

HUNTING COCKROACHES



and Other Plays

Janusz Głowacki

*Hunting Cockroaches
and Other Plays*

JANUSZ GŁOWACKI

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Contents

Cinders	1
Hunting Cockroaches	69
Fortinbras Gets Drunk	131

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Cinders

CHARACTERS

Inspector	Father
Principal	First Ugly Sister
Deputy	Second Ugly Sister
Cinderella	Director
Prince	Electrician
Fairy Godmother	Cameraman
Mouse	Soundman
Stepmother	Clappergirl

The action takes place in a girls' reform school somewhere in Poland. Not that far from Warsaw, really.

ACT ONE Scene 1

[Typical boarding school recreation room. Tables, chairs, magazines. A closed piano. Only the heavily barred windows suggest this is not an ordinary room. From another room a song can be heard, sung by a chorus of girls. Two men enter: the PRINCIPAL of the girls' reform school, and the INSPECTOR. Both have intelligent faces (we learn more later). They sit at one of the tables. Singing continues in an adjoining room.]

GIRLS. I'M FROM A RESPECTABLE HOME.
I NEVER MEET BOYS ON THE QUIET.
I NEVER GO OUT ON MY OWN.
MY FOLKS WOULDN'T DARE LET ME
TRY IT.

INSPECTOR. Well, yes! Indeed! Very nice.

PRINCIPAL. Thank you.

INSPECTOR. Singing lesson?

PRINCIPAL. Singing lesson.

GIRLS. I NEVER GO OUT ON MY OWN.
I'VE NEVER BEEN OUT ON A DATE.
MY PARENTS STILL KEEP ME AT HOME
AND GIVE ME SWEETS AND CHOCO-
LATE CAKE.

INSPECTOR. What kind of song is that?

PRINCIPAL. It's one of their favorites.

INSPECTOR. Young people certainly are imaginative.

Charming, very charming. But that's not what I want to talk about. A film director wants to make a film about your school, focusing on the play your girls are doing.

PRINCIPAL. *Cinderella?*

INSPECTOR. *Cinderella.*

PRINCIPAL. What do you think about it?

INSPECTOR. Well, you can be proud that he chose your school. No good film has ever been made about this kind of institution.

PRINCIPAL. I know that.

INSPECTOR. The whole country will watch this film about your school and your girls.

PRINCIPAL. I understand.

INSPECTOR. Are you sure you do?

PRINCIPAL. No I don't.

GIRLS. [*singing*] I DON'T FANCY SWEETS ANY-
WAY.

I WANT SOMEONE TO LOVE ME
INSTEAD.

WON'T SOMEBODY TAKE ME
AWAY?

I'M SICK OF THE SWEETS I'M
FED.

INSPECTOR. Yes, very nice. Look, we're living in the twentieth century. Film cameras can go anywhere. Our institution is state run. Everything here is in the open. We have nothing to hide.

PRINCIPAL. No.

INSPECTOR. At the same time, there is no reason to open our doors to the whole country. We can go ahead with this film, showing our courage in openly revealing the more . . . difficult aspects of

school life. On the other hand, there is no reason to leave unexamined the more cheerful side of life here. I would never dream of encouraging you to agree to the idea of this film. At the same time, I would be the last person to discourage you. Let's not beat around the bush. Why don't you give your consent? Or, alternately, why not refuse your consent? Withhold cooperation.

GIRLS. HOORAY IT'S MY BIRTHDAY TODAY!
THIS DAY I SHALL NEVER FORGET.
MY FAMILY'S ALL COMING TO STAY.
JUST THINK OF THE PRESENTS I'LL
GET!

INSPECTOR. I can guarantee you one thing, you'll have the inspectorate's full support. But let me advise you that we'll be keeping a watchful eye every step of the way.

PRINCIPAL. Thank you very much.

INSPECTOR. Please don't mention it. Well, that's our official position and we'll stand by it.

