

Bite the Apple

by Linda Manning

Finalist
Kentucky Women Writers Prize
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Time

now

Place

an urban wasteland

a forest

a desert

Characters

CINDERELLA - 40's, beautiful, regal, wound up tight
perfectionist in the midst of unraveling

RED RIDING HOOD - no longer young, wired, ruthlessly honest,
street-wise but still possesses a wide-eyed curiosity and
hope

SNOW WHITE - Disney Princess approaching middle-age, late
30's, sensible, persistent, but broiling and desperate
underneath

RAPUNZEL - older than all of them, mythical, has been
wandering the desert alone forever

A previous version of *Bite The Apple* was produced as part of the New York International Fringe Festival 2012, directed by Katherine Carter, with the following cast:

Red	Amy Young
Cinderella	Diana Henry
Snow White	Annette Arnold
Briar Rose	Jessica Arinella
Rapunzel	Linda Manning
Gretel	Diana Zambrotta

After a significant rewrite and restructuring of the script a staged reading was held at TheaterLabNYC in 2016, directed by Christine Cirker, original music written and performed by Eric Alexander, with the following cast:

Cinderella	Linda Manning
Red	Annette Arnold
Snow White	Tamara Flannagan
Rapunzel	Barbara Spence

"The child learns from 'Cinderella' that to gain her kingdom she must be ready to undergo a 'Cinderella' existence for a time"

The Uses of Enchantment
by Bruno Bettelheim

"This is done by descending into the deepest mood of great love and feeling, till one's desire for relationship with the wildish Self overflows, then to speak one's soul from that frame of mind. That is singing over the bones. We cannot make the mistake of attempting to elicit this great feeling of love from a lover, for this women's labor of finding and singing the creation hymn is solitary work, a work carried out in the desert of the psyche."

Women Who Run With The Wolves
by Clarissa Pinkola Estes



BITE THE APPLE

(This play is to be performed on a large, bare proscenium stage using lights, sound and possibly projections to create the three worlds the women inhabit, the street, the woods, a desert.

CINDERELLA, in an obscenely ornate and enormous ball gown with an endless train, floats on stage, fulfilling our image of this iconic character.

The sounds of a jazz club rise up, voices, glasses tinkling together, laughter, anticipation.

A three piece live jazz band comes alive on stage -- sax, upright bass and drums - they articulate the soundtrack of the play throughout. The band is in the middle of a raucous number.

Cinderella's enormous ball gown splits in two, she steps out and moves away from the jazz club frantically dialing her phone. She is in her mid 40's, elegant, wearing a cocktail dress, heels, hair in a tight chignon, and expensive jewelry.)

RED (O.S.)

Ah ... ah ... Oh, oh. Ugh ... oh, oh ...

(Cinderella stops dialing and listens to the sound coming from off stage. She moves toward it. It becomes clear it is a woman's voice, she is having sex.

Cinderella moves away.)

RED (O.S.)

Ah, ah. Oh, oh, oh, oh. Agh, agh, ah ... ah ...

(Silence.)

RED RIDING HOOD walks into the light. She has a curious, girlish face, but is no longer young, perhaps 35. She has the look of a feral animal living off the streets, dirty, skinny, long red matted hair, tense muscles, always ready to fight or run. She is barely clothed in a tiny skirt, tight shirt, and old boots.

There is a long beat of silence as Cinderella paces and waits and keeps checking her phone. Red pulls her tights back up and catches her breath. They take each other in.

Cinderella knows what she heard.

Red knows she heard her.)

CINDERELLA

I don't seem to be able to get any service. Do you have a phone I could borrow?

RED

Nope.

(Cinderella stares, disbelieving. Red catches the look.)

RED (CONT'D)

Do I look like I have a phone?

CINDERELLA

I assumed. I didn't mean ...

RED

Do I even have a purse?

CINDERELLA

I don't see one.

RED

So where would I hide a phone? Up my cooch?

(Silence.)

