO, IT'S JUST WAITING FOR YOU.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN.

Music is in and out of following scene. Mostly in! They wander into audience.

HENRY

Caw! I must cawnfess that I am having a ball.

ASTRID

Me too. But we can't forget what we're here for.

HENRY

Of course.

Two beats.

Uh, remind me.

ASTRID

Oh, really Henry. We're here to find Oog.

HENRY

Caw! Of cawrse. Now I remember.

ASTRID

I'm sure I saw them come in here. But we'll never find them with all these people around.

HENRY

No problem.

ASTRID

How can you say that?

HENRY

Easy. While you were stuffing your beak with peanuts and popcorn and peanut butter, I flew around ... remember, one of us can fly ... I flew around to see what I could see.

ASTRID

And ...

HENRY

Well, I still think you're foolish to be determined to help a little green man from outer space, but who am I to judge.

ASTRID

Who indeed! Henry, tell me. Did you see anything.

HENRY

Caw! Our new-found friendly alien has been made the feature attraction of Big Mac's Freak Show.

ASTRID

Oh no! How awful!

HENRY

As a matter of fact, there's Big Mac now.

Big Mac enters with a stand under his arm, sets it down, gets up on it and starts his pitch.

BIG MAC

Ladies and gentlemen. Step right this way.

For productions that can afford trumpets, there should be trumpets. For the other 99 percent, perhaps a drum roll.

Don't miss out on the biggest, the best, the freshest, I say the freakiest show in town! Why, we've got everything, from two-headed ladies to 600 pound gentlemen! You've never seen anything like it in your life before. You may never see anything like it in your life again. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to observe the unbelievable, and when you see it, you'll HAVE to believe it. To prove my point, I'm going to give you a sneak preview of our star attraction – a real, live creature from outer space! Yes, incredible as it may seem, we have captured the first known visitor to our planet from the far reaches of outer space. Ladies and Gentlemen – the jolly green midget.

He runs offstage, and returns with oog, hands bound, and a leash around his neck.

ASTRID

Oog!

Oog hears her and looks her direction mournfully.

BIG MAC

How about that, folks? Feast your eyes on the jolly, green midget!

He looks at Oog and gives a tug on the leash.

Smile, darn you, smile.

He looks back at his audience and laughs.

Well, he may not be too jolly today, but I guess we all have those moods, don't we? Alrighty now, I don't want to spoil the show inside by giving it all away for free, but I'll take a couple of quick questions. Anything you want to know?

ASTRID

Yes! I want to know when you are going to let Oog go.

BIG MAC

Who?

ASTRID

Oogalakitackirigamowadamadee.

Big Mac, Oog, and Henry all drop their heads and begin to snore. Astrid to audience.

How about that?! I remembered the name! But there's no time to lose. I've only got one minute before Big Mac wakes up.

She runs up to Oog, takes the leash off, unties his hands, and whispers in his ear.

Eedamadawwomagirykcatikalagoo.

Oog wakes up and looks around.

OOG

Astrid! Why didn't I think of that?

ASTRID

I suspect you were under a bit of stress.

OOG

Boy, this memory of mine sure causes me problems.

ASTRID

Well, you're free now. You'd better run before he wakes up.

OOG

I guess you're right. How can I ever thank you?

ASTRID

Just tell me quickly – can you show me how to fly?

OOG

If I could, I would, but even I can't fly without my flying saucer.

ASTRID

Well, I just thought I'd ask.

OOG

Sorry. But I'll find some way to repay you, I promise. Good-bye.

They give each other a quick hug.

ASTRID

Good-bye. And good luck.

OOG

Same to you.

He runs offstage.

ASTRID

To audience.

Oh! I almost forgot Henry.

She runs over and whispers in his ear.

Eedamadawomagirykcatikalagoo.

Henry opens his eyes and stretches, with a yawn.

HENRY

Caw! Well, if nawthing else, I'm sure getting lawts of rest today.

ASTRID

Hurry, hurry. We have to hide before Big Mac wakes up. The minute is almost over.

They scurry to the opposite side of the stage, just as Big Mac wakes up. He shakes his head, yawns, looks around bewildered, then notices the empty leash in his hand.

BIG MAC

Hey, what's going on here?

He heaves a big sigh. Suddenly less angry, and more contrite, he looks out to the audience.

Gee, the first real freak I ever had.

