

VASILISA MOST LOVELY

A play by

Kevin Kautzman

Draft:

August 7, 2015

Max Grossman

Abrams Artists Agency

275 Seventh Avenue

26th Floor

New York, NY 10001

(P) 646-461-9372

(E) mgrossman@abramsartny.com

kevinkautzman.com

VASILISA MOST LOVELY

CHARACTERS

Okay, so please don't freak out. You can do this play with as few as six actors.

VASILISA

FATHER

MOTHER

MIDWIFE

THE DOLL

STEP-MOTHER

STEP-SISTER 1

STEP-SISTER 2

BABA YAGA

THE WHITE RIDER

THE RED RIDER

ASSISTANT 1

ASSISTANT 2

ASSISTANT 3

SETTING

Once upon a time.

A NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

A dash at the end of a line (—) suggests a hard interruption. The character who speaks next should sharply interrupt the character delivering the dashed line.

A slash at the end of a line (/) suggests a soft interruption. The character who speaks next should begin his or her line early such that both characters speak briefly at the same time.

VASILISA MOST LOVELY

CASTING & DOUBLING

This play can be staged with as few as six actors. Roles for a cast of six I envision as follows:

ACTOR 1: F - VASILISA

ACTOR 2: M - FATHER, THE RIDERS, ASSISTANT 1

ACTOR 3: F - MIDWIFE, STEP-SISTER 1, BABA YAGA

ACTOR 4: F - MOTHER, THE DOLL

ACTOR 5: F - STEP-SISTER 2, ASSISTANT 2

ACTOR 6: F - STEP-MOTHER, ASSISTANT 3

For a cast of ten, you might cast as follows:

ACTOR 1: F - VASILISA

ACTOR 2: M - FATHER

ACTOR 3: F - MOTHER, BABA YAGA

ACTOR 4: F - MIDWIFE, THE DOLL

ACTOR 5: F - STEP-MOTHER

ACTOR 6: F - STEP-SISTER 1

ACTOR 7: F - STEP-SISTER 2

ACTOR 8: M/F - ASSISTANT 1, THE RED RIDER

ACTOR 9: M/F - ASSISTANT 2, THE WHITE RIDER

ACTOR 10: M/F - ASSISTANT 3

Of course feel free to use a combination that suits your needs, both in terms of doubling and gender.

DEVELOPMENT

VASILISA MOST LOVELY had a public reading in Austin, Texas April of 2013, presented by Scriptworks, a private workshop with support from Page 73 in New York, 2014, a staged reading at New York's Dixon Place in April of 2015 and a residency workshop and public presentation at the Barn Arts Collective, Maine, August 2015.

For Eleanor

Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my
childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.

- Schiller

I use to be Snow White, but I drifted.

- Mae West

ACT I

SCENE 1

VASILISA's MOTHER and FATHER. Outside a dance.

FATHER

Good evening.

MOTHER

Good evening.

FATHER

What a night.

MOTHER

Oh yes.

FATHER

I mean rarely is such a night—

MOTHER

Is that girl...

FATHER

Which?

MOTHER

You were dancing with?

FATHER

My cousin.

MOTHER

Ahh.

FATHER

I have a large family.

MOTHER

She's had a bit of wine, hasn't she?

FATHER

She has.

MOTHER

You're quite the dancer. You won the big prize.

FATHER reveals a Russian nesting doll: a matryoshka.

May I?

FATHER

Of course.

SHE opens doll, one layer followed by the next.

MOTHER

What a fascinating thing.

FATHER

Now is it a prize or a whole set of prizes?

MOTHER

Are you a philosopher?

FATHER

No.

MOTHER

Thank goodness.

FATHER

That doesn't mean I don't like a riddle. Well, what is it? One or many?

MOTHER

Both. See how they're all a little different? Yet they fit together. You'd be sad to lose even one.

FATHER

You can have it. Them. It.

MOTHER

I'm too old for dolls.

FATHER

I don't think so.

MOTHER

Mother says to fear a flatterer like the wolf. One moment his smile warms your heart.
The next it tears out your throat.

FATHER

Please. It's a gift.

MOTHER

Thank you. You're very kind.

FATHER

It's nothing.

MOTHER

(reassembling the matryoshka)

It's a little family of nothings.

FATHER

If you like.

MOTHER

So what are you if you're not a philosopher?

FATHER

An award-winning dancer.

MOTHER

Modest too.

FATHER

I'm the son of a clock-maker.

MOTHER

You make clocks then?

FATHER

No. I have butcher's hands. And worse, I can't keep them steady. Like sausages on a
griddle.

Are you nervous?
MOTHER

No.
FATHER

Cold?
MOTHER

Not at all.
FATHER

Your hands just shake?
MOTHER

Yes.
FATHER

Is there no cure?
MOTHER

The doctor suggested opium.
FATHER

I've heard it can be pleasant.
MOTHER

It was at first, but... how to say this? Once I took too much, and the walls began to bleed.
FATHER

Oh dear.
MOTHER

Better shaking hands than bleeding walls.
FATHER

Yes, well. So your hands shake.
MOTHER

I will never be a clock-maker.
FATHER

MOTHER

What will you do instead?

FATHER

If I cannot make clocks, I will sell them.

MOTHER

Well, Mister Clock. I'm sure you'll be very successful. Should we return to—

FATHER

You have very delicate hands. Very steady.

MOTHER

I sew.

FATHER

What do you sew?

MOTHER

Hats. Gloves. The usual.

FATHER

You must have some special thing you like to make.

MOTHER

Dolls.

FATHER

I knew you weren't too old for dolls.

MOTHER

I don't play with them.

FATHER

Of course. What kind of dolls do you make?

MOTHER

Children's dolls. But I can't quite make them the way I want.

FATHER

How do you want them?

MOTHER

Perfect. I want to make a doll so real, it's almost like... this is silly to say.

FATHER

Alive?

MOTHER

Yes.

FATHER

I'm sure you'll make such a doll one day.

MOTHER

That's kind of you to say. Well.

FATHER

Well.

MOTHER

They'll be wondering after us.

FATHER

We are young and eligible. Every gesture we make is full of possibility. And risk.

MOTHER

Yes, it's true.

FATHER

I presume you're eligible?

MOTHER

Oh my yes.

FATHER

Then it wouldn't be inappropriate for me to offer you my arm.

MOTHER

No.

FATHER

Well here we are.

Your hands...

MOTHER

Hmm?

FATHER

They've stopped shaking.

MOTHER

HE looks at his hands. They have stopped shaking. THEY look at one another and are no longer eligible.

End Scene

SCENE 2

Ten years later. The cries of a woman in labor. Silence. FATHER and VASILISA are in the sitting room of their home. A wooden clock on a stand ticks and tocks. The matryoshka is here as well. MOTHER lies in bed within an adjacent room. The MIDWIFE attends to her.

FATHER

And that's how your mother and I met.

VASILISA

Tell it again tell it again!

FATHER

Darling, it's late.

VASILISA

The baby's not even here yet.

FATHER

If you go to bed, it will be here when you wake.

VASILISA

Did you really win the matryoshka in a dance and give it to Mama just like that?

FATHER

Yes.

VASILISA

That one?

FATHER

That one.

VASILISA

And did your hands really stop shaking that very night?

FATHER

Yes.

VASILISA

Show me show me show me!

FATHER

(standing to pace)

Still as a pool. Even on a night such as this.

VASILISA

Tell it again!

FATHER

Vasilisa, darling, you're eight years old. I need you to be a big girl/

VASILISA

A big girl. I know. Why won't the baby just come?

FATHER

It's complicated.

VASILISA

And loud!

FATHER

That's the baby coming.

VASILISA

Mama was screaming.

FATHER

All good things have a price. The price of a new child is the mother's pain.

VASILISA

That's not fair. Why does it have to be that way?

FATHER

It's one of life's mysteries.

VASILISA

I don't like it.

FATHER

You'll understand one day.

VASILISA

I want to understand now. I want to know if I'm going to have a brother or a sister. Now now now!

FATHER

Well what do you hope to have?

VASILISA

I don't care as long as it hurries up!

FATHER

These things take time.

VASILISA

Time. Everything takes time. Tick. Tock. Tell me another story.

FATHER

Vasilisa...

VASILISA

Tell me about my name again!

FATHER

Well your name is Greek.

VASILISA

We're not Greek!

FATHER

No, we're not. But your name is.

VASILISA

How can that be?

FATHER

You can call something whatever you like. It's another mystery.

VASILISA

Tell me what my name means!

FATHER
Your name means "queen."

VASILISA
So I'm a queen!

FATHER
You're our little queen, yes.

MIDWIFE enters with a bundle. FATHER
stands.

VASILISA
Papa? What is it?

FATHER
Stay there.
(to the MIDWIFE)
Is it? No? Oh no.

VASILISA
What happened?

FATHER
Quiet! Is it... a boy or a girl?

MIDWIFE opens the bundle slightly and shows
him. The clock chimes. FATHER goes to the
clock and stops it. HE breaks the clock.

VASILISA
You broke the clock! Why did you... what are you—

FATHER
We stop the clocks when somebody...

VASILISA
Why?

FATHER
It's what we do when somebody...

VASILISA

When somebody what? What? I want to see.

FATHER

Sit down!

VASILISA

I want to see Mama.

FATHER

Yes is she... can we see her? What is it?

Isn't there something you can... Oh God.

MIDWIFE steps from him, turns and exits with the bundle.

VASILISA

Papa? Papa?

FATHER

(going toward the bed)

Vasilisa, sit and be a good girl.

VASILISA

Okay. Fine. I guess I'll just sit and stare at my hands. This is really exciting. I'll count my fingers. One. Two. Threeeeeee...

MIDWIFE returns without the bundle and heads toward where MOTHER lays in bed.

Four, fi... hey! Hey don't ignore me! Are you a witch? Papa says you're a witch. But you're not the bad kind of witch. The bad kind lives deep in the woods, and if she catches you, she makes a stew out of you and gobbles you up bones and all! Papa says you're the good kind. We need you to bring my brother or sister from heaven. Why isn't the baby here? We're paying you, aren't we? What's heaven like anyway, and why is it full of babies? And if heaven's so great why would a baby even want to come to Earth? Earth is boring. Fine. Ignore me. I'll keep counting my fingers. Five. Six...

MIDWIFE leaves to the bedside.

FATHER
(entering)

Vasilisa.

VASILISA

Seven, eight—

FATHER

Vasilisa!

VASILISA

What?

FATHER

I need you to be a big girl.

VASILISA

I'm big. I'm eight years old.

FATHER

You need to say goodbye to your mother. Do you understand?

VASILISA

Where is she going?

FATHER

Darling please, we don't have time.

VASILISA

Why not?

FATHER

You must come quickly.

VASILISA

Okay.

FATHER ushers VASILISA to the bedside
where MOTHER lies pale and dying.
MIDWIFE stands nearby.

FATHER

Quickly now.

MOTHER
Oh, my joy. My little star.

FATHER
Go to your mother.

MOTHER
Vasilisa, dear?

VASILISA
Mama.

MOTHER
Oh I'm so sorry.
(revealing a cloth doll)
Take this. It's a gift. For you.

VASILISA
She's beautiful.

MOTHER
I'm... oh I've gotten blood all over her.

VASILISA
She's perfect.

MOTHER
Do you see the stitching? Look how fine.

VASILISA
You can hardly see it!

MOTHER
Each stitch is my love for you, do you understand? The time I put into her...

VASILISA
I love her. She's my favorite.

MOTHER
(wincing)
I made her for your birthday, but I want you to have her now... ahh...

VASILISA

Mama, please open your eyes...

MOTHER

I see it. You're already a young woman. I see you grow tall and strong and beautiful. The boys won't know what to do! You're going to dance and laugh. They'll pull the stars from heaven for you if you ask.

VASILISA

I don't want stars. I want you.

FATHER

Vasilisa, say goodbye.

VASILISA

Where are you going? Where is she going?

FATHER

Heaven, dear.

VASILISA

Where's heaven?

FATHER

Very far away.

VASILISA

I want to go too.

FATHER

You can't. Not now.

VASILISA

Why not?

FATHER

Shh, come. Your mother... she's going to sleep. Say goodbye.

VASILISA

I don't want to.

FATHER

You must.

VASILISA

Goodbye, Mama.

FATHER

Come now.

