

The Long Standby  
Episode 1 - The House Is Now Open

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Version 12.0

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INT/EXT. THEATRE - DAY

Open on The New Market, a tired-looking theatre sat in the middle of a busy high street. On either side of the entrance are posters that read 'CINDERELLA - COMING SOON!' Inside the auditorium, the actors are on stage for warm ups led by ANNA, the Artistic Director. Sat in the stalls is NINA, the Stage Manager, dressed all in black and wearing a look of slight despair on her face. Next to her is a script and a white mug with the words 'MAKE IT STOP' in large black lettering.

ANNA

Ok everyone, form a circle. This next exercise is going to get your hearts and minds racing! I'm going to give someone the clap, like this.

Anna claps towards ELLEN, the female lead. She pretends to catch it with shy enthusiasm. Nina looks like she's going to say something but quickly changes her mind.

ANNA (cont'd)

And Ellen, our beautiful Cinderella, passes it on. Great work! When I shout change, you have to send the clap in the opposite direction. Got it? Let's go! Daniel, our dashing Prince Charming, you've got the clap!

Anna claps towards DANIEL who shrieks in delight and claps towards fellow cast member ASHLEY, who throws it back to Daniel. Daniel starts running around the circle. This prompts the rest of the cast to start running around the stage, throwing and catching claps, shouting in excitement. Nina looks down to the first aid kit by her feet and puts her head in her hands, wishing she was anywhere else.

ANNA (cont'd)

Now catch it like it's the best thing ever! You're really happy that you've caught the clap. It feels great! That's it, good! Now catch it like it's a bomb! Quick get rid of it, get rid of the clap!

Nina stands up rather abruptly, her chair scrapes across the floor and crashes over. All the actors freeze and the whole theatre goes deathly quiet.

DANIEL

Nina, I'm giving the clap to you!

He claps towards Nina, who responds with a look that suggests she'd very much like to murder him.

NINA  
I'm just gonna go and check on a...  
costume.

Nina can't leave quickly enough.

ANNA  
So, who ended up with the clap?

Everyone points at Daniel. Anna shakes her head disappointingly.

ANNA (cont'd)  
Oh Daniel...

Daniel looks embarrassed with himself.

TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. BACKSTAGE / WARDROBE ROOM - DAY

LLOYD (the sharply dressed head of wardrobe) is stomping to the wardrobe room with a basket of washing. KELLY, his assistant, is inside working on a costume.

LLOYD  
How many times do I have to tell you,  
Kelly? Check all the pockets before  
you put things in the wash. Look at  
all this nonsense!

As Lloyd pulls out little handfuls of shredded tissue from the basket, he suddenly grabs something that feels strange. His eyes narrow as he spots a familiar-looking item. Pulling it out slowly, an expression of horror soon spreads across his face. A shrunken version of a cardigan dangles in front of him. Lloyd stares at it for a moment before shrieking.

LLOYD (cont'd)  
My favorite cardigan, it's...but...  
What did you do?

Kelly shakes her head, enjoying the reaction.

KELLY  
I put the wash on like you asked.  
Maybe it was...

LLOYD  
(interrupting)  
Don't you dare! Don't you dare blame  
your own mistakes on a malevolent  
spirit or some other-such codswallop.

KELLY  
I was *going* to say, maybe it was the  
new kid, Sam. He's being doing  
personal washing errands for the  
cast.

Lloyd mulls this over before spinning on his heel to look  
for Sam, muttering to himself. Alone, Kelly smirks to  
herself.

INT. BACKSTAGE CORRIDOR - DAY

Nina is walking and flipping through documents on a  
clipboard when she collides with Lloyd.

NINA  
Oh Lloyd! I was just going to ask you  
about the Fairy Godmother costume-

LLOYD  
(interrupting)  
What do you know about this?

Lloyd brandishes the shrunken cardigan in Nina's face, he  
shakes it in silent emphasis.

NINA  
Well, it's definitely too small for  
you.

LLOYD  
This isn't funny.

Nina tries to hold back laughter but it's just too good an  
opportunity to pass up. Nina looks from Lloyd to the  
shrunken cardigan.

NINA  
It's a...little...funny

Lloyd scowls and strides off down the corridor.

NINA (cont'd)  
(calling after Lloyd)  
Oh, come on Lloyd! I do really need  
that costume though!

Lloyd spins around to face Nina.

LLOYD

Then why don't you tell our new Artistic "*Director*" that she needs to stop playing games with the actors and make some actual decisions. I'm practically working blind here!

Lloyd says the word, 'director' in air quotes.

NINA

I'll talk to Anna. She's got her hands full with Daniel at the moment. And trying to secure her next season. And she's still getting used to the way things work around here.

LLOYD

Therein lies the problem, things do not *work* around here. There's too many people who have no idea what they're doing. Case in point!

Lloyd thrusts his shrunken cardigan in the air once more before spinning on his heel and marching off. Nina sighs as she crosses something off on her clipboard.

INT. STAGE, AUDITORIUM. DAY

On stage, the cast are finishing off vocal warm ups whilst Anna thumbs through her script. She's the most excitable and enthusiastic person in the room by a long way. Sat behind her is Nina and SAM, the Assistant Stage Manager.

ANNA

Alright, let's take a look at Cinderella and Prince Charming's song...in the spooky forest scene. Sam, can we get some marks for the trees, please?

The company clears off stage, some going to the stalls, some to the wings.