He picks up his stand, puts it under his arm, and walks off slowly with his head down, dragging the leash behind him.

ASTRID

You know, I almost feel sorry for him.

HENRY

Caw! Fawrget it. Let's enjoy the rest of the circus.

HENRY, ASTRID

THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN, AND WE'RE GONNA HAVE FUN.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN. GO AND TELL EVERYONE
TO COME AND JOIN US – DON'T DELAY.
BET YOUR BRITCHES, YOU'LL HAVE A HAPPY DAY!

Ilona, the Fortune teller, enters with her crystal ball.

ILONA

Fortunes. Fortunes. Have your fortune told by the Incredible Ilona.

Her accent is filled with mystery, even for her.

Fortunes. Fortunes.

ASTRID

Excuse me, but could you tell my fortune?

ILONA

But of course. That is what I do. Sit down.

Astrid sits on the floor and Ilona joins her, placing the crystal ball
between them, and gazing deeply into it.

I see ... yes, it is becoming clearer now. I see a zoo. You are going to live in a zoo.

This thoroughly surprises Ilona, and she looks at Astrid.

You are going to live in a zoo?

ASTRID

No, no, no. That's my past you're looking at. I used to live in a zoo, but now I'm free.

ILONA

I see.

She doesn't.

Fine, let us try again.

She gazes back into the ball.

Ah, yes. I see that you are running along, flapping your wings. I do not know quite why.

ASTRID

Am I trying to fly?

ILONA

Perhaps. Yes, of course. There you go! Ahhh.

ASTRID

Am I flying?

ILONA

No. You tried. But sadly, you just fell down.

ASTRID

Am I ever going to fly? Can you tell?

ILONA

Perhaps. Perhaps. But perhaps not, and ... ah, yes ... perhaps you will no longer want to!

ASTRID

That's silly. I shall always want to fly. Take your crummy crystal ball and tell somebody else's fortune.

ILONA

As you wish.

She holds out her hand.

That will be one prediction.

ASTRID

I beg your pardon?

ILONA

I told you your fortune. It will cost you one prediction.

ASTRID

She looks at Henry, who throws up his wings as if to say, "Don't ask me."
She turns back to Ilona.

O.K. Let's see. I predict that you will make someone very happy today by telling a fortune which fulfills his or her dreams.

ILONA

Taken aback.

That is the best prediction I have ever received. Thank you.

ASTRID

My pleasure.

Ilona starts to leave, then turns back.

ILONA

Remember. You are bound to your fortune, no matter how you may try to change it.

ASTRID

I don't know if that's good news or bad news. But thanks for the heads-up.

ILONA

Turning and slowly exiting.

Fortunes. Fortunes. Have your fortune told by the Incredible Ilona. Fortunes. Fortunes.

She is gone.

ASTRID

Me? Not want to fly? What a thing to say. Some fortune.

HENRY

Caw! You awsked for it.

ASTRID

But it's just not true. Henry, I will fly. You just watch. In fact, I feel so good right now that I think I'll try again. Who knows? Maybe one of these times, I might hit the right angle to hold my wings at. Wheeee!

She spreads her wings and runs around the stage until she bumps into a clown who walks on with great purpose. As per usual, she falls. With very little grace.

WALLY (the clown)

Ho, ho, ho, ho. And what have we here?

He laughs a clown laugh.

HENRY

Don't mind her. She was just trying to fly.

WALLY

Ho, ho, ho, ho. Fly, you say? Ho, ho, ho, ho. That's very funny.

He laughs again. His laughter is very infectious, and he is soon joined by Henry, and eventually, even Astrid. Wally exits, laughing all the way.

ASTRID

Well, even if I don't ever fly, at least I'll entertain some people while I'm trying!

THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN FOR THE YOUNG AND THE OLD.
YOU CAN LAUGH AT A CLOWN OR HAVE YOUR FORTUNE TOLD.

ASTRID, HENRY

STAY A WHILE. WIN A PRIZE. PUT A SMILE IN YOUR EYES.
IF YOU'RE EIGHT OR EIGHTY-TWO, THE CIRCUS IS WAITING FOR YOU.
THERE'S A CIRCUS IN TOWN!

As the song finishes, a woman in a "beautiful assistant" outfit hops onstage with her arms and legs outstretched.

Henry addresses the audience.