MOTHER

Vasilisa! When you are sad. And alone. When you need help. Take care of your doll, and she will comfort you. Clothe her, and sing to her... ahh.

VASILISA

What should I sing?

MOTHER

Anything. A lullaby. Sing 'Little Gray Wolf.

(singing)

Baby, baby, rock-a-bye

On the edge you mustn't... oh I can't...

FATHER

It's okay.

MOTHER

Do you understand about the doll? Vasilisa?

VASILISA

I understand.

MOTHER

Kindness returns kindness. You must believe that, or... or life... oh. When did you become a young woman?

VASILISA

I'm only eight, Mama.

MOTHER

Ahh. It's very cold.

FATHER

Here. Hold my hands.

MOTHER

They're shaking.

FATHER

It's fine. I'll be fine.

MOTHER

I'm so sorry.

FATHER

Shh. Quiet now.

MOTHER

I've gotten blood on the doll.

FATHER

It's only a doll.

MOTHER

No. It's perfect. Do you know? Look at it. Oh. Now it's very warm. I don't understand this. I don't understand anything. Life is. And then it's over. And it... oh... my bright little star. My only...

FATHER

You remember when we met? I was dancing with my cousin. She was so drunk. She kept falling, and I kept picking her up, because what else could I do? You thought we were a couple. You looked so relieved when I told you we weren't. It was disarming to see that you liked me so well. And we'd only just met. You remember that's when I gave you the matryoshka? You said, "See how they're all a little different? Yet they fit together. You'd be sad to lose even one."

SHE is dead. FATHER kisses her and stands.
His hands shake. The MIDWIFE stands frozen.
VASILISA clutches the doll.

VASILISA

Papa. Your hands are shaking.

FATHER

Never mind that.

VASILISA

Mama looks gray.

FATHER

Be quiet, dear. Please.

VASILISA

Mama's turned gray, Papa. Her skin. It happened so fast.

FATHER

Vasilisa, go into the next room. Do as I say now.

VASILISA

(going, SHE sings to the doll)

Baby, baby, rock-a-bye
On the edge you mustn't lie
Or the little gray wolf will come
And will nip you on the bum
Tug you off into the wood
Underneath the willow-root

End Scene

SCENE 3

The sitting room a year later. VASILISA with the doll.

VASILISA

And that's the story of how Mama died and I got you. And how Papa broke our clock. He still hasn't fixed it! Do you like that story? Of course you do. You're in it! Oh I'm so angry at my little brother. I wish he never would have popped into Mama's belly. I'm so angry. Now I'm sad. Now I'm angry again. Rrrrrrr! Papa says I'm supposed to count to ten when I'm angry and then twenty if it doesn't go away and then thirty if I'm still angry after that. Papa's in business, so he loves numbers the way I do milk. Which is a lot. You know counting to thirty actually works, because by the time I get to twenty-five, I'm so bored I've forgotten how angry I am. But it never lasts long. I'm bored. Do dolls get bored? Mama died a year ago, but I'm still so sad. Do you get jealous of other dolls? Are you jealous of the matryoshka for having a little family of its own right in its belly? Look, let's make a little family. Papa. Mama. This is me. This is you! And this is my stupid, dead brother who killed Mama.

SHE swats the matryoshka dolls, scattering all but the baby.

Why couldn't you stay in heaven with all the other babies? Rrrrrrr! Oh. One, two... Oh. Three, four... I'm so sad... Five, six... Angry... Seven, eight...

FATHER enters with a turkey sandwich and milk.

FATHER

I brought you a snack. Oh, Vasilisa. Look at the mess! You know how special that matryoshka is to me. What are you doing?

VASILISA

I'm playing!

FATHER

What on Earth are you playing?

VASILISA

I'm playing mess.

FATHER

You're playing with your doll.

VASILISA
We play mess together.

FATHER
You're getting to be too old for this.

VASILISA
I am not. Don't touch her!

FATHER
Fine. I'm not touching her.

VASILISA
Leave us alone!

FATHER
I need you to please pick up. We're having visitors any minute.

VASILISA
Which minute?

FATHER
Any minute now.

VASILISA
I guess we'll never know what minute since we don't have a clock that works! And you sell clocks for a living!

FATHER
The clock is my business.

VASILISA
I live here too!

FATHER
What do you need a clock for?

VASILISA
To tell time!

FATHER
You're a child!

VASILISA

If the clock doesn't work, how will I grow up?

FATHER

Don't be silly. Now clean up before our visitors arrive.

VASILISA

Who's visiting?

FATHER

I made a new friend.

VASILISA

A new lady friend.

FATHER

Yes.

VASILISA

Because I'm not good enough for you.

FATHER

Of course you are.

VASILISA

Then why do you need a lady friend?

FATHER

I don't need a lady friend. I want a lady friend.

VASILISA

Why?

FATHER

Because I'm lonely.

VASILISA

But I'm right here!

FATHER

You don't understand.

VASILISA

Your hands are shaking.

FATHER

That's just the way it is.

VASILISA

Your hands never used to shake. I remember! Before Mama died.... So this new lady friend isn't like Mama!

FATHER

Nobody can replace your mother.

VASILISA

Exactly! So why bother?

FATHER

She makes me feel less alone. And you need... I need her to help me with you.

VASILISA

I'm not going to like her.

FATHER

Vasilisa! Be respectful. Get off the floor.

VASILISA

Rrrrrr! I'm sad, and I'm angry. Mostly angry. Rrrrrr!

FATHER

Well so am I. Rrrrrr.

VASILISA

You're not doing it right.

FATHER

Rurr?

VASILISA

No! Rrrrrrrrrr!

FATHER

Oh. Rrrrrrrrrr!

That's it.

VASILISA

RRRRRRRRRRRR!

FATHER

Rrrrrr...

VASILISA
(quiet)

You miss your mother.

FATHER

Yes.

VASILISA

It's okay to be sad and angry sometimes.

FATHER

Really?

VASILISA

Just so long as you aren't always sad and angry.

FATHER

So let's be sad and angry just the three of us!

VASILISA

Three?

FATHER

One, two, three!

VASILISA
(holding out the doll)

Of course.

FATHER

Why can't things stay like they are?

VASILISA

FATHER

I like this woman. We understand each other. She has daughters of her own. They're older. They'll be like sisters to you. Don't you want sisters?

VASILISA

No.

FATHER

Sure you do.

VASILISA

Sure I don't.

FATHER

I'm not going to argue. You need to learn to show some respect. Your new mother's not going to put up with any of your rudeness. Now pick up immediately.

VASILISA

I don't want to.

FATHER

I'm going to wait out front for our guests to arrive, and if I return and the room is still a mess, you'll wish you had listened. Do you hear me?

VASILISA

I'm still so angry.

FATHER

(exiting)

Count to thirty.

VASILISA grabs the doll.

VASILISA

One, two BORED! Ahh. I don't want to pick up. Angry sad. Sad angry. I miss Mama. I'm so alone. Nobody loves me except you, and you're just a doll. Mama said I should take care of you, and you would comfort me. It's been a whole year, and I'm not comforted. Am I doing something wrong? I'll sing. I only know the words to one song. Do you want to hear it? Yes? Oh, okay, I'll sing it to you again.

Baby, baby, rock-a-bye

VASILISA (CONTD)

On the edge you mustn't lie
 Or the little gray wolf will come
 And will nip you on the bum
 Tug you off into the wood
 Underneath the willow-root

It's kind of a scary song. Now I'm sad and angry and scared. Are you hungry? Is that it?
 Do you want a sandwich? I bet you do. Here you go.

SHE feeds the doll and gives it a drink of milk.
 THE DOLL appears, a slash of red across its
 face where MOTHER's blood stained it. SHE
 devours the sandwich.

THE DOLL

More more more more more!

VASILISA

Wow! You're hungry!

THE DOLL

What's this?

VASILISA

Turkey I think.

THE DOLL

Turkey I think?

VASILISA

Just turkey. It's a bird. Gobble gobble gobble.

THE DOLL

Gobble gobble gobble.

VASILISA

That's right. Gobble gobble gobble!

THE DOLL

Gobble gobble gobble!

VASILISA

Hey! Since when can you—

Ahh ahh ahh!

THE DOLL

What? Are you thirsty?

VASILISA

Yes. Thirsty.

THE DOLL

Here.

VASILISA

THE DOLL guzzles milk.

THE DOLL

That was?

VASILISA

Milk.

THE DOLL

Melk?

VASILISA

Milk.

THE DOLL

Melk. I want!

VASILISA

More milk?

THE DOLL

More melk.

VASILISA

Okay. Melk.

THE DOLL

More more more.

VASILISA

I can't.

THE DOLL
Why?

VASILISA
I have to pick up.

THE DOLL
Why?

VASILISA
The matryoshka's all over the place. I have to find the...

THE DOLL
I help.

THE DOLL, in a supernatural flurry,
reassembles the matryoshka.

VASILISA
Whoa.

THE DOLL
All together.

VASILISA
That was fast. Thank you.

THE DOLL
More melk.

VASILISA
(exiting)
Stay right there.

THE DOLL approaches the clock.

THE DOLL
Bong. Bong. Bong.

VASILISA
(entering)

Here. Melk.

THE DOLL gives VASILISA the matryoshka,
guzzles the "melk" and points at the clock.

Bong bong bong.
THE DOLL

It's a clock.
VASILISA

Cock.
THE DOLL

VASILISA
No. A cock's a rooster. That's another kind of bird. It wakes you up in the morning. Cock
a doodle do. This is a clock. Cllllock.

Cllllock. Bong bong bong. Bing.
THE DOLL

VASILISA
Right! But this one doesn't go bong or bing. It's broken.

Broken.
THE DOLL

VASILISA
That's the exact time my Mama died. It's kind of sad. You have very pretty hair.

So do you.
THE DOLL

You know our words.
VASILISA

I've been listening. What is... wolf?
THE DOLL

What's a wolf?
VASILISA

THE DOLL

Yes. What is it?

VASILISA

It's a kind of dog. Big fangs and claws and yellow eyes.

THE DOLL

Wolf is here?

VASILISA

Oh no. They live in the woods.

THE DOLL

Oh good. Phew.

VASILISA

I need to learn some different songs.

THE DOLL

Cllllllock. Bong bong bong!

VASILISA

Mama was right, I feel better.

THE DOLL

Who is Mama?

VASILISA

My Mama. She made you.

THE DOLL

Made me?

VASILISA

She sewed you. I guess she's your mother too. You even have some of her blood. So we're sisters.

THE DOLL

Sisters.

VASILISA

From the same mother.

THE DOLL
Where is Mother?

VASILISA
She's gone.

THE DOLL
Let's bring her some melk.

VASILISA
She's someplace you can't bring melk.

THE DOLL
Oh I see.

VASILISA
Do you remember her?

THE DOLL
I remember hands.

VASILISA
Me too.

THE DOLL
Nice hands. Soft. Quick. They'd tickle, then away. Tickle, then away. Until I was all the way me. You look like her. Same hands.

VASILISA
Really?

THE DOLL
Yes. The same. Who made this?

VASILISA
What?

THE DOLL
This... bag. On me.

VASILISA
You mean your dress?

THE DOLL
Yes. Who made this?

VASILISA
I did.

THE DOLL
Try again.

VASILISA
You don't like it?

THE DOLL
Try again.

VASILISA
What do you want instead?

THE DOLL
Something not this.

VASILISA
Okay. What color?

THE DOLL
Like this.

VASILISA
Like my hair?

THE DOLL
Yes. Beautiful.

VASILISA
Mama was right. I'm not sad or angry anymore since I fed you.

THE DOLL
That's good. I am happy. Shall we play clllllock? Bong bong bong.

VASILISA
Bong bong bong!

THE DOLL

Bing bing bing!

VASILISA

Bing bing bing! Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

FATHER enters with STEP-MOTHER and
STEP-SISTERS. VASILISA and THE DOLL
don't notice.

THE DOLL

Tick.

VASILISA

Tock.

VASILISA & THE DOLL

Bong bong bong!

VASILISA

Bing! What time is it? Bong!

THE DOLL

It's time for tea! It's time for lunch! It's time for breakfast!

VASILISA

Ahh! We're going backward!

THE DOLL

Bing bong bing.

THE DOLL puts a finger over its lips and
freezes.

VASILISA

We're going to be best friends! Hey. What is it?

FATHER

Vasilisa!