SAM

Er sure, where do I-

Nina produces a roll of electrical tape.

NINA

Rule number one. Always be prepared.

Nina shows Sam her stage managers kit. It's a set of drawers on wheels and it's a treasure trove of everything you could ever need.

SAM

Thanks. How many rules are there?

NINA

Two thousand or so.

Sam laughs, Nina gives him an '*I'm serious*' look and Sam's laugh fizzles out. Daniel and Ellen take their places on stage as a piano start to play. Nina looks unimpressed as she checks her watch and Sam looks rather perplexed by it all.

SAM

So this is the big show to mark the theatre's triumphant return?

Nina is about to speak but is interrupted by Daniel launching into the first chorus before anybody is ready.

NINA

Indeed. We'd usually go for something else - A Winter's Tale, Guys & Dolls, that sort of thing. But we're in dire need of money and apparently panto is what's gonna turn this ramshackle ship around.

(beat)

You know, once we've raised the wreckage from the seabed.

In the background, Daniel continues with his song and misses the high note. Nina marks it down on a tally titled "Daniel misses the note." It's into double digits.

DANIEL

Nailed it!

Daniel looks pleased with himself as the rest of the cast give him incredulous stares, some have their heads in their hands, others roll their eyes.

ANNA

Ok everyone, let's go again from the top, please.

Anna turns round to Nina, looking for support and mutters under her breath:

ANNA (cont'd)  
And pray that he hits the note this  
time.

Nina passes her tally to Anna, who sighs in resignation and  
slides it back.

SAM  
He's not very good, is he?

Anna and Nina look at each other, seeing who can come up  
with the most diplomatic response.

ANNA  
He's really...

NINA  
Trying.

Nina doesn't mean "trying" in the good sense. Kelly enters  
carrying a washing basket. She prowls towards Sam, grinning  
until she's behind Nina. Kelly schools her face and taps  
Nina on the shoulder.

KELLY  
Nina, Steve said to tell you that a  
wagon's just arrived in the dock.

NINA  
Weird, I'm not expecting anything  
today. Any idea what it is?

KELLY  
No. All Steve said was, 'it's your  
favourite driver.'

NINA  
Urgh, the creepy one?

KELLY  
And apparently he's in a bit of a  
grump. As is Lloyd by the way.

Kelly winks at Sam who frowns back, puzzled.

NINA  
Phenomenal. Well, this should be good  
then.

Nina excuses herself with a heavy sigh. Kelly leans down to  
whisper in Sam's ear.

KELLY

Lloyd is after you. He wants blood.  
I'd lay low for a while, if you want  
to survive your first week here.

Kelly stands back up with a smile on her face like nothing happened and starts to leave.

KELLY (cont'd)

Later!

Sam looks around to see if anyone else heard her.

SAM

What did I do?

Sam suddenly feels very isolated and vulnerable.

SAM (cont'd)

Nina, wait up!

He runs after Nina, whilst nervously looking over his shoulder.

CUTAWAY:

Two crew members are moving a set piece between them. We cut to a close up of one of them who stops to wipe his forehead on his shoulder followed by a quiet ripping sound. We then see that the set is now in two pieces. The two crew members exchange guilty glances then shuffle closer together so it looks like one piece again and continue on.

EXT. LOADING BAY - DAY

Nina and a slightly out-of-breath Sam arrive at the loading bay. The driver has already started to shift some of the contents out. The set pieces are damaged or have very prominent wear and tear.

NINA

What the hell is all this?

WAGON DRIVER

Dunno. Primary school art project?

Nina sees CECIL, the well-meaning but under-qualified theatre chairman, walking by. He is dressed smartly in a suit that screams 'regatta,' rather than 'theatre manager.'



NINA  
Might as well ask the person  
allegedly in charge  
(to Cecil)  
Hey Cecil!  
(gesturing to the  
wagon)  
Is this your doing?

CECIL  
Hmm? Ah yes. Now do you remember that  
theatre in the next town that almost  
had to close?

NINA  
The Rose? They put on a production of  
Les Misérables: The Pantomime.

CECIL  
Yes, that's the one! Complete bloody  
fiasco. They sank a considerable  
amount of money into it and then  
pulled it after just three nights!  
Anyway, they were practically giving  
this stuff away!

With a look of utter disbelief, Nina turns to the wagon  
driver, who is clutching a handful of huge red flags.

NINA  
Hang on, didn't Nigel, our head of  
marketing, used to work at The Rose?

CECIL  
Yes. He's has reliably informed me  
that he had nothing to do with that  
production.

There is a brief moment of silence. Nina narrows her eyes  
slightly at Cecil.

NINA  
Riiight. We're doing Cinderella, you  
do know that?

Cecil appears to already be losing interest in the  
conversation.

CECIL  
Yes. They're both pantomimes.

NINA

No! No. They chose to stage theirs as a pantomime. The two shows are polar opposites. And *this* all looks too big-

CECIL

(interrupting Nina)

Ah well I'm sure that there's a lot of jolly useful stuff here.

Cecil glances over to Sam, who looks like a rabbit that has just watched Watership Down.

CECIL (cont'd)

And how is my favourite grandson's first week going so far?

Nina looks a little surprised to hear the two are related. Before Sam can answer, Lloyd is heard off-screen shouting Sam's name. Sam's eyes widen as the shouting draws closer.

SAM

Oh God, um...

Panicking, Sam jumps into the back of the wagon and hides amongst the set pieces.