RED (CONT'D)

You're not thinking and you're in my spot.

CINDERELLA

Excuse me?

RED

That's my spot. Could you move? Please.

(Cinderella moves a few feet away. Red saunters to where Cinderella was standing and stares into the club.)

CINDERELLA

Do you know where I could get a taxi?

RED

Taxis don't come through here.

(Cinderella nervously looks up and down the street.)

RED (CONT'D)

You don't know where you are.

CINDERELLA

I need to leave.

RED

Something happen in there?

CINDERELLA

No. I was supposed to meet someone. He's not here.

RED

You sure this is the right place?

CINDERELLA

Yes. We came for the music.

RED

You got a cigarette?

CINDERELLA

No.

RED

How was the first set? I missed it.

CINDERELLA

I don't know.

RED

You were inside.

CINDERELLA

Yes.

RED

Well, how was the music?

CINDERELLA

I found it unsettling.

RED

Is that why you are in such a hurry to take off, the music?

CINDERELLA

No, yes, I want to go home ...

RED

Not having a nice time?

CINDERELLA

No.

RED

Maybe you should just start walking.

CINDERELLA

I don't really know this neighborhood ... I'm not sure which direction ...

RED

How did you get here?

CINDERELLA

I have a driver. He dropped me off. I was on the phone.

RED

Well, where is your *driver*?

CINDERELLA

He's off for the night, and I don't have any service anyway ...

(Silence. Cinderella is stuck.)

RED

I'm sure they have a phone attached to a wall in there that you could use.

CINDERELLA

(flustered)

Oh, I didn't even think of that. I'll just wait out here a little longer.

(Silence. Waiting.)

RED

So what kind of person leaves a person like you waiting out here by herself?

CINDERELLA

No one. Nevermind.

RED

Don't bother lying to me.

CINDERELLA

The person I have been married to for twenty years.

RED

What?!

CINDERELLA

My husband.

RED

Holy shit!

CINDERELLA

What?

RED

You've been married to the same guy, the same guy for twenty years?!

CINDERELLA

Yes.

RED

That's fucking crazy.

CINDERELLA

Maybe.

RED

(sincere question)

Is that like a prison sentence or what?

CINDERELLA

No.

RED

(sincere discovery)

So he really loves you and you can feel it.

(No response.)

CINDERELLA

Yes. It's our anniversary, our twentieth wedding anniversary.

RED

Wow. You are my fairy tale princess from another world.

CINDERELLA

No, I'm not.

RED

Yes, you are. I've never met a woman who actually got one.

CINDERELLA

One what?

RED

A man. You really got him. He's yours or he wouldn't have stuck around for twenty years.

CINDERELLA

I suppose.

RED

I bet he doesn't ask you to do a lot of explaining or measuring up or taking care that you haven't said the wrong thing, made the wrong step, right? I bet he looks right into your face and grins. Like this. You know that grin that says, "You and I know, we know everything." Some movie stars have that grin. He's got to have perfect teeth or it doesn't work. I bet your husband has perfect teeth.

CINDERELLA

I don't know.

RED

So where the hell is he? Where are the carriage and the four white horses and the champagne and the presents?

CINDERELLA

He was working late.

RED

Oh, he'll be here!

CINDERELLA

It's over an hour.

RED

It's your anniversary. That's the point of husbands. He knows that. They are supposed to make you feel special and go to places with you and hold your arm and stand between you and the shit in the world.

CINDERELLA

Not really.

RED

Yes, really.

CINDERELLA

Have you been married?

RED

No! But if he's not doing that for you, you married the wrong person.

CINDERELLA

Why would you say that?

RED

You're all unhappy.

CINDERELLA

You don't know anything about me.

RED

Yeah, I do. That's my best thing. I get people, right away.

CINDERELLA

Well, you're wrong about me.

RED

Okay.

(Silence.)

CINDERELLA

After twenty years? We'll be excited and happy to see each other?

RED

Yes.

(pause)

RED (CONT'D)

So, what did you get him?