THE DOLL stands still with a finger to her lips like SHE doesn't want VASILISA to give away a secret. Only VASILISA sees her. VASILISA holds the cloth doll in her hands.

What?
VASILISA

Who are you talking to?
FATHER

Nobody.
VASILISA

It's very impolite to lie, Vasilisa.
FATHER

My doll.
VASILISA

She still talks to dolls?
STEP-SISTER 1

She's still a little baby!
STEP-SISTER 2

Quiet, you two! It's not polite to talk about somebody when they're in the room like they're not even there.
STEP-MOTHER

I see you didn't clean up like I asked.
FATHER

My doll was hungry. I haven't been feeding her like I should.
VASILISA

The STEP-SISTERS laugh.

Be quiet!
STEP-MOTHER

FATHER

We'll talk about this later. I want you to meet my new friend. She's going to be like a mother to you. And these are your new sisters. Say hello.

VASILISA

No.

FATHER

Vasilisa.

VASILISA

I don't want to. They're not my sisters!

FATHER

Be polite! I'm sorry. She's not normally like this.

VASILISA

Yes, I am! This is me normal! I'm terrible! You don't want to marry him! La la la la la. Leave us alone!

FATHER

Vasilisa!

STEP-MOTHER

It's fine. What do you have there, sweetie?

VASILISA

She's not a what, she's a who.

STEP-MOTHER

What fine stitching. Oh but she's stained, dear. Is this rust?

VASILISA

It's blood.

STEP-MOTHER

Oh my. Well we can wash that right out. No? Where did you get her?

VASILISA

Mama made her.

STEP-MOTHER

You must miss your mama very much.

VASILISA

Yes. More than the whole world times thirty, plus thirty, plus another thirty times thirty. Plus thirty again.

STEP-MOTHER

That's an awful lot.

VASILISA

It's an awful lot plus thirty. Plus all the stars in the sky.

STEP-MOTHER

I understand.

VASILISA

My doll helps, just like Mama said.

STEP-MOTHER

Does your doll have a name?

VASILISA

Nope. But I fed her a turkey sandwich and melk and she talked to me and put the matryoshka family back together real fast. See?

STEP-MOTHER

Well now. What do you like to do aside from play with your doll? No? Oh my. Are you very shy?

VASILISA

I'm not very shy. I just don't like you.

FATHER

Vasilisa, be polite!

STEP-MOTHER

It's all right. May I see her? I know a trick to take that stain right out. No? That's all right. So you like to play with your doll. Is that really all you like to do? Come on, dear. I won't bite.

FATHER

She likes to sew. Just like her mother did. She made her doll's dress.

THE DOLL

It's a bag.

STEP-MOTHER

Well that's nice. We like to sew too. Don't we, girls?

STEP-SISTERS

Yes, Mother.

STEP-MOTHER

Say "hello" to your new sister.

STEP-SISTERS

Hello.

FATHER

Say "hello," dear.

VASILISA

Bing bong bing. Tick. Tock. Bong!

FATHER

Vasilisa, you're embarrassing me!

VASILISA

Bong! Bong! Bong!

FATHER

What are you supposed to be?

VASILISA

I'm a clock!

FATHER

Why?

VASILISA

Because it's time for them to leave!

FATHER

Say "hello" to your new sisters.

VASILISA

No.

FATHER

So help me if you don't behave, I will throw your doll into the fire.

THE DOLL

Gah! Fire? That sounds bad.

VASILISA

No! Don't! Please!

FATHER

Say hello then.

VASILISA

Hello.

STEP-MOTHER

Well that's nice. Come, Girls. Let's get our things.

We're going to get along fine. I can tell already. Just one big, happy family.

End Scene

SCENE 4

The sitting room seven years later. VASILISA and THE DOLL.

VASILISA

And that's how my parents met and fell in love, how my mother died, how she gave you to me, how I only know that one scary song about a wolf in the woods, how I figured out that if I fed you turkey sandwiches and melk you'd come alive and help with my chores, and how I ended up stuck with a wicked step-mother and ugly step-sisters. And now I'm sixteen and telling a story to a doll. Blargh.

THE DOLL

Tell it again tell it again!

VASILISA

Again? Really?

THE DOLL

I'm kidding.

VASILISA

Whew.

THE DOLL

You never named me!

VASILISA

Nope. But you can have a name if you want.

THE DOLL

How about "Chalk Board?"

VASILISA

Chalk board?

THE DOLL

Call me "The Great Potato"!

VASILISA

Umm, okay.

THE DOLL

I am the Great Potato! Bow before the Queen of Tubers!

VASILISA

You're kind of obsessed with food.

STEP-MOTHER

(entering)

Where are your sisters?

VASILISA

I don't know.

STEP-MOTHER

You're useless!

VASILISA

I do all the chores while you go shopping!

STEP-MOTHER

Girls! Vasilisa, I need you to prepare tea for four. With the good set. Quickly now. We're having a guest. I need finger sandwiches with cucumber and tomato.

VASILISA

I'm busy.

STEP-MOTHER

No, you aren't.

VASILISA

(with the cloth doll)

I'm meeting with the Queen of Tubers! BOW BEFORE THE QUEEN OF STARCH!

THE DOLL

She's not bowing.

STEP-MOTHER

Do as I say!

VASILISA

(exiting)

Ugh. Fine.

STEP-MOTHER

Girls!

The STEP-SISTERS enter.

STEP-SISTER 1

What is it, Mother?

STEP-MOTHER

Quickly. We must dress for tea. A real tea! There's a suitor in town from the Palace. And he's coming here! You might finally get an invited to a dance.

STEP-SISTER 2

Ahh!

STEP-SISTER 1

Ahh!

STEP-SISTERS

(exiting)

Ahhhhhhh!

VASILISA

(entering with a tray)

A suitor from the Palace is coming here?

STEP-MOTHER

Yes.

VASILISA

What does he look like?

STEP-MOTHER

Never you mind.

VASILISA

I bet he's handsome.

STEP-MOTHER

Whether he's handsome matters less than if he has money. Better rich and plain looking than handsome and poor, in the case of men anyway. Now set four places, quickly.

Four places?

VASILISA

That's right.

STEP-MOTHER.

What about me?

VASILISA

You're going to serve us!

STEP-MOTHER

What is this now?

FATHER
(entering in a robe, disoriented)

What are you doing out of bed?

STEP-MOTHER

I heard a ruckus.

FATHER

Come come come.

STEP-MOTHER

What time is it?

FATHER

It's time for your medicine.

STEP-MOTHER

Oh good.

FATHER

It's always time for his medicine.

VASILISA

Vasilisa! Make the sandwiches!

STEP-MOTHER

VASILISA
(to THE DOLL)

Give me a hand here!

VASILISA exits with THE DOLL.

STEP-MOTHER
Your daughter still talks to her doll.

FATHER
Does it talk back?

STEP-MOTHER
I'm beginning to think madness runs in your family.

FATHER
Not madness. Visions. You wouldn't believe the things I see.

STEP-MOTHER
(with a vial of the opium)
I'm sure. Here now.

FATHER
Are my hands shaking? They are, aren't they?

STEP-MOTHER
Take the medicine.

FATHER
I see a snowstorm! A black rider. A white rider. A red rider. A gate of bones. And I see a cabin in the woods. On chicken legs!

STEP-MOTHER
Yes of course. Now would you take this? There you go. Back to bed with you.

HE staggers off. The STEP-SISTERS return in wonderful dresses and pearls.

STEP-SISTER 1
How do we look?

STEP-MOTHER
Like lilies on a pond! He'll be stunned.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh oh oh. I'm nervous.

VASILISA returns with sandwiches. THE
DOLL carries the teapot.

THE DOLL

Hot hot hot!

STEP-MOTHER

Vasilisa, tell your sisters how lovely they look.

VASILISA

Oh yes. They're so lovely it makes me want to barf. May I go and change?

STEP-MOTHER

(revealing a maid uniform)

Yes. Wear this.

VASILISA

I am not your maid!

STEP-MOTHER

Don't take that tone with me!

VASILISA

I'm not going to wear this.

STEP-SISTER 1

What, too proud to help your sisters?

STEP-SISTER 2

Don't you love us?

STEP-SISTER 1

A suitor comes from the Palace and you won't even help us get an invitation to the dance!

STEP-SISTER 2

What a mean little slug.

STEP-SISTER 1

And lazy too!

STEP-SISTER 2

Don't forget crazy! She sixteen and still talks to a doll!

STEP-SISTER 1

Lazy, crazy Vasilisa!

STEP-SISTER 2

Lazy, crazy Vasilisa!

STEP-MOTHER

Enough! Our guest will be here any minute, and we don't want to look like we can't afford a maid. So you are now our maid. Easy.

VASILISA

I won't do it.

STEP-SISTER 1

Oh here we go.

STEP-MOTHER

Girls, wait in front of the house.

STEP-SISTERS

(exiting)

Yes, Mother.

STEP-MOTHER

I will tell you what my mother told me when I disobeyed. I wasn't a spoiled brat like you, but I could be willful.

(taking a poker)

My mother took a hot poker from the fire and said, "Do as I say, or the next time you wake will be a rude one."

VASILISA

You wouldn't dare.

STEP-MOTHER

Don't tempt me.

VASILISA

I'll tell Father.

STEP-MOTHER

Your father is ill. Now put on the uniform.

VASILISA does. THE DOLL helps.

VASILISA

I hate you.

STEP-MOTHER

And here's the hat.

STEP-SISTER 1

(entering)

He's here! He's here!

STEP-MOTHER

(exiting)

Steep the tea. And don't scald it!

STEP-SISTER 1

(exiting)

Vasilisa! You look ridiculous!

THE DOLL

It's not so bad.

VASILISA

My life is over.

THE DOLL

We better make the tea.

VASILISA

I might as well be dead.

THE DOLL

You don't mean that.

VASILISA
(yelling)

Baby, baby, rock-a-bye
On the edge you mustn't lie

THE DOLL

You're going to make her mad.

VASILISA

I don't care.

THE DOLL

She'll get you with a hot poker! She's mean!

VASILISA

I hate them. I hate them! I HATE THEM!

STEP-MOTHER and STEP-SISTERS enters.

STEP-MOTHER

Vasilisa, clean this up.

VASILISA

What? Is this a joke?

STEP-MOTHER

Girls, go to your room.

STEP-SISTERS
(exiting)

Yes, Mother.

STEP-MOTHER

There was a misunderstanding. Clean up and start dinner.

VASILISA

He came, didn't he?

STEP-MOTHER
(exiting)

Start dinner.

VASILISA

He came to see me! And you sent him away! Like I don't even exist!

THE DOLL

(eating a finger sandwich)

Hey, these are pretty good. It's not turkey, but still...

VASILISA

My life is over.

End Scene

SCENE 5

The sitting room the following day.

STEP-SISTER 1

You remember the day we first met her? It was right in this room. It feels like yesterday. She was so weird!

STEP-SISTER 2

She's still weird.

STEP-SISTER 1

Yeah, but she's really pretty too, so—

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh come on. She's a freak!

STEP-SISTER 1

Shh! You'll wake the big bad wolf.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh come on! Nothing wakes him up.

STEP-SISTER 1

Be quiet!

STEP-SISTER 2

Don't snap at me! You're such a nervous wreck!

STEP-SISTER 1

Am not.

STEP-SISTER 2

Ever since you didn't get invited to that dance you've been—

STEP-SISTER 1

Shut up!

STEP-SISTER 2

It's the truth.

STEP-SISTER 1

You didn't get invited either!

STEP-SISTER 2

I'm young! I've still got time! You're getting old!

STEP-SISTER 1

Shh! You'll wake him up.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh he'll sleep through anything. He takes too much of that opium. That's why Mother's sending him away.

STEP-SISTER 1

Does Vasilisa even know?

STEP-SISTER 2

No. She's going to freak out! Maybe we should—

STEP-SISTER 1

Just hurry up and find the doll!

STEP-SISTER 2

She keeps it here somewhere.

STEP-SISTER 1

In the clock?

STEP-SISTER 2

Yeah. What a weirdo. Here it is!

STEP-SISTER 1

(revealing scissors)

Give it to me. Quick!

STEP-SISTER 2

Hurry! She's coming!

STEP-SISTER 1 cuts off the cloth doll's arms.
THEY exit with the arms. VASILISA enters.

VASILISA

I've got melk. Here you go... Oh! Oh no! What happened to your—

THE DOLL

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! They cut my arms off!