GIRLS. OH LOOK AT THE GOODIES I'VE
GOT—

CHOCOLATES AND MARZIPAN!
BUT ALL I CAN SAY IS *SO WHAT?*
I'LL SHOUT IT AS LOUD AS I CAN
THAT I DON'T WANT MORE SWEETS
ANYWAY.

I WANT SOMEONE TO LOVE ME IN-
STEAD.

WON'T SOMEBODY TAKE ME AWAY?
I'M SICK OF THE SWEETS I'M FED.

INSPECTOR. Listen, tell you what. Why don't we have a talk? Confidentially, I like you. I know you want to

distinguish yourself. But I'm curious to know—in confidence, now—what on earth possessed you to put on a play as stupid as this fairy tale about—what's her name again?—in a place like this?

PRINCIPAL. Cinderella.

INSPECTOR. Exactly.

PRINCIPAL. It's because I'm unlucky . . .

INSPECTOR. I see.

PRINCIPAL. I always hated sports. You know, running, jumping. I liked peace and quiet. I loved books. But I soon realized that reading gets you nowhere. My friends who played sports were given apartments, bought cars, traveled. If you want to know the truth, I was a pretty good athlete. Once I put the shot a yard further than guys who had been training for a couple of years. I liked teaching. You know, kids. And I didn't do too badly. I got a job in a really good middle school. Appointed vice-deputy head. I was respected.

INSPECTOR. Really?

PRINCIPAL. Yes. They published my articles in educational journals. Then one day, in front of an inspector, the Head asked if anyone had any suggestions—improvements for the school. I began to speak. My colleague, a geography teacher, hit me in the ribs. Apparently the Head wasn't really expecting any suggestions, but I had plenty so I volunteered a few all the same. The Head thanked me profusely, and almost immediately I was appointed head of this reform school. Not that far from Warsaw, really. But I was still full of initiative. That was my problem. So I thought the only way to correct this was to do something I couldn't care less about.

That's when I thought of this play. If there's anything I hate more than sports, it's the theater. And I find the story of Cinderella particularly attractive, since it is utterly devoid of any sense. It's completely meaningless . . . total garbage.

INSPECTOR. I see. And how did that film director hear about it?

PRINCIPAL. I have no idea.

INSPECTOR. You know what? Maybe I shouldn't say this . . . but I sincerely hope you come out of this in one piece.

PRINCIPAL. Thank you so much. What a kind thought. You know, I . . .

INSPECTOR. Go on.

PRINCIPAL. It's nothing. It's just that no one has ever wished me well before.

INSPECTOR. In that case, I'll admit to you—in confidence of course—between the two of us—

PRINCIPAL. Of course!

INSPECTOR. I can't stand the theater either.

PRINCIPAL. I'm so pleased.

INSPECTOR. Can't stand it. But most of all I can't bear those avant-garde plays without intermissions. I prefer your traditional theater—Ibsen, Shakespeare—then you can slip away discreetly after the first act. But with these modern plays you have to sneak up the aisles or sit till the end. Take a masterpiece like *Hamlet*! The first act is quite short. *A Doll's House* is not too bad either.

[*The door opens and CINDERELLA looks in. Seeing the PRINCIPAL and the INSPECTOR, she hesitates a moment, then starts to back out.*]

PRINCIPAL. Come on in. Say hello. [CINDERELLA *executes something between a bow and a curtsy.*]

CINDERELLA. Good morning, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Good morning.

PRINCIPAL. This is our star.

INSPECTOR. I'm delighted. I'm sorry. What do you mean exactly?

PRINCIPAL. You know. She's playing the lead. In—

INSPECTOR. *Cinderella*?

PRINCIPAL. Yes. Why aren't you in class?

CINDERELLA. I've got to wash my hair.

PRINCIPAL. Now?

CINDERELLA. My teacher said to do it now, so I'll be ready for hairstyling. I'm going to have my hair done. Wanna see the shampoo he gave me?