CECIL

Attaboy! Such enthusiasm! Maybe we should all be more like Sam, eh?

Sam peaks up nervously from behind a set piece as Cecil wanders off chucking to himself and Nina is left looking very confused.

NINA

Cecil? We can't use this! This does not count as a set!

Cecil has disappeared. Lloyd bursts through the loading bay door and casts a disapproving eye over the scene.

NINA (cont'd)

Are you planning on doing any actual work today, Lloyd? Or are you gonna carry on flouncing around the place like an unhinged banshee?

LLOYD

I think we both know the answer to that.

NINA

Leave. Now!

Lloyd raises his hands in mock surrender and retreats backwards, his eyes still scanning the loading bay. Nina makes sure he has gone before turning back to the heap of set pieces and sighs in exasperation. The wagon driver takes a brief break from his unloading to also look at the pile of assorted mess.

NINA (cont'd)

How much will it cost to make it all go away?

WAGON DRIVER

Give us £50 and I'll burn for ya?

Nina laughs and appears to be considering it, but then looks at the wagon driver's emotionless face and realises that he's deadly serious.

NINA

Get out of the wagon Sam.

Nina spins on her heel and heads out of the loading bay with a sense of haste. Sam follows, mumbling something about the truck 'smelling funny.'

ELLEN'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Ellen is applying makeup whilst talking on speakerphone to a friend.

ELLEN

It's going well thanks. First acting gig since drama school. Kinda bricking it! The director is nice though and the cast are really supportive. Well, mostly. There's one individual who I don't quite gel with...He can just be a bit intense and exasperating at times. I guess that's just his way of playing the character.

(beat)

You know, the character of a charming prince.

There is a knock on the door. A voice offscreen informs Ellen that she needs to return to the stage.

ELLEN (cont'd)  
(towards the door)  
Coming!  
(back to her friend)  
Gotta go! Bye!

Ellen hangs up and leaves the dressing room

INT. STAGE - DAY

Ellen walks in just as Nina comes onto the stage to make an announcement.

NINA  
Hello company, your attention please.

Everyone turns to look at her. Sat together in the back half of the stalls are EILEEN and JOAN, two elderly actors who have been hanging around the theatre for a very long time... Joan is always knitting.

EILEEN  
Oh God, it's the Women in Black!

Eileen turns towards Joan with her hand covering the side of her face, as if Medusa had suddenly appeared on stage.

EILEEN (cont'd)  
Don't look at her! She'll take your first born.

Joan doesn't bother to look up from her knitting.

JOAN  
She can have him. He's a useless bugger.

Nina doesn't appear to have heard the two ladies. In fact, nobody in the room reacts to them.

NINA  
*Please* write your name on your script and look after it. I will print no more.  
(beat)  
Oh and *please* remember to sign in *and* out every day. I'm not going back into the dressing rooms to look for you. Not after last time. The theatre is dark and full of terrors.

Nina heads out into the stalls and takes a seat at the table. A lot of the cast understand the reference and chuckle.

EILEEN

Oooh, King John. Now there's a play.

Joan frowns at Eileen.

JOAN

It's from Game of Thrones, you daft cow.

Eileen looks rather bewildered by the comment.

ANNA

Thanks Nina. Ok, if we're all ready, then, let's start at the top of page 35.

There's a rustling of pages turning. Joan has a script which clearly says in big letters, 'DANIEL'S SCRIPT - HANDS OFF!' in the top left corner. Daniel's rummaging through his bag and puts his hand up.

DANIEL

Miss! I can't find my script!

ANNA

Oh. Nina, could you lend him yours please?

Nina looks at Anna as if she's lost her mind.

NINA

Er, mine has got on all the lighting and sound cues, costume and make up changes-

ANNA

You're right, Daniel take mine. Nina, I'll share yours. Sam?

Sam pops up from behind the seat next to Anna.

ANNA (cont'd)

Oh Sam! You scared me! Would you mind popping to the office and printing off another script for Daniel please?

Sam starts scanning the auditorium like a meerkat. He darts to the back and disappears out the door into the foyer.

ANNA (cont'd)  
 (to Nina)  
 Is he ok?

NINA  
 Hard to tell. If he doesn't encounter  
 the wicked witch, he'll be fine.

Anna looks a bit confused.

ANNA  
 Are you...talking about Lloyd?

NINA  
 Worse.

Anna is still puzzled, but returns to her script.

INT. BOX OFFICE - DAY

KAREN, the Box Office Manager is sat behind the reception desk and is on the phone to a customer. Her name badge is visible on the left side of her blouse.

KAREN  
 What? It's Cinderella. With the  
 pumpkin and the glass slipper?  
 (beat)  
 No, You're thinking of Sleeping  
 Beauty. You can't buy tickets for  
 Sleeping Beauty.  
 (beat)  
 Because we're staging Cinderella...

Karen stares at ceiling with a pained expression, silently mouths "Oh my God."

KAREN (cont'd)  
 No. I can't explain the whole plot,  
 you'll just have to see it for  
 yourself. Or look it up online.  
 (beat)  
 No, the internet. You don't have the  
 internet?

Karen covers the speaker with her hand for a moment.

KAREN (cont'd)  
 Of course you don't.  
 (beat)  
 Is that everything?  
 (MORE)

KAREN (cont'd)

(beat)

I definitely don't have time to explain what the internet is. You'll have to Google it-I mean, ask someone.

(beat)

Someone who isn't me!

Karen looks like she wants to throw the phone into the sea.