VASILISA

Oh. Oh I hate them.

THE DOLL

Get my arms back!

VASILISA

I'm looking!

THE DOLL

Look faster!

VASILISA

Does it hurt?

THE DOLL

Just find them!

VASILISA

They're not here!

THE DOLL

Eeeeeee! They took them! Go get them back!

FATHER

(entering)

What's not here?

VASILISA

Papa, are you okay?

FATHER

Well the sun keeps setting and rising in my bedroom. Oh. When did you become a woman?

VASILISA

It just happened.

FATHER

You look so womanly.

VASILISA

Thank you. I guess. I'm sixteen, so...

FATHER

You were talking to the doll, weren't you?

VASILISA

They cut off her arms!

FATHER

They'll show up.

THE DOLL

Ahhhhhhhh! I want my arms back!

VASILISA

Oh, Papa. When's the last time you had a bath?

FATHER

I don't recall.

VASILISA

How can you not recall?

FATHER

The opium stops my hands from shaking so I can work on the clock. But I forget things.

VASILISA

You need a bath.

FATHER

What does your doll think of me? Ask her.

VASILISA

What do you think of my father?

THE DOLL

What do you want me to say?

The truth. VASILISA

He's very sad. THE DOLL

What'd she say? What? FATHER

You're very handsome. VASILISA

No, I didn't. THE DOLL

Oh. Well. That's nice. FATHER

I didn't say that. Hey! You! I think you're sad and you need a bath! And I want my arms back/ THE DOLL

And she wants to see you dance. VASILISA

Really? THE DOLL

Really? FATHER

Yes. Very much. VASILISA

I need a partner. FATHER

We can dance. VASILISA

Fine! I'll just sit here armless and watch you dance! THE DOLL

THEY dance.

VASILISA

Youch! Watch the toes.

FATHER

Sorry. I'm nervous.

VASILISA

Relax. You know how. One two three. Bup bup bup.

FATHER

I can't.

VASILISA

It's okay. I'll lead.

FATHER

No, I really can't. It's... I can't keep steady time/

VASILISA

It's easy. Bup bup bup. Bup bup bup.

FATHER

How did you learn this?

VASILISA

I've been dancing.

FATHER

I still think of you as my little girl.

STEP-MOTHER

(entering)

What are you doing to your father?

FATHER

I'm fine.

STEP-MOTHER

Ugh. You smell like a barn. Here, come on. Come on!

THEY exit.

THE DOLL

My nose itches!

VASILISA

I'll find your arms!

THE DOLL

Ahh! Scratch my nose!

VASILISA scratches THE DOLL's nose, to the
DOLL's relief.

Oh. Ahh. Thanks. Oh. Get my arms! Hurry!

STEP-MOTHER

(entering)

Vasilisa.

VASILISA

What do you want?

STEP-MOTHER

What are you doing dancing with your father?

VASILISA

He asked.

STEP-MOTHER

He asked.

VASILISA

Yes! He's a good dancer!

STEP-MOTHER

You were leading!

VASILISA

He forgot the steps.

STEP-MOTHER
He's ill.

VASILISA
You keep drugging him!

STEP-MOTHER
He needs it for his hands.

VASILISA
No, he doesn't!

STEP-MOTHER
The doctor says so. If he's ever going to work again, he needs his hands—

VASILISA
His hands are fine. They just shake a little.

STEP-MOTHER
Your father is very ill. You're too young to understand.

VASILISA
Oh I understand.

STEP-MOTHER
He hasn't worked in over a year! A man works, Vasilisa. Your father is broken.

VASILISA
That doesn't stop you from spending all our money! You think pearls and dresses will make those ugly daughters of yours beautiful? It would take an ocean of pearls to get them invited to a dance and a dress for a queen for somebody to actually ask them to—

STEP-MOTHER slaps her.

THE DOLL
Are you okay? Vasilisa?

VASILISA
Shut up!

STEP-MOTHER
I didn't say anything.

VASILISA

They took my doll's arms. I want them back. Now.

THE DOLL

There you go! Go get 'em!

STEP-MOTHER

You're sixteen years old.

VASILISA

They cut them off!

STEP-MOTHER

It's a doll!

VASILISA

My mother made this doll.

STEP-MOTHER snatches and throws the doll
to the floor.

STEP-MOTHER

It's a child's doll!

VASILISA

Then I am still a child!

A moment.

STEP-MOTHER

Your father is going away.

VASILISA

What?

STEP-MOTHER

And we're moving.

VASILISA

What? Where?

STEP-MOTHER

The woods.

Why?
VASILISA

The money's gone.
STEP-MOTHER

Because you spent it.
VASILISA

Your father doesn't work.
STEP-MOTHER

You want me out of the way so your daughters can meet somebody!
VASILISA

That has nothing to do with it.
STEP-MOTHER

I won't go.
VASILISA

Yes, you will. And you're going to cook and clean and gather wood and be glad to have a roof over your head.
STEP-MOTHER

You can't make me.
VASILISA

Oh? What are you going to do?
STEP-MOTHER

I'll leave.
VASILISA

Where?
STEP-MOTHER

Any where.
VASILISA

No, you won't.
STEP-MOTHER

VASILISA

How do you know?

STEP-MOTHER

Because you're still a child.

(exiting)

I'll get the damned doll's arms.

VASILISA picks up THE DOLL.

THE DOLL

Finally! Some action!

VASILISA

Shut up.

THE DOLL

You shut up.

VASILISA

I'm done talking to you.

THE DOLL

Vasilisa. Come on. Hey. Oh fine. Armless and friendless. This is great.

STEP-MOTHER returns with the arms.

STEP-MOTHER

Here. Don't look at me like that. I didn't cut them off. Just sew them back on.

THE DOLL

Yes, hurry!

VASILISA

I can't. The stitch is too difficult. I don't know it. It won't look right.

STEP-MOTHER

Then you'd better learn it. And say goodbye to your father. He leaves tomorrow.

End Scene

SCENE 6

The following day. The sitting room. VASILISA practices stitching on a pillow. The doll remains armless. STEP-MOTHER enters dragging a trunk. SHE lets the trunk drop to the floor, goes to the bedroom, and returns. The STEP-SISTERS enter and watch.

VASILISA

(to the doll)

And that's the story of how my horrible Step-Sisters cut off your arms. And this is how I'll sew them back on. By learning this really hard stitch. It's going to take time, but I can do it, because I'm smart and patient and don't care who knows I still talk to a doll.

(whispering)

Sometimes I feel like I'm going crazy.

FATHER enters, bedraggled and dressed for a journey

STEP-MOTHER

Say goodbye to your father.

VASILISA

You don't have to go.

FATHER

I'm not well.

VASILISA

Please don't go.

STEP-MOTHER

We'll miss the train.

FATHER

(taking the clock)

I'll come back when I've fixed this clock. That's my problem. A man needs work, and I never learned a trade. Men in my family have always worked with our hands. It's in our blood.

VASILISA

My blood too.

FATHER

Yes. Of course. Well, they're going to make my hands right, and it will be like it was. Do you remember?

VASILISA

I remember.

FATHER

Please don't be sad. Oh. Look at your doll? It lost its arms! Why haven't you sewed them back on?

VASILISA

I can't do the stitch. It has to be perfect.

FATHER

You're just like your mother. Do you think of her often?

VASILISA

No.

FATHER

(whispering)

I think of her every day. I see her in you, you know. You must see it too!

STEP-MOTHER

The train!

VASILISA

Please stay.

STEP-MOTHER

You'll miss the train.

STEP-MOTHER and FATHER begin to exit.

VASILISA

(with the matryoshka)

Papa! Wait. Here.

SHE opens the matryoshka and gives him the biggest one.

FATHER

We can't separate them.

VASILISA

Please, take them. This way you won't forget me. When you come back we'll put them together again, and/

STEP-MOTHER

Girls, one of you give me a hand with this trunk. One of you stay with her.

STEP-SISTER 1

I'm not staying with her.

STEP-SISTER 2

Fine. I don't want to carry some old trunk anyway.

STEP-SISTER 1

Good.

STEP-MOTHER, STEP-SISTER 1, and
FATHER exit.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh don't blubber.

VASILISA

I'm all alone.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh hush. Crying's not going to do any good. Would you hush?

VASILISA

Why are you so mean to me?

STEP-SISTER 2

Let me see the doll.

VASILISA

What are you going to do?

STEP-SISTER 2

Just let me see it.

VASILISA

No!

STEP-SISTER 2

Would you give me the doll? I won't hurt it.

VASILISA

It's a her.

STEP-SISTER 2

(taking the doll)

It's an it. Oh I know this stitch. I'll show you if you stop crying.

VASILISA

Really?

STEP-SISTER 2

Yes. Just don't tell. My sister really hates you. Mother too.

VASILISA

What did I ever do to them?

STEP-SISTER 2

(preparing to stitch)

They're jealous. I guess I am too.

VASILISA

Oh.

STEP-SISTER 2

You know what the boys in town call you? Vasilisa Most Lovely. They don't invite us to the dances, but you've been invited to a bunch already.

VASILISA

Just a couple.

STEP-SISTER 2

That's more than us! And we're older! If something doesn't change, we'll end up a couple of old maids. And I hate cats!

VASILISA

I'm sorry.

STEP-SISTER 2

No, you're not. Shut up and watch. One two three. Easy. See? You try.

VASILISA

Like this?

STEP-SISTER 2

That's it.

VASILISA

One... two... three.

STEP-SISTER 2

Like dancing with your hands.

VASILISA

Yes. Thank you.

STEP-SISTER 2

I had a little stuffed wolf.

VASILISA

Really?

STEP-SISTER 2

Yeah. But I got angry and tore its head off when our father left.

VASILISA

I thought he died.

STEP-SISTER 2

That's what Mother wants everyone to think. But it's not true.

VASILISA

Where'd your father go?

STEP-SISTER 2

I don't know.

VASILISA

I don't know what's worse: when a parent dies or when they leave.

STEP-SISTER 2

Apples and oranges.

VASILISA

Still. Fruit.

STEP-SISTER 2

Yeah. I'm sorry about your doll.

VASILISA

It's okay. See? Like new.

STEP-SISTER 2

This is our secret. If Mother knew I told you about Father leaving, she'd hit me with a frying pan. Okay?

VASILISA

Okay. The boys really call me that?

STEP-SISTER 2

Don't let it go to your head. And don't think this means I like you any better. Because I don't. I just hate to listen to you cry.

VASILISA

Thanks.

STEP-SISTER 2

(exiting)

Play with your doll. Weirdo.

VASILISA

All right now! You've got your arms back. I hope you're happy. Here. Have some melk.

THE DOLL

My arms! They're back!

VASILISA

You're welcome.

THE DOLL

(scratching)

Ahh ahh ahh ahh ahh. That feels so good! Ahhhhhhhhhh! Oh! Melk! Gimme!

VASILISA

Here you go.

THE DOLL

(guzzling the melk)

So we're talking again, huh?

VASILISA

Yeah. I guess.

THE DOLL

Oh thank heavens. Hey! She taught you the stitch! Maybe the ugly step-sisters aren't so bad.

VASILISA

One of them at least.

THE DOLL

Your father's gone?

VASILISA

Yeah. I'm all alone.

THE DOLL

No, you're not.

VASILISA

Thanks.

THE DOLL

Do you want to play tea?

VASILISA

No.

THE DOLL

You can do my hair?

VASILISA

No.

THE DOLL

One day you're going to die, aren't you? Just like Mother.

VASILISA

Yeah.

THE DOLL

What's going to happen to me?

VASILISA

The same thing that happens to every other doll. People stop loving you. Then they throw you away like trash.

THE DOLL

I'm not trash.

VASILISA

Neither am I.

THE DOLL

It's not fair.

VASILISA

No. It's not. Oh. And we're moving to the woods.

THE DOLL

What? Why?

VASILISA

The money's gone.

THE DOLL

Don't wolves live in the woods?

VASILISA

Yep. And witches too.

THE DOLL

Witches?

VASILISA

Cranky old ladies. They'll make a stew out of you and gobble you right up!

THE DOLL

Eek.

End of Act

ACT II

SCENE 1

The house by the woods. Sparsely furnished. Drafty. A fixer upper.

THE DOLL

(to the matryoshka)

And that's the story of how Vasilisa Most Lovely became Vasilisa Most Depressed. And how she stopped being nice. And how we moved to this terrible little drafty house near the woods where the wolves and witches live.

