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# The White Cat

A Pantomime

Norman Robbins

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1830

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## CHARACTERS

**Mother Goose**, an Immortal  
**Ghiselle**, her pet Goose  
**Ambrose**, the Court Chamberlain  
**King Pat-a-cake**, Ruler of Euphoria  
**Venoma**, the Witch-Queen of Despondia  
**Dame Hernia Lovelorn**, Nurse and Guardian to  
    Rosamund  
**Princess Rosamund**, Heir to The Seven Kingdoms  
**Peter Piper**, a Groom in the King's stables  
**Prince Fyne**, the King's eldest son  
**Prince Dandi**, his second son  
**Prince Peerless**, his youngest son  
**Bluemalkin**, the White Cat's servant  
**Esmeralda**, a Gypsy leader  
**Peglegasus**, a Royal Horse  
**Tigger-toes**, a very Jazzy Cat (dancer only)

**Chorus of Citizens, Courtiers, Servants, Cats, etc.**

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### ACT I

PROLOGUE	Mother Goose's Arbour
SCENE 1	The Kingdom of Euphoria
SCENE 2	A Forest Path
SCENE 3	Dame Lovelorn's Cottage Garden
SCENE 4	A Corridor in Castle Splendid
SCENE 5	The Great Throne Room

### INTERVAL

### ACT II

SCENE 1	The Forest of Mysteria
SCENE 2	Outside the White Cat's Palace
SCENE 3	Inside the White Cat's Palace
SCENE 4	On the way back to Euphoria
SCENE 5	The Great Throne Room again
SCENE 6	A Corridor in Castle Splendid
SCENE 7	The White Cat's Ballroom and Finale

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Like *King of the Golden Mountain*, *A Frog He Would a Wooing Go*, *King Hummingtop* and dozens of other Victorian pantomimes, *The White Cat* vanished from the pantomime roster almost a hundred years ago. Its last production was, I believe, at the Drury Lane theatre in 1904, (that particular version being written by J. Hickory Wood and Arthur Collins) but for many years prior to this, it was a very popular subject.

Based on a story by the French Countess d' Aulnois, it was first seen in 1811 at the Lyceum Theatre as *The White Cat; or Harlequin in Fairy Wood*, though typically of the pantomimes of that period, the story part served only to set the comical Harlequinade in motion. In 1842, however, at Covent Garden theatre it was presented as a fairy *extravaganza* (written by that brilliant man of the theatre, J. R. Planche) as a vehicle for the sensational Lucy Vestris, to whom the theatre world owes so much. Following its huge success in this form, its innovations were quickly adapted by other managements for pantomime use and continued to delight audiences for the next 60 years until mysteriously it fell from favour.

Whilst researching *Slapstick and Sausages*, my book on pantomime's evolution, I was kindly and unexpectedly loaned original copies of the Planche *extravaganza* and the Hickory Wood/Collins version of *The White Cat*, both of which I read with interest. The latter was a world away from Planche's beautifully rhymed and touching couplets, its comic fairy making "her" first entrance on a wire, and many zany characters being introduced to carry the story forward. There was even a short Harlequinade (from which modern pantomimes developed) tagged on to the end of it and (unusually for pantomimes of any era) three acts. Both, however, must have been spectacular to watch, and again made me wonder how the story could have been ignored for so long.

Having a strong dislike for comic fairies, it took me some time to formulate my own pantomime version of the story and adapt it for amateur usage, but eventually the scenes took shape and modern technology has enabled me to include one section that would have been impossible for Victorian audiences to see, but would have delighted the Countess d' Aulnois who described it so beautifully in her original story; the ghostly hands. In offering this version of *The White Cat*, I'm assuming that today's audiences will be as enthralled by

this unusual story as I was. The potential for an experienced production company is awesome, yet even the smallest pantomime society should find it within their capabilities. For those with limited resources I include a few production hints overleaf.

Norman Robbins

## PRODUCTION NOTES

White Cat and Bluemalkin would appear at first glance to be problem characters. They are, however, no more of a problem than Puss in *Puss in Boots*, and are in fact, much simpler to costume because only the heads and hands are ever seen. White Cat's headpiece is of white fur material (which can be purchased fairly cheaply at almost any material shop), close fitting to the head, full face opening, and fastened under the chin. It should be long enough at the bottom to be tucked well into the high neckline of the dress. A moulded cat mask covers most of the face, but the mouth should be free for speech. Bluemalkin's headpiece is exactly the same, but blue-grey in colouring and she also wears a mask. (Most carnival or fancy dress shops stock these and if only full face ones are available, they can be cut with scissors to the required dimensions.) Both wear mittens of matching fur to their heads and their tails are also made of the same material. The dresses of both are floor length, loose fitting, high-necked and long-sleeved. White Cat is dressed in cream, white or ivory, Bluemalkin in whatever appears suitable, but the same style. The White Cat's costume could be decorated with diamonté or silver sequins, as the more splendid she looks the better.