KAREN (cont'd)

I've got other customers on the line, so, if that's everything...Super. Thanks. Goodbye.

Karen seems emotionally exhausted as the call ends. She starts hitting the keyboard with the handset.

KAREN (cont'd)

(in time with the hits)

Why. Are. People. So. Stupid?

Karen sees Sam standing right in front of her, who looks very shifty and on edge.

SAM

Can you print out some more scripts for me please?

KAREN

Does this look like a printers to you, young man?

SAM

(sensing a trap but unsure of the right answer)

No...

KAREN

Correct. Besides, I don't have a printer. Not that kind of printer, anyway. Now shoo.

SAM

What's that on the shelf behind you?

Karen turns round and sees the printer on the shelf. She turns back to Sam and narrows her eyes at him.

INT. STAGE - DAY

The cast are sat on the stage taking a short break. Anna and Nina are not with them.

ELLEN

What did Nina mean before when she said that the theatre is full of terrors?

Daniel looks across to Ellen and his face lights up.

DANIEL

She doesn't know! She doesn't know about the theatre ghosts! Hugh, lights! Lewis, music!

Some people sigh, including HUGH, the lighting technician and LEWIS, the sound technician. Hugh reluctantly fades down the stage & house lights, plunging everything into darkness, save for a number of dim working lights. Lewis fades up some spooky music. Daniel's underlit face, courtesy of a mini Maglight - clearly labeled "NINA'S" - which he seemingly plucked out of thin air, is now visible.

DANIEL (cont'd)

Journey with me, through the New Market's dark and twisted past. It's a story of betrayal so cruel and murder most foul. Of two tormented souls who cannot leave.

(beat)

Alice Bancroft. A brilliant actor adored by her audiences. In 1865, she died every night on stage. Twice on Saturdays. For her character danced the hangman's jig in the final act. But on closing night, the stage hand did not set the safety lever in the correct position and Alice...

(beat)

Well, she danced the Hangman's jig for real. The oblivious audience gave her swinging corpse a five minute standing ovation.

(beat)

To this day, people claim to see Alice, still in her grey costume, waiting in the wings. Be careful not to anger her, or else you might see her swinging from the lighting bars, eyes wide open with the shock of her own mortality.



Ellen is transfixed by Daniel's story. Some of the cast are enjoying Daniel's little performance but others seem very uncomfortable.

ELLEN

That can't be true? It's so awful.

DANIEL

It's as true as can be! As is the story of John.

ELLEN

John?

DANIEL

The second ghostly member of our company. John loved a sweet woman called Mary. Unfortunately, John had a rival in acting and love - Bill. And when John began courting Mary, Bill became extremely envious.

(beat)

One fateful day in 1886, after a long and arduous rehearsal, John was returning some props to the cellar. John tripped and fell down the stairs, twisting his ankle. John called for help, but the only person who heard his cries was Bill.

(beat)

Bill found his rival, lying there helpless. The opportunity to do away with his competition was too great. Bill stabbed John seventeen times before he realised that he was holding a prop knife. So he bashed Bill around the head with a wooden leg instead.

(beat)

Legend says that Bill buried John's body somewhere inside this theatre. John still wanders the theatre at night, searching for his forgotten body. Often, you can hear him walking across the balcony.

Daniel points towards the balcony and everyone turns to look. The sound of footsteps growing louder can be heard. MICHELLE, a female cast member, whips her head around, taking stock of who's where.

MICHELLE

Cut it out Lewie.

LEWIS

I'm not doing anything! My master  
fader is down, I swear!

MICHELLE

Well if it's not you... and we're all  
here... who's up there?

A shadow figure is visible in the third row of the balcony.

ELLEN

Alice?

DANIEL

Looks more like a man. It must be  
John!

They all gasp in horror. A light suddenly shines upon them  
from where the figure stands.

NINA

What the hell is going on? Why are  
the lights off?

Hugh brings the lights back up to reveal Nina, having  
entered the balcony on her way to the box. She's standing  
there holding her large Maglight. Daniel hides the mini  
Maglight behind his back.

NINA (cont'd)

Daniel, I swear to God, if you were  
doing that bloody ghost story again -

Daniel holds his hands up in mock surrender, the Maglight  
has disappeared. Nina turns to look across to the lighting  
desk.

NINA (cont'd)

As for you two, Hughie and Lewie, you  
ought be ashamed of yourselves.

Hugh and Lewis look very embarrassed. Nina throws a pack of  
electrical tape that she brought especially for Hugh, in his  
direction.

NINA (cont'd)

I need to go and check on a wig that  
should have been ready three hours  
ago. Daniel, since you clearly have  
time to kill, why don't you go down  
to the cellar and see if we have any  
useful props down there.

(MORE)

NINA (cont'd)

Can I trust the rest of you to keep  
the lights on, whilst I'm gone?

The cast silently nod and Nina marches through the balcony doors and Daniel sulks off towards front of house via the auditorium. There is silence for a moment.

ELLEN

So...has anyone actually seen the  
ghosts?

The cast exchange awkward glances between each other. There's a moment of quiet before Hugh and Lewis, who are examining some of the microphones on the stage, pipe up.

HUGH

I've definitely seen a figure in a  
grey cloak walking across the  
balcony. It often feels like he's  
lurking in the back corner of the  
box... watching us.

LEWIS

I've picked up some strange sounds on  
these stage mics. Mostly banging, but  
occasionally something that sounds a  
bit like whispering.