VASILISA

Would you shut up?

THE DOLL

See how mean she is?

(to the matryoshka)

Oh yes! She used to be so nice! But now she's sad and mean!

VASILISA

I'm not mean! I'm busy! I have a thousand things to do before they get back from town. I have to make this stew, finish a quilt they're just going to sell anyway, and I have to chop wood. And it's freezing out! Why don't you chop the wood so I can finish this stew?

THE DOLL

What about the wolves?

VASILISA

There are no wolves.

The loud, long howl of a wolf.

THE DOLL

There's a witch though!

VASILISA

That's what they say. A real Baba Yaga. She lives in a cabin built on chicken legs, and it's surrounded by a gate of human bones. And she eats little girls! Oooooo!

THE DOLL

Gah! What if she's out there right now?

VASILISA

She lives deep in the woods.

THE DOLL

Maybe she's out for a walk. She'll gobble me up.

VASILISA

She doesn't eat dolls. She eats people.

THE DOLL

I'm scared.

VASILISA

It's a story to scare little kids. She's probably not even real.

THE DOLL

It feels real.

VASILISA

You're getting on my nerves. I think they might be right.

THE DOLL

About what?

VASILISA

About us talking.

THE DOLL

Oh.

VASILISA

I don't think it's good for me.

THE DOLL

You're just depressed.

VASILISA

Or I'm going crazy.

THE DOLL

Oh! Great! How's that supposed to make me feel?

VASILISA

You're just a doll.

THE DOLL
What?

VASILISA
You heard me.

THE DOLL
You don't mean that.

VASILISA
Hand me that potato. Brr. It's freezing.

THE DOLL
We'll make a big fire and you'll feel better.

VASILISA
Is that all you ever want?

THE DOLL
What?

VASILISA
For me to feel better.

THE DOLL
Yes.

VASILISA
I want you to want more.

THE DOLL
Like what?

VASILISA
I don't know.

THE DOLL
I'll chop the wood. You finish that stew, okay? Vasilisa?

VASILISA
Yeah.

THE DOLL exits. VASILISA stirs the stew.
THE DOLL returns.

THE DOLL
(entering)

There's an old lady outside.

What?
VASILISA

I think she saw me!
THE DOLL

BABA YAGA
(at the window, tapping with a stick)
Hello, dear! I see you. And your little dolly there. Hello there, dolly. Ahh ha ha ha ha.

Hello.
VASILISA

What?
BABA YAGA

Hello!
VASILISA

What, dear? I can't hear you?! Why don't you let me inside and we can talk?
BABA YAGA

Oh no. No no no. Don't let her in.
THE DOLL

You wouldn't leave an old lady out in the cold now, would you?
(tapping)
HELLLOOOOOO!

Don't let her in!
THE DOLL

VASILISA

It's just an old lady.

BABA YAGA

(tapping)

I see you!

THE DOLL

It's the witch! She'll eat us!

VASILISA

I'm not leaving some old lady out in the cold!

BABA YAGA

Oh what a pretty doll you have!

VASILISA

(exiting)

Just a moment!

THE DOLL hides behind a chair. VASILISA
returns with BABA YAGA.

BABA YAGA

What a cozy little house.

VASILISA

It's okay I guess.

BABA YAGA

A bit drafty though, hmm? What's your name, dear?

VASILISA

Vasilisa.

BABA YAGA

Oh I've heard of you!

VASILISA

Really?

BABA YAGA

Oh yes. A young man got lost near my cabin. He was looking for you. Your name was the last word on his lips before I GOBBLED HIM UP! Ahh ha ha ha! Heeeeee! Look at your face!

VASILISA

Ahh. Ha. Ha.

THE DOLL

That wasn't funny! This old bat is crazy!

BABA YAGA

Oh come now, dolly. Be kind.

THE DOLL

You can hear me?

BABA YAGA

Of course I can! And I'd think twice before calling me an old bat again. I'm not fond of bats. Rats with wings those are.

VASILISA

Say you're sorry.

THE DOLL

Sorry.

BABA YAGA

Oh my! Manners. How old fashioned.

THE DOLL

Did you really eat that boy?

BABA YAGA

I don't eat boys.

VASILISA

Thank goodness.

BABA YAGA

I eat girls. The flesh is tastier. Ahh hee hee hee! Look at your faces!

THE DOLL

I think she's serious.

BABA YAGA

Oh I am. But don't worry. I only eat mean girls. And you seem very kind. Now are you home all alone, dears?

VASILISA

Yes. No.

THE DOLL

No. Yes.

VASILISA

My step-mother and sisters will be back any minute.

THE DOLL

Her step-sisters are mean! And ugly! You should eat them!

VASILISA

Quiet!

BABA YAGA

(touching the cloth doll)

I haven't seen a doll like this in ages! Whose blood is this?

VASILISA

My mother's. She died giving birth to my brother. He died too.

BABA YAGA

Very powerful blood then. No wonder it's such a yappy little thing.

THE DOLL

Hey! Who you calling yappy!

BABA YAGA

Careful I don't stitch your mouth shut, dolly!

VASILISA

Is there something I can do for you, ma'am?

BABA YAGA

Oh? Are you in a hurry to get rid of me?

VASILISA

I have chores.

BABA YAGA

Of course you do. Well I'm here because I lost something. One of my darlings flew the coop, and yours is the house nearest to mine. My darlings like to hide in clocks. You don't have a clock here, do you?

VASILISA

No.

BABA YAGA

Hmm. Do you have any eggs?

VASILISA

Eggs?

BABA YAGA

Yes, eggs. Chickens squat and lay them. Like this. Bcaaaa! Bcaaaa! Bcaaaaaaaaaaaa!

THE DOLL

Oh! Eggs.

BABA YAGA

So, do you have any?

VASILISA

(exiting)

Of course. Just one moment.

THE DOLL

Has anybody told you how creepy you are?

BABA YAGA

You're a blunt little slug.

THE DOLL

Do you really eat girls?

BABA YAGA

Only when I'm hungry! Ahh ha ha heeeee! Look at your face/

THE DOLL

Look at my face. Yeah.

VASILISA

(entering)

Here are the eggs.

Here BABA YAGA tosses the eggs over her shoulder after saying "no". THE DOLL scrambles to catch them. If SHE fails, SHE cleans up the mess.

BABA YAGA

Let me see. Hello! Are you in there? Knock knock? No.

(examining a second egg)

Hello! I know you're in one of these! No, this isn't it either.

(examining the third egg)

Wait. I think this is it. Yes. Yes, here you are!

BABA YAGA places the third egg on the table, holds her hand over it, and smashes it. ASSISTANT 1, a disembodied hand, appears atop the table in an egggy mess.

ASSISTANT 1

Gah! Blah! Bluch!

BABA YAGA

Bad bad bad bad bad!

ASSISTANT 1

Help me! Help me! Ahh! I'm covered in egg. I can't breathe.

BABA YAGA

That's what you get for hiding in an egg!

VASILISA

Here. I've got a towel. Let me wipe you.

ASSISTANT 1

Oh that's nice. Thank you thank you. Are you the Vasilisa?

VASILISA

I'm a Vasilisa...

THEY shake hands.

ASSISTANT 1

Oh I've heard of you! The loveliest girl in/

BABA YAGA

Yes yes yes. That's all very nice.. Now come on. Into the bag with you.

ASSISTANT 1

She's a slave driver! I want to come live with you.

BABA YAGA

Oh shut up!

BABA YAGA wrestles a black bag over
ASSISTANT 1.

ASSISTANT 1

Mff! Mff! Marff! Mgg! Mff!

VASILISA

You really are a witch.

BABA YAGA

What gave it away?

VASILISA

Are you going to eat me?

BABA YAGA

I'm tempted. There's nothing quite as succulent as a girl your age. You're about sixteen, yes?

VASILISA

Yes...

BABA YAGA

Oh my word, well. Like a ripe fruit. You're not a little girl anymore, are you?

VASILISA

No.

BABA YAGA

Not exactly a woman yet either, hmm?

VASILISA

No.

BABA YAGA

Oh yes. It's a sticky place. And very tempting. How would you feel about being eaten?

VASILISA

I'd prefer not, thank you.

BABA YAGA

Oh fine. I won't eat you today. But only because you've been so kind and polite and helped me find my servant. You really gave me a hand. Ha! These things are such a pain, but they're necessary. I only have two hands myself, but the things I do, well. Very complicated. And now I must repay you for your hospitality.

VASILISA

That's okay. I really should get back to my—

BABA YAGA

No no! Kindness must be repaid. As must cruelty. Or else the world falls out of balance, and we can't have that. My repayment will come in two parts: words and matter. The words will matter, and the matter will burn. Words first. This will be an especially cruel winter, and it's come early. It's in the air even now. This will be a storm for the ages. You must be prepared. Here. Enough words.

(revealing a piece of coal)

Now, the matter at hand. This, my dear, is a special piece of coal.

THE DOLL

Wow, Vasilisa! Your very own piece of coal!

BABA YAGA

Quiet, dolly! Or I'll beat you upon a rock and make a pillow out of you! Now where was I?

VASILISA

The coal is special.

BABA YAGA

Indeed it is! It takes no fire to light this coal, only a kind heart! When placed beside a kind heart this coal will catch fire. And it will warm the one who lights it for a week! But I warn you, if people fight over it, it will burn right up! Poof! It's very sensitive coal! You must keep it safe, for it may soon save your life.

VASILISA

Thank you.

BABA YAGA

(exiting)

Eeee hee hee hee. So polite. It's like stepping back in time. Well I'll be going. You're always welcome at my cabin for a snack. Eee hee hee. Ha. Just take the trail into the woods and look for the bones. You can't miss it.

VASILISA

Okay. Umm. Look for the bones. Thank you. Goodbye.

THE DOLL

I told you not to let her in! What are you doing!

VASILISA

Hiding the magic coal in the matryoshka!

THE DOLL

You let a witch into the house!

VASILISA

Apparently.

THE DOLL

She knows where we live!

VASILISA

Brr. It's so cold. Look at it out there. The sky's gone gray. It happened so fast.

THE DOLL

It's going to be a bad storm.

VASILISA

Look, the fire's almost out. Oh, the stew's going to get cold. She's going to kill me.
Where's the wood? We forgot to chop the wood! We're going to freeze to death! Quick!
Gather what you can!

THE DOLL

It's too late. Listen to the wind!

VASILISA

How did it start so quickly?

THE DOLL

It's that witch!

VASILISA

Don't panic.

THE DOLL

You let a witch into the house!

VASILISA

Okay, yes. Just calm down and help me get this fire going.

THE DOLL

Just use the coal!

VASILISA

No! You heard what she said. I'm saving it.

THE DOLL

Listen to the wind.

VASILISA

Somebody's out there.

THE DOLL

She's back! Hide!

STEP-MOTHER and the STEP-SISTERS enter. THEY force the door closed behind them against the wind. THEY look terrible. STEP-MOTHER carries a walking stick.

STEP-MOTHER

Vasilisa, what are you doing? Why isn't there a fire? Where's the wood?

VASILISA

I... a woman came. And she—

STEP-MOTHER

Don't lie to me, Vasilisa! I don't want to hear any of your stories. It's freezing! We barely made it home!

STEP-SISTER 1

We tried to turn back! The road to town is blocked!

STEP-SISTER 2

The storm came out of nowhere!

STEP-SISTER 1

You wouldn't believe the snow!

STEP-MOTHER

Girls, quickly. Gather what wood you can from outside. Hurry now!

STEP-SISTERS

(exiting)

Yes, Mother.

STEP-MOTHER

Vasilisa! Why haven't you lit a fire! Why haven't you chopped wood!

VASILISA

There was a woman. She needed eggs. No. Don't. I'm sorry!

STEP-MOTHER hits VASILISA with her walking stick and knocks her to the floor. SHE beats her. The STEP-SISTERS return, carrying very small bits of wood.

STEP-MOTHER

Because of your stupidity we're without wood! The fire's gone out! The wind is blowing!

VASILISA

Ow. Please. Don't. Stop. She's a witch! A witch came. A witch/

STEP-MOTHER

We could die because of you, and you sit here talking to your doll! I should throw you into the cold and let you die!

STEP-SISTER 2

(grabbing STEP-MOTHER's arm)

Mother! Stop! You'll kill her!