CINDERELLA

Nothing.

RED

You're dressed up like a million bucks, it's your twentieth wedding anniversary, and you don't got anything for him? I don't believe you.

Oh, I get it. It's you. You're the present.

CINDERELLA

How did you know?

RED

I told you, I get people.

CINDERELLA

He wanted to pretend we were strangers and then he would follow me into the bathroom and ...

RED

And fuck you until you can't sit down.

CINDERELLA

Something like that.

RED

(truly sincere)

Well, that's special.

CINDERELLA

You think so?

RED

Yeah, he thought about it, he made a plan, he picked out a place. That's something. *(pause)*

Oh, but he wants to play make-believe and you don't.

CINDERELLA

Pretending we are strangers when we are supposed to be celebrating the fact we've stayed together for so long?!

RED

Why did you say yes to pretending?

(Cinderella doesn't have an answer.)

RED (CONT'D)

I see, you have officially left the land of make believe. Don't do it! It sucks!

CINDERELLA

What you are talking about ...?

RED

Make believe. Where you believe shit that you want to be true, and you keep believing in it so it will be true, some day. Pretending.

CINDERELLA

I'm not pretending anything.

RED

But you tried right? You tried to crawl your way back in to your make believe head tonight. That's why you said yes to pretending, right? Being strangers was supposed to make you believe again. But it's not working, right? You can't pretend anymore. Once you stop pretending you can't crawl your way back in. I've tried. I can't figure it out. I've tried hard to get back to that place where I believed shit that I want to believe, that I did believe, until somebody fucked it up for me. And once they put their truth-shit in my head, my shit gets all jumbled up, and their shit takes over and then I can't figure it out anymore. So even though your husband was trying to play make believe what he really did was put truth-shit in your head and now you can't get it out. My Grandmother does that to me all the time, "You have to stop doing that shit you are doing," which is supposed to make me want to do her shit, which she, of course, thinks is the truth-shit, but I am just simply trying to maintain my shit that I know is true, and she is fucking with it. It pisses me off.

CINDERELLA

So what is the truth shit he put in my head?

RED

You know.

CINDERELLA

I don't. I would like to hear something that someone knows is absolutely true.

RED

You don't believe in him anymore.

CINDERELLA

What?

RED

He made this whole date, but you didn't even want to come.

CINDERELLA

I showed up! I have the lingerie on!

RED

Yeah, but you're not into it. Don't you think he knows that? Maybe he's not either. That's why he's not here. Maybe he was on his way over here after a hard day at the office ready to play make-believe stranger with you and suddenly he just popped out of his make-believe head. That happens to me too. He couldn't make himself believe anymore, so he just ran away.

CINDERELLA

That's ridiculous.

RED

A little too much truth coming your way, huh? I know what that's like.

CINDERELLA

Aren't you going to go in?

RED

I never go in.

CINDERELLA

You should go in.

RED

I never go in.

CINDERELLA

Why not?

RED

Because I don't.

Maybe you should go inside and wait.

CINDERELLA

I'd rather not.

RED

Why not?

CINDERELLA

I'll take my chances out here.

(Waiting.)

RED

You can't stand out here, Princess, with ten thousand dollars worth of shit on you. There some real animals lurking in the shadows.

CINDERELLA

(looking Red up and down)

I guess so.

RED

What does that mean?

CINDERELLA

Nothing.

(Silence. Waiting.)

RED

Nice shoes.

CINDERELLA

They're one of a kind.

RED

Italian leather and all that?

CINDERELLA

Yes, actually.

RED

Can I try one on?

CINDERELLA

Excuse me?

RED

Pleeeeeaaaaase.

CINDERELLA

I do not think that would be a good idea.

RED

Right. I might walk away with it. Steal it. What the hell good would it do me to have one shoe?

CINDERELLA

It wouldn't.

RED

Exactly. So let me try one on?

CINDERELLA

I'm not comfortable ...

RED

We're both sitting out here waiting, we've got no cigarettes, we've got no phone ...