ASHLEY sidles over to Ellen.

ASHLEY

Oh I've seen them both. A couple of  
times each actually. Saw Alice pacing  
in the wings and John moving across  
the balcony. Someone took a photo of  
me backstage and it wasn't until I  
looked at it afterwards that I  
noticed it, look!

Ashley shows Ellen an image on their phone that shows Ashley in costume and behind them what would appear to be a lady dressed in grey.

ASHLEY (cont'd)

Can you see her? Freaky right?

Lloyd, who has been hanging up costumes on a mobile running rail in the wings has had enough.

LLOYD

It's all absolute rubbish and  
nonsense from people with nothing  
better to do.

(MORE)

LLOYD (cont'd)  
It's just a ploy to get the theatre  
publicity so people come to the  
shows. Gives them something to look  
for when they get bored during a  
show.

Behind Lloyd, one of the costumes falls off the rail.  
Everyone gasps, apart from Lloyd, who just looks annoyed.

LLOYD (cont'd)  
Oh behave yourselves! Has no one  
heard of gravity?

Lloyd turns to hang the fallen costume back up. In the  
stalls, Joan speaks without looking up from her knitting.  
Nobody appears to hear their exchange or acknowledge them.

JOAN  
They don't like being talked about  
like that, you know.

Eileen nods in agreement.

EILEEN  
Our final moments on this earth are  
not a form of entertainment. His  
Royal Highness would do well to  
remember that.

INT. THEATRE CELLAR - DAY

Daniel walks down into the dusty cellar where a lot of the  
old props are stored. The air is thick and musty.

DANIEL  
Eurgh, did someone die down here?

He surveys the mess around him, covering his nose with his  
top. He opens a few drawers, looking to see what he can  
find.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
There's nothing here, it's just a  
load of junkaaahhhh-

Daniel steps back onto a floorboard which breaks. He falls  
back and lands on his behind.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
Owie!

Daniel still has part of his leg trapped beneath the floor and he wrestles it out.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
Someone's gonna get in trouble for  
this. Ooo injury lawyers! Oh! I could  
be in the advert too!

He stops for a moment to imagine himself in the TV advert.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
Better get a photo then tell Nina I  
need the rest of the day off.

Daniel gets his phone out. The flash goes off as he does so. He looks at the picture then notices something odd.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
What the-?

Daniel crawls over to the hole and peers inside.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
What is *this* I see before me?

INT. STAGE - DAY

Anna is rehearsing a scene with Ellen, Ashley and Michelle. Ashley doesn't seem to be interested. Michelle keeps glancing at her phone when she thinks nobody is looking. Ellen is the only one trying and carrying the scene. With the exception of Anna, everyone else sat in the stalls is on their phones, reading, somebody is painting Dungeons and Dragons figures and another is attempting to chop fruit in their lap.

Ellen is on stage alone, the Ugly Sisters enter from a set door, stage right. They're all wearing odd bits of their costume on top of their rehearsal clothes.

ASHLEY  
(as Ugly Sister 1 and  
with little  
enthusiasm)  
Oh, there you are Cinderella. I  
thought I could smell you. Have you  
washed my dress for the ball yet?

ELLEN  
(as Cinderella)  
Um, well no not-

Cinderella is interrupted by Ugly Sister 2.

MICHELLE

(As Ugly sister 2)

Yeah, and mine. I need to look absolutely ravishing for the prince.

ASHLEY

Why? Is it a magical dress? No? You'll have to hope they turn all the lights off! Oh Hugh, be a dear?

The stage briefly dims to a blackout

MICHELLE

Hugh! Turn them back on!

The lights come back up.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

I'll have you know that many men have traveled from far and wide to gaze upon this beautiful face of mine.

ASHLEY

Oh is that where all the statues in the garden came from?

MICHELLE

Oh har har, we'll see who's laughing after I dazzle the prince with my moves.

Michelle does some dance moves, whilst Ashley looks on, unimpressed.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

I've been watching Dirty Dancing a lot recently. That reminds me, these shoes are proper smelly. You'll need to give these a clean too Cinderella.

Ugly Sister 2 takes her shoes off and chucks them at Cinderella. Ugly Sister 1 and Cinderella react to the smell of Ugly Sister 2's feet.

ASHLEY

Ewww, it smells like an abandoned fish market in here! You'd best take mine too Cinderella. Have them done by this evening!

Ashley takes their shoes off and gives them to Ellen. Ashley & Michelle exit up stage, laughing with each other. Ellen sighs as she looks at the shoes. She cautiously sniffs one and grimaces at the smell.

ANNA

Alright, let's hold it there.  
Michelle, try not to turn your back  
to the audience on the "har har".  
Ashley, could you try and be a bit  
more present in the scene, please?

Ashley rolls their eyes at Michelle before turning an obviously fake smile on Anna

ASHLEY

Sure!

Anna senses the mounting frustration and tension in the room. She sets her notebook down.

ANNA

Look, I know that panto isn't  
something that you'd usually do. But  
this is the reality of our current  
situation.

Ashley crosses their arms, rolls their eyes at their scene partners and strides off upstage and sits down on the throne that's been left just offstage.

ANNA

I promise you that I have a wonderful  
season planned! The Merry Wives of  
Windsor, Little Shop of Horrors -  
Ashley, don't you want to play  
Audrey? Present Laughter,  
Communicating Doors...

Anna suddenly stops herself.