PRINCIPAL. Ah. What kind is it?

CINDERELLA. Beer.

INSPECTOR. Mmmhmm.

PRINCIPAL. What kind do you use, sir?

INSPECTOR. Egg.

CINDERELLA. Egg? It makes your hair like an omelet.

PRINCIPAL. Lemon and lime is good.

CINDERELLA. Coal tar soap is the best, but I can't get any.

INSPECTOR. Yes, it's true. We haven't solved all our problems. Supplies still aren't up to scratch.

PRINCIPAL. What's your program today?

CINDERELLA. [*in Russian*] Wieczniernaya priczoska.

PRINCIPAL. That means "a day of doing your hair for the evening."

INSPECTOR. Yes, I understand Russian. The girl's accent is excellent. That's good. Education is vital. A grasp of foreign languages, like Russian, broadens

one's horizons, allows great intimacy with other cultures and civilizations. Nowadays the world's becoming smaller and smaller. One can be anywhere within a couple of hours. Take advantage of this opportunity to travel. In the old days, children weren't so fortunate. You are very lucky. Well . . .

[*Looking at the barred windows, he becomes momentarily confused.*] Are you happy to be in the play?
[CINDERELLA *nods.*] Why?

CINDERELLA. I like the theater. [PRINCIPAL *and* INSPECTOR *exchange looks.*]

PRINCIPAL. Off you go. [CINDERELLA *bows and leaves.*]

INSPECTOR. Pretty.

PRINCIPAL. Yes. I suppose she is.

INSPECTOR. And charming.

PRINCIPAL. Yes, she is charming. Yes.

INSPECTOR. What's she here for?

PRINCIPAL. Robbery with violence.

INSPECTOR. Violence?

PRINCIPAL. With a bottle.

INSPECTOR. Amazing. See how deceptive appearances can be? She has the face of—

PRINCIPAL. An angel.

INSPECTOR. Exactly. Who did she use the bottle on?

PRINCIPAL. Her stepfather. So her mother informed us.
She stole her stilettos and vanished.

INSPECTOR. Shoes?

PRINCIPAL. Yes.

INSPECTOR. The mother.

PRINCIPAL. The mother.

INSPECTOR. Ah, the mother. Has she been here long?

PRINCIPAL. Two years. She could be released at the end of the year.

INSPECTOR. I wish you luck then. Oh, just one more thing. Will this play of yours have an intermission?

PRINCIPAL. I don't know yet.

INSPECTOR. Hmm. In any case, this time the audience won't be leaving.

Scene 2

[A professional film crew is setting up camera, lights, directors' chairs, etc.]

ELECTRICIAN. Did you get a look at them? They're not bad.

CAMERAMAN. They practically shoved their heads through the bars when they saw us coming.

ELECTRICIAN. Not bad at all.

CAMERAMAN. Jesus! You steal, you drink, you screw around, next thing you're a budding film star.

ELECTRICIAN. Jealous?

CAMERAMAN. You gotta be kidding. OK. Let's set up to rehearse.

ELECTRICIAN. I got an idea! If you cut your old lady in half, then someone will film you. Just be scientific about it. Draw a line across her stomach and then . . . chop.

CAMERAMAN. Take it easy.

[Four GIRLS enter carrying a long chest shaped like a coffin. They cover it with a blanket and fix a cross about it. This is the grave of CINDERELLA's mother, where CINDERELLA will pray later.]

ELECTRICIAN. Look at them! Look at them!

[All the GIRLS turn around. SOUNDMAN enters. The girl playing the PRINCE makes a rude gesture and winks.]

CAMERAMAN. [*to the PRINCE*] OK, which one of you is supposed to kneel at the grave?

[*PRINCE is sixteen, tall, well built. The GIRLS adore her, surround her, blindly obey her.*]

PRINCE. Not me. I'm playing the Prince. Cinderella does the kneeling.