The White Cat's great hooded cloak should be all-enveloping and trimmed with white fur. Nothing but the half mask should be seen of her when she appears at the Court. After her distressed exit a body double should put on the cloak and mask for the second entrance. When the Black-out comes, the body double exits and is replaced by the Princess. If there is any problem with this, the girl playing the White Cat/Princess role must turn upstage after the dagger incident, and everyone cluster round her as she discards the cloak and mask in the Black-out. The Princess costume, of course, would be worn underneath the cloak. When the lights return, everyone falls back to reveal the Princess. The first option, however, is a better effect.

The Cat Chorus and/or Dancers wear the same kind of headpieces and mittens as above, and although described as being in Court dress, could, if preferred, be in tights and body stockings, plus furry mittens and tails.

Tigger-toes should be outstandingly coloured as a solo dancer or singer.

For the UV or Black Light sequence, only four people are needed to work this. They should be totally clothed in black, including faces, (black net over the eyes) and wear pure white gloves. The table should be totally black and therefore invisible. The tablecloth has a black backing which faces the audience, white side upstage. When the black side is lowered on to the table, the white side suddenly becomes visible to the watcher. Chair, salvers, salver covers, foods, plates and cutlery, etc., are all painted on to hardboard in UV paint. (Artists' stores should be able to get these easily and many colours are available.) Salver covers are separate to the dish holding the food and are simply held in front of the food. Lifting the obstructing cover causes the food to miraculously appear. Prince Peerless's Act II costume should also be made of UV materials or edged in UV material or paint. This effect does need a lot of rehearsal to get a polished result, as experienced societies know, but it's well worth the effort.

If for some reason your society is unable to do a UV scene, the script is written in such a way that it can easily be omitted. On the Prince's entrance to the enchanted Palace, just lower the lights, allow the White Cat to get into position, then take the lights back to normal.

For the "Tree of Truth" routine, it is suggested that tennis balls or similar, painted orange, are used for the oranges. They're just about the right size and not too hard on the skull when dropped from a height. Polystyrene balls are also useful and can be made out of old packing material and shaped with a soft-wire suede brush. It's a messy job, with bits flying all over the place, but it's cheap and can take water based paint very well. You do need about fifty, though. If other fruits are used, just alter the lines. The gag remains the same and after a hundred years, still brings the place down.

for

GRAHAM AND AVRIL CHAMBERS

of Gloucester, Canada.

“Just a small token...”

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# ACT I

## PROLOGUE

### *Mother Goose's Arbour*

*A frontcloth scene depicting a gigantic shimmering spider's web suspended between huge dew-spangled roses*

*The Lighting should suggest early morning and, if possible, a light mist should be visible*

*When the main CURTAIN rises to reveal this, Mother Goose is standing DC, a beaming smile on her face. She is everyone's idea of a friendly grandmother and dressed in the traditional garb of the nursery-rhyme character, carries a large wooden spoon which she uses as a wand. Beside her is Ghiselle, her pet goose*

**Mother Goose** (*brightly*) Hallo, my dears, and welcome to my Arbour of Delight.

I'm Mother Goose, your friend and guide throughout the show tonight. (*She drops a curtsy*)

(*Wryly*) At least, that's my intention, though I'm very sad to say,

Some modern critics now declare that panto should be swept away,

Because, although for years on earth  
You've marvelled at the tales I've told,  
In these dot.com and e-mail times,  
They're simply too well known and *old*.

(*With determination*) Well...

Tonight there'll *be* no Pumpkin Coach;  
No Magic Lamp or Cave.

No Beanstalks; Babes; or London Bells, or  
Ship-wrecked sailors we must save.

We'll do without a Giant and ignore old Humpty's fall;

I'll tell *instead* a tale that's barely known today at all.

And ere this ev'ning's over, trust you'll find you're happy that

You came to hear the story of the fabulous White Cat.  
*(Brightly)* So no prevarication. I'll whisk you all away  
 To where, as in *all* fairy tales, imagination still holds sway.  
 This time it's old Euphoria, for in that Kingdom fair  
 Its people wait to greet you—in the ancient City Square.

*Mother Goose brandishes her spoon and exits R, followed by Ghiselle as the Lights rapidly fade to a Black-out and the backdrop flies out*

### SCENE 1

*The Kingdom of Euphoria*

*The Lights come up at once to reveal an ancient city square with stylized buildings and cobbled streets in the background. Other buildings hide entrances and exits L and R. Suggested period, 14th Century*

*When the scene begins, it is a bright, sunny day and the Citizens of Euphoria are singing and dancing*

#### No. 1 Song (Citizens)

*At the end of the routine they fall back into small groups, silently chatting and laughing*

*Ambrose, the elderly Court Chamberlain, hurries in UC and moves DC, looking very anxious and glancing around hastily*

**Ambrose** *(dismayed)* Oh, my goodness. Look at the poor things. Laughing and joking as though they haven't a care in the world.