VASILISA

A witch A witch A witch/

STEP-MOTHER

What do you care?

VASILISA

a witch a witch a witch/

STEP-SISTER 2

She's my sister!

VASILISA

(whispering)

awitchawitchawitchawitcha/

THE DOLL

Vasilisa? Are you all right? Vasilisa?

VASILISA

(whispering)

awitchawitcha awitchawitcha awitchawitcha/

STEP-SISTER 2

She's my sister.

End Scene

SCENE 2

Some days later. What furniture had been in the little house by the woods has been used for kindling. VASILISA clutches her cloth doll, and THE DOLL clutches the matryoshka. The STEP-SISTERS huddle together with STEP-MOTHER for warmth.

THE DOLL

I've run out of stories.

VASILISA

Tell me the one about stew with potatoes and onions and great big hunks of chicken.

THE DOLL

Again?

VASILISA

Please!

THE DOLL

Once upon a time there was a stew with potatoes and onions and great big hunks of chicken. The end.

VASILISA

I like that story. Oh. I'm so cold.

THE DOLL

You're freezing to death.

VASILISA

I know I am.

THE DOLL

You need to do something.

VASILISA

I know I do.

THE DOLL

You're the only thing I have, Vasilisa. You can't die.

VASILISA

Yes, I can.

STEP-MOTHER
Stop talking to yourself!

STEP-SISTER 1
She's talking to her doll!

STEP-MOTHER
Crazy, lazy Vasilisa.

STEP-SISTER 1
Crazy, lazy Vasilisa.

STEP-SISTER 2
Would you two be quiet?

The wind blows fierce.

THE DOLL
That coal's still in the matryoshka. Use it!

VASILISA
No, they'll see it!

STEP-SISTER 1
We'll see what?

STEP-MOTHER
Just ignore her. She's insane. When this storm passes, I'm sending her away. I never should have married her father.

STEP-SISTER 1
It's so cold. How many days has it been since the storm started?

STEP-MOTHER
You can't even tell when the sun's risen!

STEP-SISTER 2
I'm so cold.

STEP-SISTER 1
Are we going to die? Mother?

STEP-MOTHER

Shh. Save your energy.

STEP-SISTER 2

(crawling to VASILISA)

Vasilisa, what did that old lady say to you?

STEP-MOTHER

Get back here!

STEP-SISTER 1

Just let her die!

STEP-SISTER 2

Is she really a witch?

VASILISA

I think so. She has a magic servant. A hand without a body! It popped out of an egg!

STEP-MOTHER

What did you do to the old bat that she cursed us like this?

VASILISA

Nothing! I was very polite! She invited me to her cabin even.

STEP-SISTER 1

Great! Why don't you go there and leave us in peace?

VASILISA

She eats girls.

STEP-SISTER 2

Why didn't she eat you?

VASILISA

Because I was kind.

STEP-SISTER 2

Do you think you could find her cabin now? Even in this storm?

STEP-MOTHER

Yes! Vasilisa! Go to the old woman's cabin and bring us fire! She's sure to have some.

STEP-SISTER 2

Could you do that? You could save us all. Your doll could go too. And help you. Couldn't she?

THE DOLL

Yes. I'll go. I'll help!

VASILISA

Aren't you afraid of the Baba Yaga?

THE DOLL

It's better than waiting for you to die. I'm not afraid.

VASILISA

She doesn't eat dolls!

THE DOLL

So what? If she eats you, where does that leave me? She'll use me as a pin cushion! Come on. Anything's better than staying here!

VASILISA

I don't want to be eaten by some witch.

THE DOLL

You'd rather freeze to death?

VASILISA

Maybe?

THE DOLL

As long as we're together, we'll be okay. Trust me.

VASILISA

Okay yes, I'll go.

STEP-MOTHER

At least you're good for something.

VASILISA

(whispering to STEP-SISTER 2)

If I don't come back in time, hold this matryoshka to your heart and it will keep you warm.

STEP-MOTHER

What are you whispering?

THE DOLL

What? Don't give that to her! We might need it!

VASILISA

But you mustn't let them know you have it. Promise.

STEP-SISTER 2

I promise.

STEP-SISTER 1

Sister, come help us keep warm!

VASILISA

I'll go to the Baba Yaga's cabin and bring back fire. I'm not afraid.

STEP-SISTER 1

Good riddance.

STEP-MOTHER

Try not to die too quickly!

STEP-SISTER 2

Goodbye, Vasilisa.

VASILISA

Goodbye.

STEP-SISTER 2

Be careful.

VASILISA and THE DOLL exit.

STEP-SISTER 1

Mother, I can't feel my hands.

STEP-MOTHER

Quiet.

STEP-SISTER 1

Do you think she'll come back with fire?

STEP-MOTHER

No, dear. She's going to die.

End Scene

SCENE 3

The woods. VASILISA and THE DOLL walk against the gusting wind and blowing snow.

THE DOLL

Why did you give her that magic coal? We could have used it! You made a big mistake. We should go back and take it.

VASILISA

Do you remember when she helped me stitch your arms back on?

THE DOLL

Yes.

VASILISA

Kindness returns kindness.

THE DOLL

They're the ones that cut my arms off in the first place!

VASILISA

And when she saw how sad I was, she sewed them back on.

THE DOLL

It's always about you, isn't it?

VASILISA

Come on. Let's keep singing! It'll pass the time.

THE DOLL

All right.

VASILISA

This is the song of I'm not afraid!

THE DOLL

Because we are not afraid!

VASILISA

I'm not afraid of you, wind!

THE DOLL
We're not afraid of you!

VASILISA
I'm not afraid of you, snow!

THE DOLL
We're not afraid of you!

VASILISA
I'm not afraid of you, trees!

THE DOLL
We're not afraid of you!

VASILISA
I'm not afraid of witches or wolves either!

THE DOLL
Okay maybe I'm afraid of wolves a little.

VASILISA
It's more of a chant than a song, really.

THE DOLL
I like it. It makes me feel brave. Oh I'm tired.

VASILISA
Don't stop! We have to keep going.

THE DOLL
I can't even see the trail!

VASILISA
Here it is! I think it's midday. Look how bright it is!

THE DOLL
What's that sound?

VASILISA
It sounds like thunder!

THE DOLL
It's a snowstorm!

VASILISA
It's hoofbeats!

THE WHITE RIDER appears.

THE DOLL
Who is that?

VASILISA
It's a rider in white.

THE DOLL
What's he doing?

VASILISA
Is he pointing?

THE DOLL
He's pointing the way we came. Are we going the wrong way?

VASILISA
Sir! Excuse me. Are we going the wrong way?

THE WHITE RIDER
You can only go one way.

VASILISA
What way?

THE WHITE RIDER
Forward.

VASILISA
Is that the way you're pointing?

THE WHITE RIDER
You can only go one way!

THE DOLL

You said that.

THE WHITE RIDER

Forward!

THE DOLL

Tell you what. Why don't you tell us which way is forward, and we'll go there.

THE WHITE RIDER

You can only go one way!

THE DOLL

Let me guess...

THE WHITE RIDER & THE DOLL

Forward!

VASILISA

Sir, please. We're looking for the Baba Yaga's cabin! Can you tell us which is the way...

THE WHITE RIDER lowers his arm and
vanishes to the sound of receding hoofbeats.

THE DOLL

Ooookay, that was weird.

VASILISA

It doesn't make sense. We can go all kinds of directions. Back. Forward. Left. Right.

THE DOLL

Maybe it's a riddle.

VASILISA

He was pointing that way. But that's the way we came!

THE DOLL

Are you sure? Maybe we got turned around or/

VASILISA

No, I'm sure. This is the way. Like he said, you can only go forward. Let's go.

THEY march.

THE DOLL

This is the song of I'm not afraid!

VASILISA

Because we are not afraid!

THE DOLL

I'm not afraid of you, cold!

VASILISA

We are not afraid!

THE DOLL

I'm not afraid of you, tired!

VASILISA

We are not afraid!

THE DOLL

I'm not afraid of you... oh how long have we been walking?

VASILISA

Half a day at least.

THE DOLL

Where's this cabin?

VASILISA

We have to be getting close. Look, the trail's narrowing!

THE DOLL

Listen! Hooves!

VASILISA

Another rider! A red one!

THE RED RIDER appears.

THE DOLL

Now which way is he pointing?

VASILISA

Both ways at once!

THE DOLL

Oh now we're doomed.

VASILISA

Sir! Why are you pointing in both directions?

THE RED RIDER

At some point you will find yourself in the middle, but when, you will never know!

THE DOLL

The middle of the trail?

VASILISA

We're looking for the Baba Yaga!

THE RED RIDER

The middle is full and empty, finished and unfinished!

THE DOLL

I told you it's a riddle!

VASILISA

Tell us which way to go, please! Are we getting closer?

THE RED RIDER

Stay to the trail, and you can only get closer. Leave the trail and the woods will swallow you whole!

THE RED RIDER vanishes to the sound of
receding hoofbeats.

VASILISA

Huh. Not very helpful.

THE DOLL

This is getting ridiculous!

VASILISA

We have to keep going. Stick to the trail. Come on. We are not afraid.

THE DOLL

We are not afraid!

VASILISA

You're still my best friend.

THE DOLL

I know.

VASILISA

This is the song of I don't care what anybody thinks of me!

THE DOLL

This is the song of Vasilisa Most Lovely!

VASILISA

This is the song of come and get me, cold, come and get me, dark!

THE DOLL

Come and get me, cold!

VASILISA

Come and get me, dark!

THE DOLL

This is the song of come and get me, worry, come and get me, fear!

VASILISA

Come and get me, worry!

THE DOLL

Come and get me, fear!

VASILISA & THE DOLL

COME AND GET US!

THE DOLL
Now we're just sort of yelling.

VASILISA
Yeah.

THE DOLL
Mother would be proud of you.

VASILISA
You too. Look ahead! The storm's clearing.

THE DOLL
Listen!

Hoofbeats as before. This time the rider passes.
THEY watch.

VASILISA
A rider in black.

THE DOLL
Why doesn't he stop?

VASILISA
Maybe he doesn't have anywhere to point.

THE DOLL
Look! There's a fire! It's a cabin on chicken legs!

VASILISA
We made it!

THE DOLL
It's so warm here.

VASILISA
It's like there wasn't a storm at all.

THEY arrive at a gate of bones, beyond which
BABA YAGA stands in front of her cabin on
chicken legs.

BABA YAGA

Eeee hee hee hee! Vasilisa! Have you come for that snack?

VASILISA

No, ma'am! I've come for fire to keep my family warm.

BABA YAGA

Oh! Well nothing is free. If you would have my fire, you must give me something in return.

THE DOLL

Be careful she doesn't trick you!

BABA YAGA

Oh hello again, dolly! I see you! Eee hee hee.

THE DOLL

Yes, it's hilarious! I'm a talking doll! Eee hee hee.

VASILISA

I don't know what I can give you, ma'am. All I have is my doll.

BABA YAGA

Oh keep your doll. Puh. No, I have three chores for you. But they won't be easy, and if you fail even one, I'll gobble you up! I'm hungry, and you look especially edible today.

THE DOLL

All right well. This was a waste of time. Let's go.

VASILISA

No! I'm staying. I'm not afraid. You can help.

THE DOLL

Vasilisa, I can't promise we'll be able to do all her chores.

VASILISA

We have to try!

THE DOLL

Why? For your Step-Mother? For your Step-Sisters? They treat you like garbage, Vasilisa! They don't love you.

VASILISA

They'll die if we don't.

THE DOLL

Who cares?

VASILISA

I do.

BABA YAGA

Well, dear! What'll it be?

VASILISA

We'll stay! And we'll do your three chores. And if we fail, you can eat me.

BABA YAGA

Come in then. You can sleep in my cabin until morning, and then we'll begin. Oh come now, don't be shy. I won't bite. Yet. Eeee hee hee hee!

THEY enter BABA YAGA's cabin.

End Scene

SCENE 4

Later within the cabin. VASILISA and THE DOLL sleep on the floor. At first there are voices in the dark.

ASSISTANT 1

And that's the story of how our mistress lured the most lovely girl in all the land to our little hut!

ASSISTANT 2

I want a look at her!

ASSISTANT 3

Let them sleep. They need to rest for their chores.

ASSISTANT 2

It's not going to matter how much rest they get. They won't finish even one of the chores.

ASSISTANT 3

They might! She has that doll.