HENRY

The fun continues.

He turns back to Astrid.

Caw! Are you going to awsk, or should I?

BEAUTIFUL ASSISTANT

She stops to address Henry and Astrid in a very wooden manner.

There is no need to ask. I'll tell you. I am the beautiful assistant ...

She bows.

To the Great Hawawa, and Indian knife-thrower, and now that I've learned the position he wants me to take when he throws knives around me, I don't want to lose it, or he might hit me.

HENRY

How utterly lawgical.

ASTRID

But why don't you just mark the position on the board?

BEAUTIFUL ASSISTANT

How can I do that? I'd have to come out of my position to mark the board, and then I wouldn't know where to mark it.

ASTRID

Of course. I never thought of that.

STRONG MALE VOICE

From offstage.

Hunyahuna!

BEAUTIFUL ASSISTANT

Oh, oh. That's Hawawa. Time for rehearsal.

HENRY

Caw! Sweet. But missing certain elements for a sound mind.

ASTRID

That's worse than being in a zoo. No one throws knives at me in the zoo.

HENRY

Caw! However bad things might be, there awlways is something worse!

ASTRID

This is so frustrating. I want to learn how to fly, but everyone around here just walks ... or hops.

HENRY

Everyone, maybe, but not everything.

A balloon floats onstage, with a dangling ribbon, followed by George, a balloon salesman, who is desperately trying to catch it. Henry and Astrid join in the chase. Finally Astrid grabs the ribbon and returns the balloon to a grateful George.

GEORGE

Thanks. I appreciate the help. These darn balloons fly away so easily that it's a wonder I ever keep enough to sell.

ASTRID

Never one to concede. Relentless.

Do you think I could learn to fly like a balloon?

GEORGE

Laughing good-naturedly.

What? No, I really don't think so.

ASTRID

Why?

GEORGE

Well, balloons fly because they're so light, and full of air, and when the wind catches them, whoosh – they're gone!

ASTRID

I haven't eaten anything at all today. Might I be light enough?

GEORGE

I don't think it's quite as easy as that. I mean, a balloon is a balloon. And an ostrich is an ostrich.

ASTRID

Oh. You noticed.

GEORGE

Kinda hard to miss.

ASTRID

Right. Astrid the Ostrich, to be precise. And this is Henry the Crow.

GEORGE

My name is George. I'd like to help you, but presumably your friend Henry can fly. What's his advice?

ASTRID

He flies. But he doesn't know to teach me.

GEORGE

Maybe you weren't meant to fly.

ASTRID

But that's not fair. If balloons can fly, why can't I?

SONG #9:

EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON

EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

BALLOONS ARE SO SOFT AND ROUND, RESEARCH HAS FOUND
THAT EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON,
BALLOONS ARE THE ANSWER FOR THE END OF WAR.
IF EVERYONE PLAYED WITH BALLOONS,
THEY WOULDN'T BE DOIN' WHAT THEY'RE DOIN'.

B'LOONS ARE FUN TO RUB.
THEN THEY STICK TO EVERYTHING.
TAKE ONE IN THE TUB.
IT WILL MAKE YOU LAUGH AND SING.
EVERYONE SWOONS OVER BALLOONS.

EVERYONE LOVES TO BLOW UP BALLOONS,
FOR WITH EVERY BLOW THEY GROW AND GROW.
YES, EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

FONDLE THEM, SQUEEZE 'EM,
PRETEND THAT YOU PLEASE 'EM.
PAINT FACES ON.
JOSTLE OR JUGGLE THEM,
SNEAK UP AND SNUGGLE 'EM.
THE CHASE IS ON.
FOR THEY WON'T STAY STILL,
THEY'RE REALLY ALIVE.
ONE LITTLE NUDGE, THEY'RE IN OVERDRIVE,
MOVING SO TERRIBLY FAST,
IT'S SIMPLY AMAZING THEY LAST.

GEORGE, ASTRID, HENRY

EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.
BALLOONS ARE SO SOFT AND ROUND, RESEARCH HAS FOUND
THAT EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.
EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

ASTRID

THE BIGGER, THE BETTER.

HENRY

YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT.

GEORGE

GO ON OUT AND TRY ONE AND SEE

GEORGE, ASTRID, HENRY

WHAT THERE IS ABOUT THEM -
WE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT 'EM.
YES, EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.
EVERYONE LOVES A BALLOON.