ANNA (cont'd)

I'm aware that we still don't know  
for sure that we have a season yet.  
But we're definitely not going to get  
anywhere if we're phoning it in.

Ashley turns back to Anna, intrigued but not quite ready to vacate their throne. Nina looks around the room at the faces of the cast members. Anna's riling speech doesn't quite seem to have had the desired effect. Nina glances at her watch and decides to rescue Anna.

NINA

Oh look, it's nearly one o'clock.  
How about we break for-

There's a sudden rush of actors grabbing bags and discarding props and costume pieces.

NINA (cont'd)

...Lunch.

Glad of the break, Anna makes her way out once too. Lloyd walks onto the stage and promptly shrieks.

LLOYD

Savages! Is it that hard to hang up  
their own costumes just once?

Lloyd starts hanging the costumes back up in a very exaggerated manner, reminiscent of a Monty Python sketch.

NINA

I think everyone's just tired. It's  
been a long morning.

LLOYD

Oh poor dears. It's ok. I'm happy to  
work through my lunch break in order  
to clean up after them. No one else  
has to put up with this kind of  
nonsense.

As Lloyd is talking, Ashley has walked back onto the stage.

ASHLEY

Nina, someone's robbed my lunch! I  
had my name on it and everything and  
someone just swiped it.

(beat)

We need to cease all fridge-related  
activities until we find out who the  
culprit is!

Nina turns from Ashley to look back at Lloyd and raises her eyebrows. Lloyd narrows his eyes in reply.

LLOYD

Ok fine, I get it. Enjoy your  
victory.

Lloyd heads off backstage and Nina allows herself a little smile.



ASHLEY

So, shall we unplug the fridge or  
what?

Nina's smile turns into a frown.

CUTAWAY:

STEVE, one of the stage technicians, is sat in a room with his lunch. He has his feet up on a chair and is loudly eating a bags of crisps whilst reading a book called 'THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS.' The sound of someone clearing their throat can be heard. As Steve looks up, mid-crunch, we cut to a wide shot to see he's actually in a meeting room, surrounded by a bunch of unimpressed people who are trying to have a meeting.

INT. STAGE - DAY

Lunch is over and everyone is back in the auditorium.

NINA

Ok, from the top of the scene.

The Ugly Sisters go to exit via one of the set doors but are surprised to find Daniel waiting in the doorway. Daniel is leaning against the set in a dramatic melancholy pose, his head is bowed, holding something behind his back.

ASHLEY

Jesus! Daniel?

Daniel doesn't move, he just heaves a sigh that seems to suggest he's carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders.

MICHELLE

Nina? Daniel's blocking my exit.

Nina doesn't look up from her script.

NINA

Clear the scene please Daniel.

Daniel, head still bowed, heaves another heavy sigh, peels himself off the set wall and takes a step forwards. Ashley and Michelle exchange a look and back off, clearing a path for Daniel who clearly wants the stage. He crosses to center, waits a beat, and finally looking up with what he considers to be mournful eyes. All of his movements are greatly over-emphasised and exaggerated.

He looks about at the assembled company, his bottom lip quivering. Ashley and Michelle retreat to the relative safety of downstage.

DANIEL

Alas!

With a flourish, Daniel produces the skull from behind his back. Ashley and Michelle are close enough to see that it looks very real and gasp. The rest of the company look on, not thrilled about yet another Daniel-interruption.

DANIEL (cont'd)

Poor Yorick! I knew him well.

JOAN

Horatio, dear.

Daniel swivels to glare out into the audience, putting a hand up to shield his eyes from the stage lights.

DANIEL

Huh?

Daniel lowers the skull slightly, doubting himself.

EILEEN

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him,  
Horatio... that's the line.

There are sniggers from the company. Daniel still hasn't worked out who is heckling him and none of the cast turn round to acknowledge Joan and Eileen. Daniel scowls and continues, a little flustered.

DANIEL

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him,  
*Horatio*: a fellow of, um, infinite  
jest, errr... of...

Daniel has been thrown off his game, He turns his back to the company, extracts his phone and glances at it, clearly reading the soliloquy.

DANIEL (cont'd)

Of most excellent fancy. He hath  
borne me on his back a thousand  
times?

Daniel looks confused over the meaning of the text.

EILEEN

Best stick to playing pantomime  
princes, poppet.

Daniel is fuming at how badly this is all going. Nina jumps  
in before he can go any further.

NINA

Steve and I buried the Hamlet props  
in the offsite storage unit. Where  
did you get that skull from?

DANIEL

Would you believe that I found this  
fella looking up at me from under a  
broken floorboard in the basement? Oh  
by the way Nina, there's a broken  
floorboard in the basement.

He suddenly looks a bit guilty.

DANIEL (cont'd)

It was like that when I got there.

Nina doesn't know which issue to address first - the mystery  
skull, the broken floor in the cellar or the fact that  
Daniel is subjecting the remains of some poor, defenseless  
dead person, to his terrible Hamlet. She heads to the stage  
to take a closer look.

NINA

Oh, how I am going to regret this.

(beat)

Daniel, where exactly was the skull  
when you found it?

DANIEL

Well, the floorboard broke - by  
itself - and when the dust settled, I  
saw the skull underneath it. Weird  
place to leave a prop, huh? It's like  
they didn't want it to be found.

Nina takes a small step back.

NINA

Daniel, put the skull down.

She quickly takes out her phone.

NINA (cont'd)

I think I need to call the police.

DANIEL

Why?