ASSISTANT 2

Nobody finishes the chores! She gobbles them all up! Remember that last girl?

ASSISTANT 1

Oh she screamed and screamed!

ASSISTANT 3

Let me out! Let me out! I don't want to be a stew! Ahh!

ASSISTANT 1

Poor thing didn't last long.

ASSISTANT 2

Oh yes. Mistress just hates when someone asks about us straight away.

ASSISTANT 3

Well it's very rude to talk about someone when they're in the room, like they're not even there!

ASSISTANT 2

I'll light a candle. I just want one little peek at this famous Vasilisa Most Lovely. The most beautiful girl in the whole country they say.

THE ASSISTANTS, all disembodied hands,
peer out from a slender table.

ASSISTANT 1

Look at her!

ASSISTANT 3

That's it?

ASSISTANT 2

That's the problem with hype. You get your hopes built up way out of proportion.

ASSISTANT 3

I mean she's pretty, but the most? The prettiest ever?

ASSISTANT 1

She's even prettier when she's awake.

ASSISTANT 3

She's not ugly.

ASSISTANT 1

I think she's beautiful!

ASSISTANT 2

I was just expecting like wow! You know? Oh well.

ASSISTANT 3

There's the sun rising. Time for a wake-up call. Ready?

THE ASSISTANTS snap their fingers in
unison. VASILISA and THE DOLL mumble
and stir but don't awaken.

ASSISTANT 2

It's not working.

THE ASSISTANTS make fists and pound them on the table. VASILISA and THE DOLL awaken with a start.

VASILISA

Urgh.

THE DOLL

Ahh! What! Ahh!

THE ASSISTANTS vanish. BABA YAGA enters.

BABA YAGA

Up and at 'em rise and shine three chores before dinner, or you're mine! To eat that is! Ahh ha ha ha. Oh you're rosy cheeked. Look at that. So nice and firm.

VASILISA

Don't pinch me! Please.

THE ASSISTANTS reappear with a big bowl of corn.

BABA YAGA

Right! First chore. This is a big bowl of corn! Some of the kernels are covered in mildew. You must separate the mildewy ones and leave only the nice ones for my darlings to make into meal. Clear? Hope we're clear!

VASILISA

I just woke up.

BABA YAGA

You have three hours. Starting...

VASILISA

I haven't even had coffee.

BABA YAGA

Now!

VASILISA

Hold on a second.

BABA YAGA

(exiting)

My darlings will tell me if you try any funny business. Good luck.

VASILISA

This is impossible. I can't even see which is which.

THE DOLL

Step aside.

VASILISA

She's going to eat me.

THE DOLL

I told you I'd help. Now let me do it.

VASILISA

What am I supposed to do?

THE DOLL

Close your eyes. Don't open them until I say. Ready?

VASILISA

Yeah, but I don't know what good this—

THE DOLL

Now.

VASILISA closes her eyes. Darkness. A moment.

VASILISA

Can I open them?

THE DOLL

Just a second. All right. Three. Two. One. Open.

VASILISA opens her eyes. The corn is sorted into two piles on the slender table.

VASILISA

You did it!

THE DOLL

Yep. Whew.

VASILISA

How long did I have my eyes closed?

THE DOLL

I'd say about three hours.

VASILISA

How do you do it?

THE DOLL

I move my hands very quickly.

VASILISA

What if I peek?

THE DOLL

It'll burn your eyes out of your skull.

VASILISA

(stirring)

Really?

THE DOLL

Trust me. You do not want to peek. I tried this one day when you were taking a nap. I killed a bunch of birds.

BABA YAGA

(entering)

Well look at this! Now how did you manage that?

THE DOLL

Teamwork!

BABA YAGA

Oh ho! Well now. Darlings, throw this nasty corn away! I'm impressed! I forgot to tell you. If you complete a chore, you get to ask me a question. But I warn you: too much knowledge makes one old before their time! So what do you want to know?

THE DOLL

Ask about the hands!

VASILISA

Oh no. It's not polite to talk about somebody when they're in the room like they're not even there.

THE DOLL

Ask her about the riders then!

VASILISA

All right. Well, tell us about the white rider!

BABA YAGA

Ah. That is my day.

THE DOLL

I told you it's a riddle.

ASSISTANT 1

She completed a chore!

ASSISTANT 3

Nobody's ever completed even one!

ASSISTANT 1

It's her doll! It's a magic doll!

ASSISTANT 2

Hey, doll! Come and shake!

ASSISTANT 3

High five!

THE DOLL

Aww, well. All right. It's nothing really.

ASSISTANT 2

How did you do it?

THE DOLL

I just move my hands really fast, I feel all warm inside, and/

BABA YAGA

SILENCE!

THE ASSISTANTS duck behind the table.

THE DOLL

Whoa, lady . Okay .

BABA YAGA

I apologize. I get angry when I get hungry. I get hangry! Right! Chore number two. Here we have a bowl of wheat, black grain and wild peas. Separate them. You have until lunchtime.

VASILISA

Piece of cake!

BABA YAGA

Oh. And I need you to watch this pot and make sure it doesn't boil over.

VASILISA

No problem!

THE DOLL

There you go, that's the spirit. You can't let some cooky old bat get you—

BABA YAGA snatches THE DOLL and
clamps her mouth shut.

THE DOLL (CONT'D)

M fffffff!

BABA YAGA

I've had enough of your mouth, Dolly. Darlings, my needle. And thread. The red thread. now!

VASILISA

Leave her alone!

BABA YAGA

Oh, would you like to trade places?

THE DOLL

Don't, Vasilisa. It's a trick. Mff!

BABA YAGA

Well, dear? You weren't the rude one. But if you'd rather I stitch up your pretty lips... Is that a no?

VASILISA

I need to complete the chores.

BABA YAGA

Fine then. And one, two, three.

THE DOLL writhes as BABA YAGA stitches shut her mouth.

THE DOLL

Mfffff!

BABA YAGA

A stitch in time saves nine, you know. What a mean little worm. Bad bad bad dolly.

VASILISA

(to THE DOLL)

I'm sorry.

BABA YAGA

So, where were we? Right. Sort. Stir. You have three hours.

VASILISA

But I can't do it on my own.

BABA YAGA

(exiting with the cloth doll)

You should have taught your dolly to be more polite. Well. Tick tock!

BABA YAGA exits with THE DOLL.

VASILISA

Oh. Oh no. Oh.

I am not afraid of you stew. I am not afraid of you wheat and black grain and peas. I'm not afraid of you witch. Oh. But I am afraid.

Vasilisa the Doomed. Vasilisa the Depressed. Vasilisa the Lonely.

ASSISTANT 1

This is our chance! Let's help her.

ASSISTANT 2

Yes! She's such a nice girl.

ASSISTANT 3

So polite!

ASSISTANT 2

Yes! And kind!

ASSISTANT 1

Vasilisa, you helped me when I was covered in egg, so we're going to help you!

VASILISA

Really?

ASSISTANT 2

Yes! We don't like our mistress.

ASSISTANT 3

She treats us like dirt!

ASSISTANT 1

Like garbage!

ASSISTANT 2

We want revenge!

VASILISA

Oh thank you. How can I ever thank you enough?

ASSISTANT 3
We want gloves!

ASSISTANT 1
Sew us new gloves each year!

VASILISA
How about the third chore?

ASSISTANT 2
We'll help you with that too.

ASSISTANT 1
Just promise you'll make us those gloves!

VASILISA
Of course, yes. Anything. Just please help me!

ASSISTANT 2
Vasilisa, on three, close your eyes and stir the pot.

VASILISA
Okay. This actually smells pretty good.

ASSISTANT 1
Here we go. One. Two. Three.

VASILISA closes her eyes and stirs the pot.
Darkness. A moment. SHE opens them. The
wheat, grain and peas are separated. THE
ASSISTANTS high five and give each other
thumbs up.

ASSISTANT 2
Nice!

ASSISTANT 3
That'll show her!

ASSISTANT 1
Yay! Gloves for life!

VASILISA

You did it!

ASSISTANT 1

It was nothing.

VASILISA

(shaking them)

Oh thank you thank you thank you.

ASSISTANT 2

Just bring us those gloves!

VASILISA

Every year I will! I promise!

THE ASSISTANTS

Hooray!

ASSISTANT 2

You can never tell our mistress we helped you.

VASILISA

No, of course. It's our secret.

BABA YAGA

(entering)

All right now, dear. Why don't you just turn around and I'll cut your throat real quick... what? How did you...

Two of THE ASSISTANTS twiddle their thumbs. The third examines its nails.

VASILISA

Never mind how! I did your chores, and now I get to ask you a question.

BABA YAGA

Yes, it's true. Oh blast! I'm starving! Here. Give me some stew.

VASILISA

What kind of stew is this?

Leftovers.

BABA YAGA

Leftover what? Yeah. Okay. No.

VASILISA

Darlings! Clean up this mess.

BABA YAGA

May I ask my second question now?

VASILISA

I suppose so.

BABA YAGA

Who's the rider in red?

VASILISA

That is my rising and setting sun.

BABA YAGA

Ah, I thought so. What's the next chore?

VASILISA

Aren't you afraid?

BABA YAGA

Not any more.

VASILISA

Poppy seeds. Dirt. Separate them and you will have your fire.

BABA YAGA

Is that all?

VASILISA

That's all. Darlings! Come with me.

BABA YAGA

Wait...

VASILISA

BABA YAGA

Yes?

VASILISA

No. Nothing. I just don't think I can do another chore. I'm very tired.

BABA YAGA

That's a shame. I wonder what you'll taste like.

VASILISA

I want to go home.

BABA YAGA

But you don't have a home, dear! You might as well let me eat you. No home. No parents. No family. Vasilisa the Delicious!

VASILISA

I want my mother.

BABA YAGA

Your mother is dead and buried, dear.

VASILISA

Then I want my doll.

BABA YAGA

Sorry, no.

VASILISA

Why are you doing this to me?

BABA YAGA

You came to me, dear. You have all night to complete this chore. Sleep well... Ahh hee hee hee hee.! Come, darlings.

BABA YAGA and THE ASSISTANTS exit.
VASILISA stands before the poppy seeds and dirt. SHE picks at a single poppy and sets it aside. SHE slumps to the floor.

VASILISA

This is the song of I miss my father. This is the song of I miss my mother. This is the song of I don't want to live. I'll just let her eat me. I don't care. I'm all alone.

MOTHER

No, you're not.

VASILISA

Oh. Oh. I miss you so much.

VASILISA does not look at MOTHER.

MOTHER

Shh. Look at me. You never look at me. It's going to be all right.

VASILISA

Nothing is all right. How can you just be here one day, and the next day you're not? I miss you every day.

MOTHER

I am still here.

VASILISA

No, you're not. I hear voices. I talk to a doll. Crazy lazy Vasilisa.

MOTHER

Look at me, please.

VASILISA

I don't want to look. Oh. I'm so tired.

MOTHER

Then sleep.

VASILISA

I have to separate the poppy seeds from the dirt. But it's impossible. And if I don't, my sister will die of cold, and the beautiful doll you made for me will be a pin cushion.

MOTHER

My bright little star. Go to sleep, and all will be well.

VASILISA

I'm too scared to sleep. The Baba Yaga's going to eat me in the morning.

I'm scared all the time.

MOTHER

I'll sing to you.

Baby, baby, rock-a-bye
 On the edge you mustn't lie
 Or the little gray wolf will come
 And will nip you on the bum
 Tug you off into the wood
 Underneath the willow-root
 Baby, baby, rock-a-bye
 On the edge you mustn't lie

Vasilisa, look at me.

VASILISA looks. MOTHER brings a finger to her lips and smiles.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now close your eyes.

VASILISA closes her eyes and sleeps.
 MOTHER kisses her brow. SHE exits.

In VASILISA's dream, the poppy seeds drift apart from the dirt. And it is so.

The morning comes. BABA YAGA enters with THE ASSISTANTS and THE DOLL, her mouth still stitched shut.

THE DOLL

M fffffff!

ASSISTANT 1

She did it!