GEORGE

Offering a balloon to Astrid.

Here, Astrid. I can't show you how to fly like a balloon, but I can give you a balloon to play with as you may wish.

ASTRID

I can do anything I want with it?

GEORGE

Anything you want.

He moves over to give a balloon to Henry, as Astrid faces the audience.

ASTRID

Well, you heard what the man said. And what I really want to do is pop the balloon. I've always wanted to do that, but the balloons were always outside my cage. I know it's not the nicest thing to do when George has just given it to me as a present, but he did say I could do anything I want with it ...

She turns back to George.

Right, George?

GEORGE

Right, Astrid.

ASTRID

Back to audience

So, you tell me. Should I pop the balloon?

The suspicion is that normally the reply will be a resounding “Yes!”.

Alright. Here we go!!!!

She puts the balloon on the floor, looks the other way, and steps on it. When it bursts, George has his back to her. He jumps and loses control of the other balloons in his hand. There is a mad scramble, accompanied by mad scramble music, as the three of them try to retrieve as many balloons as possible. Finally, hopefully, the majority are back in George’s possession.

I’m sorry, George. I just couldn’t resist it.

GEORGE

That’s fine, Astrid. But next time, give me just a little warning!

ASTRID

I promise.

GEORGE

And look, about this flying business. There is one person who might be able to help you a bit.

ASTRID

Immediately very excited.

Who???!!!

GEORGE

Well, the trapeze act features Countess Carlotta, and I swear, the way she bounds between the swings, that some of the time she simply must be flying!

ASTRID

Do you think I could get to meet her?

GEORGE

I don’t see why not. She should just be finishing her act about now in the big tent over there. Tell her I sent you.

ASTRID

Thanks George. You're a true friend.

GEORGE

But don't get your hopes up. She probably can't help you anymore than I can.

HENRY

Caw! Don't try and tawk sense to that bird. It's a waste of breath.

George chuckles.

GEORGE

I've already figured that out. Get going, you two, or you'll miss her.

They start to exit.

ASTRID

Good-bye.

George waves after them, then walks off in the opposite direction, whistling "Everyone Loves a Balloon.". The music picks up from his whistle into ...

SONG #10:

THE CIRCUS WALTZ (instrumental)

We hear the sound of a crowd ooing and ahing offstage, leading to huge applause. Astrid and Henry enter.

ASTRID

Over here, Henry. The usher said she always comes past this way to get to her dressing room. Wow! Wasn't she something?

HENRY

Caw! For a bird without feathers, she sure flew around up there!

ASTRID

Look! Here she comes now.

The Countess Carlotta enters, with a towel around her neck.

CARLOTTA

Well, what do we have here?

ASTRID

How do you do, Ma'am? We saw the end of your performance, and ... well, George the Balloon Salesman said you might be able to let us in on how you fly around like that.

CARLOTTA

Smiling and shaking her head.

Oh, he did, did he? Well, it's really very simple. You practice, and practice, and practice some more.

ASTRID

Oh, I'm prepared to practice. Just tell me how you fly, and I'll practice day and night until I can do it as well as you.

Carlotta is charmed.

CARLOTTA

You don't really think I'm flying up there, do you?

ASTRID

But how ...?

CARLOTTA

I just use the swings to propel me around. If I was ever to miss one, I'm afraid you'd see all too quickly that I most certainly do not fly.

ASTRID

But isn't that awfully dangerous?

CARLOTTA

Very. However, I try not to do anything I'm not fully capable of, and that way, there's not much chance of my getting hurt.

HENRY

Caw! You see, Astrid. Some people accept that there are some things they cawn't do. If only some birds would!

Carlotta addresses Astrid.

CARLOTTA

Why is it so important for you to learn how to fly?

ASTRID

Well, you might have noticed that I'm a bird.

CARLOTTA

I picked up on that.

ASTRID

Birds fly. At least, all the other birds I know do. Isn't that a good enough reason?

CARLOTTA

But surely there are other things you can do that they can't. I'll bet you can run like the wind.

ASTRID

When I'm not in my cage, yeah, pretty fast.

CARLOTTA

Tell you what. Why don't you pay a visit to Mystic Manuel, the magician. Perhaps he has a trick or two in his bag that might help you fly.

HENRY

Caw! Here we go again!