NINA

I think it's a real skull.

Daniel takes a beat to process this information before he freaks out and starts awkwardly juggling the skull, like a hot potato

DANIEL

Oh God! It's got my fingerprints all over it! Get it off me, get it off me! Horatio!

NINA

Be careful with it! Just give it here!

Nina rushes forward and catches the skull before it can fall to the ground. She doesn't really want to be holding it either, so quickly puts it on a seat, grossed out by the way it's empty eye sockets appear to be staring at her.

NINA (cont'd)

Well this is different.

Whilst on the phone to the police, Nina moves side to side, looking at the skull.

NINA (cont'd)

I swear its gaze follows you around the room. Creepy. Gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "dead crowd".

INT. BACKSTAGE (WINGS) - DAY

Lloyd, laden with costumes, heads towards a running rail. Markers divide the rail into the characters. He pulls a gap in the rail to hang something on,

KELLY (O.S.)

Lloyd? Do you know where Prince Charming's boots are?

Lloyd turns to Kelly and doesn't see Sam's head revealed in the gap he's just created. Sam sidesteps so that he is once again hidden by costumes.

LLOYD

They're on the bottom shelf towards the back.

KELLY (O.S.)

Got them!

LLOYD

(Muttering to himself)

Funny that. They were in the same place that they've been in for the last four weeks.

Lloyd makes another gap in the rail further along where Sam is hiding. Sam cannot be seen by Lloyd and from a different camera angle we see that Sam has ducked down out of sight. Lloyd grabs the whole rail and walks out with it. Sam is revealed, still crouching down, unbeknownst to Lloyd. Sam stands up and is suddenly face to face with Kelly. She grins at him, then looks to the door and back to Sam.

KELLY

Lucky escape. This time.

She flashes a menacing grin and walks off. Sam looks terrified and turns around to now be face-to-face with Cecil.

SAM

Woah! What's with this place?

CECIL

Sam, dear boy, whatever's the matter?

SAM

Everyone here has got a screw loose. I've spent most of the day trying to avoid the clutches of a madman who thinks I've shrunk his favourite cardigan. I've been belittled, ridiculed and I don't think the Box Office lady likes me very much.

CECIL

Yes, that's probably true.

Cecil chuckles. He sees that Sam looks quite downtrodden.

CECIL (cont'd)

Oh don't worry about her, Karen doesn't like anybody.

SAM

Is this what it's like on a regular basis?

CECIL  
There's usually a bit more crying.  
Still, it's early in rehearsals.

Cecil wanders off, lost in thought. Sam realises he's all alone and hears Lloyd cursing in the distance. He darts off the opposite way to the sound.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

The actors are rehearsing on the stage apart from Eileen and Joan, who are sat in their usual seats in the stalls. The skull is in the seat next to Eileen. She is staring at it inquisitively and looking quite wistful. Joan is busy knitting.

EILEEN  
Joan? Have you ever wondered why  
we're still here?

JOAN  
Not especially. I assume it's because  
our souls have chosen to remain in  
the place that we love.  
(beat)  
To spend eternity watching the young  
company rehearse. To be unseen and  
unheard as we observe the great show  
that is life itself.

Eileen looks at Joan with palpable skepticism then turns to shout out to Daniel on the stage.

EILEEN  
Oi! Prince Alarming! Your crocs are  
untied!

Daniel looks up at them and then down at his shoes (he's not wearing crocs). He looks back at them and unwinds his middle finger up towards the two women. Joan raises her eyebrows at Eileen, who sighs in resignation.

EILEEN (cont'd)  
We should be so lucky eh?

Daniel is now spinning imaginary plates on his middle finger and adding more on each time.

JOAN  
More's the pity. I wonder if the  
skull was an actor in life.  
(MORE)

JOAN (cont'd)  
The rest of 'em is probably spinning  
in their grave at this performance.  
(Turning to the  
skull) )  
I bet they didn't cast third rate  
celebrities in your day, did they?

Joan looks back to Daniel. Anna notices Daniel's messing  
around and adopts her "mum" voice.

ANNA  
Daniel!

Daniel is caught off-guard by Anna and drops his imaginary  
plates. He takes a moment to mourn the non-existent smashed  
plates as Eileen and Joan laugh at him.

ANNA (cont'd)  
Let's have another look at the scene  
where Cinders meets Prince Charming  
for the first time in the forest.

Sam reads aloud the stage directions from the script. Joan,  
having finished her knitting, places a bobble hat on the  
skull. Giving a satisfied nod, she props the skull up on her  
bag in its seat, so it can continue to watch the rehearsal  
with them.

JOAN  
(to the skull)  
Trust me, you'll want to see this.

SAM  
Cinderella has been sent out to  
collect firewood by her evil  
stepmother. She is chopping up a  
large tree branch with an axe when  
Prince Charming walks by.

Daniel, with air of arrogance about him, struts over to  
Ellen and looks her up and down.

DANIEL  
(As Prince Charming)  
Good morning, fair maiden. Can I...  
axe you a few questions?

Daniel looks out to the auditorium and grins. Nobody laughs.  
Somebody coughs.

ELLEN  
(As Cinderella)  
Good morning to you sir. What would  
you like to know?

Ellen returns to chopping wood.

DANIEL  
I'd like to know what that tree did  
to you!

ELLEN  
Oh, haha! I'm just chopping some  
firewood for my stepmother and  
stepsisters.

DANIEL  
Well, you certainly know how to...  
handle yourself!