How?
ASSISTANT 3

Quiet! Wake up. Hey. Wake up!
BABA YAGA

What? Hey. Coffee.
VASILISA

Tell me how you did it.
BABA YAGA

Hang on a second. I just woke up/
VASILISA

Who helped you?
BABA YAGA

Nobody.
VASILISA

Don't lie to me!
BABA YAGA

I dreamed it, and it was so.
VASILISA

It's not polite to lie, little girl.
BABA YAGA

It's not a lie.
VASILISA

Look me in the eye and say it.
BABA YAGA

I dreamed it, and it was so.
VASILISA

Bah.
BABA YAGA

VASILISA

Now you have to let me and my doll go. And give me the fire!

BABA YAGA

Of course you're right. Darn it all. Oh now I'm really hangry. Ahh well. The world is full of mean young things for me to snack on. I won't be hangry for long.

VASILISA

No, ma'am. I'm sure you won't.

BABA YAGA

But you must ask a final question!

VASILISA

Who is the rider in black?

BABA YAGA

Surely you already know! Don't you want to ask something else? About my darlings perhaps?

VASILISA

No. As you said: too much knowledge makes one old before their time. I'm happy just to have the fire.

BABA YAGA

(exiting)

So be it. Of course the rider in black is my night. And he's my favorite, because his silence speaks. I'll get you the fire.

THE DOLL

MFFFFFFFF!

VASILISA

Oh! I'm sorry. Here. Three. Two. One. Stitches undone.

THE DOLL

Ahh. Ha. Ahh! You got her!

VASILISA

Yeah. But I had some help. Thank you all so much.

THE ASSISTANTS

Gloves gloves gloves for life!

THE ASSISTANTS give THE DOLL thumbs up. THE DOLL returns it. BABA YAGA enters with a skull on a stick. It glows with fire.

BABA YAGA

This will keep your family warm all through the winter.

THE DOLL

It's a skull!

BABA YAGA

It's decorative. It's the fire inside that counts. Do you understand?

VASILISA

Yes, ma'am.

BABA YAGA

Of all the girls I've desired to eat, you are by far the kindest. Get out of here before my appetite gets the better of me. You too, Dolly. Good riddance!

VASILISA

Goodbye, ma'am.

THE DOLL

You should go vegetarian. Vegetables can't run away.

THEY exit.

BABA YAGA

Bah! Leftovers again.

End Scene

SCENE 5

VASILISA and THE DOLL on the trail back to the little house by the woods.

VASILISA

Look how the storm is thinning. We're going to make it!

THE DOLL

We didn't even have to sing!

VASILISA

And no more riddles.

THE DOLL

You can only go one way!

VASILISA

Forward!

THE DOLL

What's it even supposed to mean?

VASILISA

Time goes forward.

THE DOLL

I don't get it.

VASILISA

Look! There's somebody there! In the snow!

THE DOLL

Who is it?

VASILISA

I can't tell. It's a woman. She's gone blue.

THE DOLL

It's your step-mother. And your step-sister's there too!

VASILISA

Oh. Oh no. They're dead. We weren't fast enough.

THE DOLL

You're free, Vasilisa. You can go any where. Do anything.

VASILISA

Yeah.

THE DOLL

You should be thrilled!

VASILISA

I'm not happy they're dead.

THE DOLL

They were cruel! They treated you terribly!

VASILISA

Yes. But only they know why they became that way. I'm not happy they should die like this, cold and alone in the snow.

THE DOLL

Vasilisa the Wise.

VASILISA

I'm not wise. I've suffered. Come on.

STEP-MOTHER

Wait! Vasilisa!

THE DOLL

She's talking!

VASILISA

You're dead.

STEP-MOTHER

I am dead.

VASILISA

You can talk?

STEP-MOTHER

All the dead do is talk. People don't hear. But you do, Vasilisa. It's who you are.

VASILISA

I wish it would stop.

STEP-SISTER 1

That's a foolish wish.

THE DOLL

Now they're both talking.

STEP-MOTHER

We left the house. We looked for the trail.

STEP-SISTER 1

But the storm got worse and worse!

STEP-MOTHER

We got so tired. We just sat down in the snow.

STEP-SISTER 1

It got so warm for a moment. And then we were dead. Just like that. It's a little sad.

VASILISA

It's very sad. Oh. I'm so sorry.

STEP-SISTER 1

Really?

VASILISA

Yes. Oh, yes. Of course.

STEP-SISTER 1

Please, save my sister. If you can, please!

VASILISA

I will.

STEP-SISTER 1

Tell her we loved her very much. Don't let her forget.

VASILISA

She won't.

STEP-SISTER 1

Oh, thank you. May I hold your doll? For just a moment?

THE DOLL

Oh, no. Don't let her... ugh... She's mean...

VASILISA

Yes. Yes, of course.

THE DOLL

Ugh, okay. Fine. Hey, there. What's it like being dead? Your hands are cold.

STEP-SISTER 1 holds THE DOLL.

STEP-SISTER 1

Oh. What a lovely doll. Look at the stitching. So fine.

STEP-MOTHER

Vasilisa. We were cruel, and we are sorry.

STEP-SISTER 1

Very sorry.

STEP-MOTHER

The world was cruel to us, but that's no excuse.

STEP-SISTER 1

We don't expect you to love us!

STEP-MOTHER

Only let us sing to you before you go. Please/

STEP-SISTER 1

Please.

STEP-MOTHER

If you listen closely, we'll rest better.

STEP-SISTER 1 & STEP-MOTHER

As the wolves pick our bones.

THE DOLL

Wait what? This is creepy. Vasilisa...

VASILISA

Sing. I'll listen.

The ensemble shares the following as a group - a story.

"The dead step-mother and step-sister open their mouths, and an unreal sound emerges: the howling of wind, the explosion of stars, the most beautiful aria imaginable, the breaking of a heart, the knowledge that a child is born to die but also to love and to come to know too that its children are in turn also born to die, and that it's worth it, despite not knowing, despite everything."

VASILISA (CONT'D)

It is impossible to describe.

THE DOLL

I can't hear anything. Vasilisa! Why don't I hear anything?

VASILISA

You're just a doll.

THE DOLL

How can you say that?

VASILISA

Because it's true. Hush now. Thank you.

THE DOLL

Oh I'm not ready. Vasilisa, I'll love you til the stars fall from heaven. Don't make me go. Please. It's too soon/

VASILISA kisses THE DOLL.

THE DOLL (CONT'D)

Thank you for the melk. And turkey sandwiches. And for loving me.

VASILISA

I'm going to close my eyes. Goodbye.

THE DOLL

Oh. Oh, Vasilisa. Good—

VASILISA puts a finger to her lips and closes her eyes. Darkness. VASILISA opens her eyes, and the light returns. THE DOLL, STEP-SISTER 1 and STEP-MOTHER have vanished. VASILISA gazes at the limp cloth doll in her hands.

End Scene

SCENE 6

Inside the little house by the woods. STEP-SISTER 2 huddles near a small fire, in which the coal burns. SHE holds the matryoshka in her hands.

VASILISA

(entering)

You're alive!

STEP-SISTER 2

Vasilisa! I'm so cold.

VASILISA

I brought fire.

STEP-SISTER 2

I can't feel my hands.

VASILISA

Here. This will warm you.

STEP-SISTER 2

It's a skull.

VASILISA

It's decorative.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh. That's nice.

VASILISA

Did the coal work?

STEP-SISTER 2

Yes! It's magic. I put it to my heart and it caught fire. See, I burned my hand. You saved my life. Thank you so much.

VASILISA

Kindness returns kindness.

STEP-SISTER 2

Where's mother?

Oh. I don't... I'm so sorry.

VASILISA

Oh. Oh no. And my sister?

STEP-SISTER 2

I'm so, so sorry.

VASILISA

How?

STEP-SISTER 2

The cold.

VASILISA

Oh. Shh. It's/

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh. Oh.

VASILISA

It's going to be okay.

STEP-SISTER 2

No. No, it's not. Oh. Oh.

VASILISA

I promise it will. Look at me. Hey. Look. It's okay.

STEP-SISTER 2

I'm numb. I can't feel anything. Oh. They're really dead?

VASILISA

They loved you very much. Look at me.

Finally SHE looks.

They loved you very much.

STEP-SISTER 2

I'm all alone.

VASILISA

No, you're not.

End Scene

SCENE 7

Five years later. An antechamber inside the Palace. STEP-SISTER 2 cradles a bundled baby in her lap and holds the cloth doll with her free hand. VASILISA sits with a travel bag beside her. SHE sews a glove. The clock from before is here.

STEP-SISTER 2

(puppeteering the cloth doll)

And that's the story of how your aunty Vasilisa the expert seamstress got fire from the Baba Yaga and saved your mama from the terrible storm! Hello, Mama! She nearly froze to death! Brrrrrr! And it's also the story of me, the Doll! I'm very special, you know! If you sing to me and feed me ham sandwiches and milk I'll come to life and comfort you and help you should the Baba Yaga ever come to eat you!

(herself)

Did I tell it right, Vasilisa?

VASILISA

Turkey sandwiches and melk. She calls it melk.

STEP-SISTER 2

(puppeteering the cloth doll)

Oh excuse me! Very important details! I eat turkey sandwiches and drink melk. Whew! Well wasn't that a long story? But it's important, because if it hadn't happened, you wouldn't even be here in this beautiful room! Look how they've painted stars all over the ceiling! Isn't that lovely? The world is full of so many wonderful things if you only take time to look. And do you know what we're doing here? I'll tell you! We're in the Palace waiting to meet the King himself. Imagine it, the King! And he wants to hire your aunty Vasilisa to make clothes for him! See, your aunty is world-famous for her fine stitching. She makes all kinds of things. Hats. Gloves. She's very good with gloves! She's an expert. After she met the Baba Yaga and saved your mama...

(herself)

How many years was it?

VASILISA

Five.

STEP-SISTER 2

(puppeteering the cloth doll)

Five years ago aunty Vasilisa really took up sewing, and in no time she was one of the best in the land. Like magic!

VASILISA

It wasn't magic. I practiced. Every day. I practiced until my fingers curled up like bones, and then I practiced some more.

STEP-SISTER 2

(whispering as the doll)

Well it looked like magic to me.

The clock sounds the hour. VASILISA goes to it.

STEP-SISTER 2 (CONT'D)

(puppeteering the cloth doll)

Do you hear that? That's a clock! The clock goes tick tock and bing bong bing and tells the time! It's very important. Without a clock all you have is the sun, and the sun's not very precise! Though it is reliable. And time only goes one way, you know. Your aunty likes to remind your mama that when she gets sad! "You can only go one way," she says.

VASILISA

Forward.

STEP-SISTER 2

It's good advice!

(as herself)

Vasilisa, what is it?

VASILISA

You left out the part where we searched for my father for a year but never found him.

STEP-SISTER 2

I know. I'm sorry. I just want it to have a happy ending. Vasilisa? What is it?

VASILISA

I know this clock.

STEP-SISTER 2

Oh they all sound alike to me.

VASILISA reaches behind the clock and reveals the portion of the matryoshka SHE gave her FATHER all those years ago.

FATHER
(entering)

Vasilisa?

VASILISA
Yes. It's me. Oh papa. How... I mean... what are you doing here?

FATHER
I work here. On the clocks. You'd be amazed how many clocks there are in this place! It's my job to... well, look. See how steady my hands are?

VASILISA
I see. Yes.

FATHER
They told me you were dead. That some witch had taken you into the woods. So I left the asylum and went to look for you. I was out of my mind. I wandered in circles. I found no trace of you, but I realized I liked it there. And I liked being alone. I stayed in the woods a long time. Day after day I chopped wood until my shoulders ached. My hands grew callouses like the knots of trees. And then one day I woke up with the sun, and there was a golden stillness over everything. My hands stopped shaking, and that very day I came back and began to learn to repair clocks. This was the first one I fixed. Your mother loved this clock. You look so much like her...

VASILISA
Oh Papa.

FATHER
I heard an expert seamstress by the name of Vasilisa would be here today. They say she's so lovely the King himself has taken a fancy to her. I wondered could it be my Vasilisa? And it is you. Look at you. Vasilisa Most—

VASILISA
Papa, please... come look.

FATHER
What? What is it?

VASILISA
(taking his hand)
Here. See?

VASILISA draws FATHER to her chair and from her bag reveals the other portion of the matryoshka. THEY unify the dolls. THEY embrace.

VASILISA (CONT'D)

You'd be sad to lose even one.

THE DOLL enters and stands above STEP-SISTER 2 and the baby. STEP-SISTER 2 turns her eyes to THE DOLL.

THE DOLL brings a finger to her lips and smiles.

End of Play