ASTRID

He's my resident cynical crow.

CARLOTTA

Everyone needs one. Don't go anywhere. I'll have Manuel pay you a visit.

ASTRID

Thank you.

CARLOTTA

Good luck.

She exits.

HENRY

Can I ask a question?

ASTRID

Shoot.

HENRY

How long do you intend to keep this up?

ASTRID

As long as it takes.

HENRY

I knew that.

Manuel enters, the typical classic magician, with his moustache, cape, hat, and cane.

MANUEL

There you are. Carlotta asked me to seek you out.

He thrusts a pack of cards at Astrid.

Here, pick a card – any card.

ASTRID

Well, if you don't mind, I'd rather ...

MANUEL

But you must pick a card.

ASTRID

I'm sorry. I really don't want to.

Manuel turns to Henry.

MANUEL

How about you, sir? Pick a card.

HENRY

No way, Hoez.

MANUEL

The name is Manuel.

HENRY

Caw! No way, Manuel.

MANUEL

Mystic Manuel. And I am mystified. This is terrible. No one has ever refused to pick a card before.

ASTRID

Aside to Henry.

Does he look a bit familiar?

MANUEL

How can I show how clever I am if no one picks a card?

HENRY

Actually, yes, he does.

MANUEL

I'm ruined. Doomed to a life of solitaire.

He begins to cry, and as he wipes his nose, his moustache comes off.

Oh, what a tragedy.

ASTRID

Taking a closer look, then turning to Henry.

Henry. It's Big Mac. In disguise.

MANUEL

No, no. You found out

ASTRID

Wait a minute.

She takes a closer look.

I'm wrong. It's not Big Mac. It's George, in disguise.

Manuel cries even louder.

MANUEL

Alright.

He blows his nose.

I guess there's no use keeping it from you any longer. You see, it takes a lot of money to run a circus nowadays, so my wife and I decided to open one where we did everything ourselves.

HENRY

Caw! Impawsable.

ASTRID

You mean ...?

MANUEL

Yes. They were all me. Big mac, Wally the Clown, George, Mystic Manuel, the Great Hawawa, and the usher in the big tent.

ASTRID

And your wife?

Manuel counts on his fingers.

MANUEL

Ilona, the beautiful assistant, Countess Carlotta, ... and Oog.

HENRY

The Little Green Man was a Little Green Woman?

MANUEL

Sorry about that. But now it's over. My secret is out, and I'm ruined.

ASTRID

What are you talking about? Who are we going to tell?

HENRY

Frankly, what you are doing is nothing short of amazing.

ASTRID, HENRY

Your secret is safe with us.

They turn to leave.

MANUEL

Wait. Astrid.

ASTRID

Turning around.

What?

MANUEL

Do you still want to fly?

ASTRID

Why?

MANUEL

Well, what magic I do know, I learned from an eccentric old witch called Juanita, who lives in the big haunted house up on the hill. She might be able to help you, but I'm not sure it's a good idea to fool around with her. She can do some pretty strange things at times.

ASTRID

Hey, why not? It's worth a try.

HENRY

Caw! Astrid, don't ...

ASTRID

Henry, you asked this morning if I was an ostrich or a chicken. Well, how about you?

HENRY

Lifting himself to his full height of ... very little ... and growing a harvest of resolve.

Caw! Look awt, Witch Wawnita. Here cawm da birds!!!!

Blackout.

SCENE 4

The lights rise on Juanita in her house, stirring a witch's brew.

JUANITA

Heh, heh, heh, heh. Oh, what a master brew. Juanita, old girl, you outdid yourself this time! Heh, heh, heh, heh.

SONG #11:

JUANITA'S BOILING BREW

I LOVE TO WATCH IT BOIL AND BUBBLE,
AS I STIR A LITTLE TROUBLE.
MY SPECIAL RECIPE FOR SOME DIRE DEVILRY.
WHO KNOWS WHAT EVIL MIGHT ARISE
FROM THIS WITCHY EXERCISE?
MIXING UP JUANITA'S BOILING BREW.

WHAT MONSTERS ARE THERE LURKING
IN THE POT BY WHICH I'M WORKING?

I HAVE NOT GOT A DOUBT THAT I'LL
CONSPIRE TO BRING THEM OUT.
IF I FIND THE PERFECT BLEND,
WHAT APPARITIONS WILL ASCEND
FROM JUANITA'S BOILING BREW?