CINDERELLA

They were very expensive.

RED

I know. That's why I want to try it on.

CINDERELLA

The buckle is difficult.

RED

I got time.

(Cinderella gives in. She undoes the intricate buckle.)

RED (CONT'D)

Really?

(Cinderella hands her the shoe.)

CINDERELLA

Here.

RED

(childlike excitement)

You're going to let me do this?

CINDERELLA

You want to or not?

(Red tosses off her beat up boot and puts on Cinderella's heel. Like magic, Red's whole posture changes, becomes erect, straight for the first time, almost regal, and a huge grin spreads across her face.)

RED

I wish I had a mirror.

CINDERELLA

Look in the front of the bar, you can sort of see yourself.

RED

I look pretty.

CINDERELLA

They were a wedding present from my husband.

RED

Should I take it off?

CINDERELLA

It's okay.

RED

If he shows up and sees me in your shoe is he going to get all crazy?

CINDERELLA

No. He doesn't get all crazy. He'll probably tell you, you look pretty.

RED

Really?

CINDERELLA

Yes, they're comfortable right?

RED

Perfect. We're the same size.

CINDERELLA

That's odd.

RED

Not really. I'd sleep in these.

(Red is suddenly struck by her slumped shouldered, dirty, tattered image in the bar window, rage erupts from her and she crumbles into a snarling heap on the ground.)

RED (CONT'D)

Fuck!

CINDERELLA

What?

RED

I totally, totally believed you.

CINDERELLA

About what?

(Red tears off the shoe and throws it at Cinderella.)

RED

That I look pretty.

(Silence.

Cinderella puts her shoe back on.)

CINDERELLA

What's your problem?!

(A slow, mournful, sax solo starts and then the rest of the band comes in. They both stare into the club. Red gets very excited, like a young girl at a concert.)

RED

They're starting. Listen. I come here every night to watch them play.

CINDERELLA

Every night?

RED

Almost.

(They watch/listen.)

RED (CONT'D)

Do you feel it?

CINDERELLA

What?

RED

Calm. Like it's just you and him.

CINDERELLA

Yes.

RED

I thought you said you didn't like the music.

CINDERELLA

Do you know him?

RED

Him? Do you?

CINDERELLA

No. Why don't you go in there? Talk to him.

(Cinderella reaches into her clutch.)

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

Here. Here's the twenty dollars.

(Red gets in Cinderella's face, peering into her eyes, sniffing her.)

RED

He did something to you. That's why you ran out here.

CINDERELLA

He walked over to me.

RED

And then what?

CINDERELLA

Nothing. I was sitting at the bar and he came up behind me.

RED

Him?

CINDERELLA

Yes. We looked at each other across the room for a moment and I turned around and then he was behind me. He leaned over me like he was going to order a drink ...

RED

What did he say?

CINDERELLA

Nothing. He got very close, and he leaned toward me. I thought he was going to say something, but he just ... smelled my neck ...

(A deep groan comes from the sax.)

RED

He smelled your neck?!

CINDERELLA

Yes.

RED

What was his voice like?

CINDERELLA

I don't know.

RED

You must have felt his breath on your face and your neck?

CINDERELLA

Yes. And then he looked at me with those big grinning eyes and gleaming teeth, everything stopped and I was calm for a second. But then I felt like I'd been caught ... My heart

CINDERELLA (CONT'D)

began to race and I couldn't catch my breath and I felt like I'd done something wrong.

RED

Well, you are a married woman and you did invite him over.

CINDERELLA

I did not.

RED

You saw him across the room.

CINDERELLA

So?

RED

All it takes is one look, the right look, and you let a man know he's in. And that's what you gave him, right?

CINDERELLA

It wasn't like that. It was different.

RED

How?

CINDERELLA

It felt serious.

RED

Serious?! I don't believe this shit.

When you looked at him across the room did you look away first or did you wait for him to look away?

CINDERELLA

I don't know.

(Red corners her.)