CAMERAMAN. Doesn't matter. You kneel in for her.

PRINCE. For you? I'll kneel down for a butt. One butt, one knee. [*Again, she gestures obscenely and winks at ELECTRICIAN.*]

ELECTRICIAN. I'd give her one. Just like that. Then like that, and then like that.

SOUNDMAN. She's a kid.

ELECTRICIAN. Relax, Pop. She's had more cock than you've had hot dinners.

[*The PRINCIPAL, his DEPUTY, and the FILM DIRECTOR enter in mid-conversation. The DEPUTY has a pleasant face, neatly waved black hair; the DIRECTOR is blond, impeccably dressed. The GIRLS, dazzled, scream in admiration.*]

PRINCIPAL. Mayewsky, it's enough!

DIRECTOR. Good morning, girls. [*approaches and greets them with extreme courtesy*]

PRINCE. [*admiringly*] Check him out!

FAIRY GODMOTHER. Jesus Christ!

DIRECTOR. [*gesturing elegantly at the GIRLS*] You know, I want to protect them. Ask a few questions of society—point the finger a little. How is it possible that young girls—our children—should end up here?

PRINCE. Holy shit. Listen to him talk!

FAIRY GODMOTHER.. He's beautiful.

DIRECTOR. The moment I heard about this play, I thought to myself: this is it. This is an Oberhausen film. What do you think?

DEPUTY. I'm sorry, but I don't speak German.

DIRECTOR. What? Oberhausen. It's a town in West Germany. There's an important film festival there every year.

DEPUTY. Oh. In that case, yes. Certainly, yes.

[*The SECOND UGLY SISTER runs in.*]

UGLY SISTER #2. He came in a BMW.

PRINCE. You're kidding.

UGLY SISTER #2. Swear to God.

MOUSE. Well fuck me!

PRINCIPAL. Well, I think you may be a little overhopeful. In any case, a few formalities have to be settled. The parents' consent, for one thing.

DIRECTOR. No problem.

PRINCIPAL. I'm afraid you're right.

FAIRY GODMOTHER. My dad has a Mercedes.

PRINCE. And his prick has wings. [*laughter*]

DIRECTOR. Naturally, we'll pay the parents something for the days we're shooting. That girl has a good face. What part is she playing?

PRINCIPAL. The Prince.

DIRECTOR. Good.

PRINCIPAL. Look, I wonder if . . .

DIRECTOR. Very good. [*walks away*]

UGLY SISTER #2. He's got his eye on you.

PRINCE. Forget it. He's a director. The money's shit and there's no work anyway.

STEPMOTHER. Too bad he's not Polanski.

DIRECTOR. Look, I understand your concern, but it's going to be better if we destroy any illusions right from the start. That's what this film is about!

PRINCIPAL. The girls will have to give their consent.

DEPUTY. That's not a problem.

PRINCIPAL. Of their own free will, Professor.

DEPUTY. Of course, most definitely.

DIRECTOR. So you teach as well?

DEPUTY. Singing, marches, campfire songs. That sort of thing.

DIRECTOR. I'd like to meet the girl who's playing Cinderella.

PRINCIPAL. She's in class now.

DEPUTY. I've always taken an interest in art.

PRINCIPAL. Have you?

DEPUTY. Yes.

PRINCIPAL. Why?

DEPUTY. Because it affords a glimpse of one's higher emotions.

DIRECTOR. Very interesting.

PRINCIPAL. I know you mentioned Oberhausen, but will this film be shown over here too?

DIRECTOR. I hope so.

PRINCIPAL. People will get to know their faces and might remember them later on. That could create problems for the girls.

DIRECTOR. Girls' faces change so quickly at their age.

DEPUTY. Where would they be recognized anyway? Only in criminal circles, where they're known already.

PRINCIPAL. Yes, but they—

DIRECTOR. They're still children. I understand. And that's exactly what we want to show. These chil-