GOBLINS AND GHOSTS AND PHANTOMS
WILL CREEP OUT INTO MY ROOM.
I WILL COMMAND A FRIGHTENING ARRAY
IN MY SHADOWS OF GLOOM.

I'VE A PREMONITION ABOUT THE WORLD'S CONDITION:
IT WILL START TO WORSEN ONCE I PUT MY CURSE ON,
AIDED BY THE SIZE OF THE MONSTERS THAT ARISE
FROM JUANITA'S BOILING BREW.

She cackles, as witches are wont to do, through a short musical
interlude, as she continues to perfect her mixture.

IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY, YOU'LL HEAR THE SCREAMS SO GHOSTLY.
THE VOICES SAY BEWARE NOW. I'M VERY NEARLY THERE NOW.
TO FINISH UP THE FUN, I NEED TWO BIRDS, AND THEN I'M DONE
WITH JUANITA'S BOILING BREW!

Heh, heh, heh, heh – now, where can I find two birds?

Needless to say, there is a knock at the door.

Visitors? I never have visitors. Who could it be?

She waddles over, peeks out the window, then jumps up and
down, clapping her hands at what she sees.

Two birds!!!!

She hurries over to the door, and opens it slowly. Is it necessary
to mention that it creaks?

Come in, my dears. Can I help you?

Astrid walks confidently into the room, with Henry hopping
close behind her, unquestionably petrified.

ASTRID

Thank you. I hope you can. We were sent here by Mystic Manuel.

JUANITA

Who?

ASTRID

Mystic Manuel, the Magician at the Circus.

JUANITA

Ah, yes. Mystic Manuel. Better known as George Mansfield. He had talent, that boy, but he could never bring himself to add those necessary ...

She looks at the two of them, lick her lips, then turns to the audience.

Finishing touches.

ASTRID

Well, I wanted him to help me fly, but he couldn't. So he sent me to you.

JUANITA

Oh, bless him. A very smart move, that was.

ASTRID

You mean, you can make me fly?

JUANITA

Nothing to it, my sweet. In fact, I just happened to be mixing up a little flying potion here this very instant!

ASTRID

Is it ready to drink yet?

JUANITA

No, no, no – my pet. You don't drink it. You bathe in it.

She turns the word "bathe" into a fantasy.

HENRY

Caw! Astrid. Be cawrful.

The ladies, with a grace ladies are born with, ignore him.

ASTRID

Well, I never liked baths much. I'm more into showers. But, if you think it will help ...

JUANITA

You'll be a frying ostrich in no time. Oh, heh, heh, heh – excuse me. I mis-spoke. Of course, I meant, a flying ostrich.

HENRY

Astrid! No!

ASTRID

It's O.K., Henry. Even if it doesn't work, and even if I prefer showers, I must admit that I could use a hot bath after all that walking today.

She climbs into the pot. Henry scurries to a rafter, to be out of the reach of Juanita,

JUANITA

There now. You just relax. I'll be right back.

She turns and speaks to herself.

Now, where did that other pesky little devil go?

As she searches around, Henry addresses the audience.

HENRY

Kids –I need your help. Quickly. Astrid may thin Juanita is on her side, but I know better, and I suspect you do as well. Our only chance is to put the witch to sleep. Can you help me remember Oog's full name.

Hopefully, the kids respond with ensuing mayhem. Juanita spies Henry.

JUANITA

There you are, my pretty.

She tries to grab him. He hops out of reach. She goes to get her broom.

HENRY

Hurry, kids. What was the name.

Chaos builds. Juanita returns with the broom.

JUANITA

Come on. There's no use. I'll get you sooner or later.

She finally sweeps him down, and approaches him menacingly with the lid for the pot. Henry falls into the pot just as he remembers.

HENRY

I remember! I've got it! Oogalakitackyrigamowadamadee!

Astrid and the witch both drop their heads and begin to snore. Immediately, Henry whispers in Astrid's ear.

Eedamadawomagirykcatikalagoo.

Astrid wakes up.

ASTRID

Henry! This is no flying potion at all. She was coming at us with the lid for the pot.

HENRY

Caw! You cawtch on so quickly!

ASTRID

They climb out as quickly as possible.

Let's get out of here.

HENRY

You said it!

Astrid runs for the door. Henry flaps his wings. Nothing happens.