Daniel looks out to the auditorium and winks. This time  
somebody groans.

DANIEL (cont'd)  
I'm Charming, by the way.

Ellen has to force a smile. Daniel is off script and  
flattering himself.

ELLEN  
Well I suppose you are a bit  
charming, even if you do say so  
yourself.

DANIEL  
Oh no, you misunderstand me. I meant  
that I'm Prince Charming. I live in  
the palace over yonder.

Daniel points dramatically off into the distance with a smug  
look on his face.

ELLEN  
You live in the castle! I've dreamed  
of living in a place like that. Tell  
me, what's it like?

DANIEL  
You'll find out tomorrow night, will  
you not?

ELLEN  
What do you mean?



DANIEL

The ball of course! The palace is throwing a huge ball and every lady in the land is invited. I am hoping to meet someone that I can fall in love with. We'll marry, have fifteen kids, and then we will live happily ever after.

A cast member playing the role of the Duke calls over to Prince Charming.

DUKE

Prince Charming? His Royal Highness, the King, requests your presence back at the palace for your suit fitting.

DANIEL

I must go, fair maiden. I very much look forward to seeing you at the palace tomorrow night.

Daniel looks Ellen up and down once more before exiting the stage with arms stretched out towards Cinderella.

ELLEN

But I didn't get an invitation!  
Hello? Prince Charming?  
Oh no. He's gone and I don't have an invitation to the ball. However will I...

Ellen's dialogue is interrupted by some banging. Ellen tries to continue.

ELLEN (cont'd)

He's gone and I don't have an invitation to the ball. However will I get into...

The sound of sawing is now heard, along with some cursing, startling everybody.

ANNA

Can we hold the work back there please?

The roar of power-tools, followed by metal screeching as its curt into, drowns Anna out. Somebody screams, Daniel nearly falls off the stage (he saves himself, much to Joan and Eileen's visible and audible disappointment).

ANNA (cont'd)  
Hello! We're trying to rehearse here!

Nina pops her head out from backstage, ear defenders round her neck, and a small angle grinder in hand.

NINA  
Sorry Anna, we have to shift these ridiculously large set pieces to somewhere where they aren't a fire risk.

ANNA  
Oh. Is that the palace interior set then? Don't forget that we need columns and a grand staircase.

Nina looks across to the set piece, it appears to be stuck in the doorway.

NINA  
I mean, I'm sure someone could fashion this into something that once looked somewhat like a palace ballroom.

Anna makes her way to the wings to see what Nina is talking about. We see her stop all of a sudden as she sees the problem.

ANNA  
Woah. What show is this from?

NINA  
Guess.

ANNA  
War of the Worlds?

NINA  
Close. The Les Mis panto

ANNA  
I see.

NINA  
And it won't go through the door so we'll have to saw the top off.

Nina motions behind her where all of the doors have been removed from their hinges. A bit of set is already wedged in the doorway.

From the other side of the set piece, we hear the muffled voices of the crew who were attempting to push the piece through the doorway. Nina looks at her angle grinder.

NINA (cont'd)  
Not with this though, I'll need  
something bigger.

ANNA  
Ok, do what you need to. We'll move  
rehearsal to the studio.

Nina nods her thanks as Anna and the cast head towards the studio. Meanwhile Sam has walked onto the now-empty stage area carrying some paperwork.

SAM  
Where did everybody go?

From the other side of the stage, Lloyd is pushing a running rail. He cannot see where he is going and Sam is looking the opposite way. The rail knocks into Sam.

SAM (cont'd)  
Hey, watch it!

Lloyd's head appears from around the rail and his eyes narrow.

LLOYD  
You!

Sam's eyes widen in horror.

SAM  
S\*\*t!

Sam runs off in a panic with Lloyd in pursuit.

INT - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Nina is stood next to the piece of scenery, enjoying a rare moment of peace and quiet. She gazes up to the ceiling, her safety goggles on her forehead and ear defenders on.

NINA  
Even the darkest night will end and  
the sun will rise.

She pulls the safety googles down and looks down solemnly at the scenery.

NINA (cont'd)  
But not for you.

She looks towards the set with some glee as she fires up the chainsaw. Enjoying the sound and how it feels in her hands, Nina doesn't notice that two police officers have walked into the auditorium and into the backstage area, escorted by Karen.

POLICE OFFICER  
Excuse me madam?

Nina looks up in confused horror to see the police officers looking very concerned whilst Karen is very amused. Nina turns the chainsaw off.

POLICE OFFICER (cont'd)  
We're here about the human remains  
that have been found on the premises.  
You look like you might know  
something about it.

The look on Nina's face is one of pure unintended guilt. In the stalls, Eileen pulls the woolly hat all the way over the skull, concealing it. Sam runs past Nina, screaming, closely followed by Lloyd, who is holding his cloth tape measure like a garroting wire.

SAM  
Help! The crazy man is going to kill  
me!

LLOYD  
I'll kill you! I'll kill every piece  
of you!

Lloyd spots the police officers and comes to a stop next to Nina. The facial expressions of the police officers goes from concerned to very concerned. Karen looks absolutely thrilled. Nina slowly turns her head towards Lloyd, keeping her eyes on the police officers and speaking out of the corner of her mouth.

NINA  
Not the best time Lloyd.

Still awkwardly holding the chainsaw and tape measure, Nina and Lloyd try to give the police officers a reassuring non-guilty grin. It does not look convincing.

END CREDITS