HENRY

Astrid.

ASTRID

Looking back.

What's the matter. Come on. Hurry!

HENRY

I can't fly. My wings are all matted down from the witch's brew.

ASTRID

Oh no. Then you'll have to run. She'll be awake any second.

HENRY

I cawn't run. I can only hop. Go. Take cawr of yourself. Don't worry about me.

ASTRID

I can't do that. You're my friend. Hurry up and hide. As soon as she wakes up, I'll make her chase me, and that'll give you a chance to get away.

HENRY

But what if she catches you?

ASTRID

Not a chance. I'm an Ostrich!

Henry hops into the audience and hides. Juanita wakes up and spots Astrid.

JUANITA

Why, you ... I'll teach you to fool with Juanita.

The chase is on. Keystone Kops. Juanita on her broom. Astrid always just out of reach. Around the stage, into the house, back onstage. Finally Juanita falls off her broom, exhausted.

HENRY

Wow. Carlotta wasn't kidding. You do run like the wind. If I could run like you, I wouldn't need wings.

ASTRID

It does make you realize –

They look at each other.

Maybe we should both just accept what we are. I'll do the running.

HENRY

And I'll do the flying. Caw! I kinda think that would be easier on all of us.

ALBERT

Calling from offstage.

Astrid! Astrid?

HENRY

It's Albert. Hide.

ASTRID

It's O.K., henry. I'm through with hiding from myself, or Albert.

Albert enters. His face lights up at the sight of Astrid.

ALBERT

Astrid. I've found you at last. Are you alright?

ASTRID

Better than I've ever been in all my life.

ALBERT

Oh. Does that mean you won't come back with me?

Astrid turns to the audience.

ASTRID

Well, it looks like it's time for one last decision. But do you know what? You've all been a big help. But I think it's time I learned to make decisions on my own.

She turns back to Albert.

ALBERT

I really wish you'd come back, Astrid. I miss you. And guess what? They finally gave you that new place to live, and it's a real beauty. In fact, you could run around to your heart's content, and never have to feel hemmed in. No roof. No lock.

ASTRID

How did you pull that off?

ALBERT

It wasn't me. I know it sounds far-fetched, but apparently a strange little green man appeared at their meeting this afternoon, and kept putting them to sleep until they agreed to give you the home you deserve.

HENRY

Caw! Oog!

ASTRID

Good old Oog. He promised he'd thank me somehow.

HENRY

Oog?

ASTRID

It's a long story, Albert. I'll tell you on the way back.

HENRY

You mean you're coming home?

ASTRID

I'm coming home.

HENRY

Caw! Well, we'd better hurry. It's getting dark.

Juanita gets up slowly.

JUANITA

Maybe I can help.

The other three all instinctively draw back, ready for anything.

ALBERT

Who's this.

ASTRID

You don't want to know.

She speaks to Juanita.

We don't need your help, thank you. Now we are going to leave slowly, and if you dare ...

JUANITA

Please. Listen. I promise to be a good witch from now on.

HENRY

I've heard that one before.

JUANITA

I'll even fly you all home on my broom.

ALBERT

Sounds a bit crowded to me.

JUANITA

I'm a witch. I can wave my ugly wand and make it bigger.

ASTRID

Still suspicious.

And in return?

JUANITA

Could you tell me how you put me to sleep? That was quite a piece of magic for a mere bird.

ASTRID

I'm not a mere bird, Juanita. I'm an ostrich.

HENRY

Oh, great. Now she's happy with what she is, and we'll have to listen to her telling us every hour of every day!

Astrid laughs.

ASTRID

Don't worry, Henry. I'll try to be as modest as you.

ALBERT

That's modest?

JUANITA

Well, what about it? Your secret, for a ride home on a supersonic broom?

ASTRID

Do you promise not to ever use it for making trouble?

JUANITA

I swear it on a stack of magic cookbooks.

ASTRID

Alright. Let's get going, and we'll tell you on the way.

JUANITA

Jumping up and down, clapping.

You really are a big-hearted bird.

She grabs her broom, and pulls out an extension so they can all fit on.

All aboard.

They board, and away they go. Almost immediately, we hear Astrid's voice.

ASTRID

Hey, Henry.

HENRY

Caw! Whawt?

ASTRID

I'm flying!!

Lights fade to black. End of play.