**Citizens** *(brightly)* Good morning, Lord Chamberlain.

**Ambrose** *(flustered)* Never mind "Good morning". Everyone hide. Quick. Quick. We're in terrible danger. *(He attempts to shoo them away)*

**Citizen 1** *(stepping forward)* But why? What's happened?

**Ambrose** *(agitated)* It's Queen Venoma. She's heading this way and she's probably got her horrible son, Prince Ghastly with her. Run. Run. *(He shoos them again)*

*No-one moves*

**Citizen 2** *(puzzled)* Queen Venoma? Prince Ghastly? Who on earth are they?

*Everyone shrugs and shakes their head*

**Ambrose** (*horrified*) Don't you *know*? (*Faintly*) Oh, my goodness. I don't believe it. We thought *everyone* knew about *them*. (*He gathers himself*) She's the world's wickedest witch, and *he's* its most ugly man.

*Citizens react*

**Citizen 3** (*worried*) But what do they want in Euphoria?

**Ambrose** (*helplessly*) Who knows? But whatever it is, they'll get it. They always do. (*Mournfully*) And they'll be here at any minute.

**Citizen 4** In that case we better *had* be off. And we won't come back till they've gone again. (*To others*) Come on, everyone. You can hide in *my* house.

*Citizens quickly exit* UL, *leaving Ambrose shrouded in gloom. He suddenly realizes and hurries* L

**Ambrose** (*calling after them*) Wait. Wait. (*Dismayed*) Oh, dear. They've gone. (*To the audience*) I was going to ask if they'd seen King Pat-a-cake today. He left the Palace almost an hour ago and I can't find him *anywhere*. If he's not here when Queen Venoma arrives she'll be *furios*.

*There is a fanfare and King Pat-a-cake enters* UR. *He is an elderly man, not too bright in intellect, but resplendent in royal robes and wearing his gold crown*

*As Ambrose turns to see him, the King moves* DC

(*Relieved*) Oh, Your Majesty. Thank goodness you're here. I've been searching everywhere. Where have you *been*?

**King** Down to [local chemist's shop] for some headache tablets. (*Remembering*) And you'll never guess *what*. I'd just left the shop when the chemist came running after me shouting "Stop. Stop. There's been a terrible *mistake*. Instead of giving you aspirin, I've given you arsenic".

*Ambrose reacts*

"Does it make any difference?" I asked him, and the poor fellow nearly fainted. "Of *course* it does, Your Majesty", he said. "Arsenic's a deadly poison. You owe me another fifty pence."

**Ambrose** (*reacting, then recovering*) Yes. Well, never mind that, Sire. I've got the most awful news.

**King** (*grimacing*) Oh, it's not another crime wave, is it? If we catch any more crooks I don't know where we're going to put them. All the prisons are full and so is the House of Commons.

**Ambrose** (*hastily*) No, no, Your Majesty. It's Queen *Venoma*. She's coming here today and demands to see you.

**King** (*startled*) What? But she *can't*. It's impossible. Tell her to go away. If she hears the Royal Announcement we'll *never* get rid of her.

**Ambrose** Can't you *delay* it, Sire? Wait until after she's gone?

**King** (*aghast*) Certainly *not*. It's the most important announcement I'll *ever* make and everything's just about ready. The Palace has been cleaned from top to bottom and even the *flagpole's* getting a fresh coat of paint.

**Ambrose** So I noticed, Sire. The workmen were climbing up it, half an hour ago. (*He frowns*) But why were they carrying tape measures?

**King** (*beaming*) Ah. That was *my* idea. I told them to find out how tall it was so they'd know *exactly* how much paint it would take to do the job.

**Ambrose** (*frowning*) But wouldn't it have been easier for them to lay the pole on the ground and *then* measure it?

**King** (*scornfully*) Don't be silly, Ambrose. They need to know how high it is, not how long. (*Remembering*) But never mind that... What are we going to do about *Venoma*? Remember. Her son's a prince, too, and if one word of what we're doing reaches *her* ears, she'll be casting her nasty little spells left, right and centre and helping *him*. Nobody else will get a look in.

**Ambrose** (*miserably*) You're right, Sire. Oh, if only you'd had children of your *own*. None of this would be happening.

**King** I know. I know. (*Plaintively*) But how else can I decide who'll get the throne when I retire? Three adopted sons ... all princes ... and not a thing to choose between them. It's the fairest way I can think of.

**Ambrose** I quite agree, Sire. But with *Venoma* around... (*He shrugs helplessly*)

**King** (*suddenly*) Wait. What if I make the announcement *now*? Before she arrives. (*Eagerly*) By the time she gets here, the boys will be gone and she won't know a thing about it. (*He looks hopeful*)

**Ambrose** (*brightening*) It's worth a try, Your Majesty. But you'll have to be quick.

**King** (*firmly*) Then I shall be. Find Their Highnesses at once and tell them to present themselves *immediately*.

*Ambrose gives a deep bow and hurries off DR, leaving the King alone*

(*Chortling*) Oho. I can't *wait* to see their faces when I tell them what they have to do. And the minute one of them *wins*, I can give up the throne and spend the rest of my life doing what *I* want to do. Collecting Pokemon cards [or any current craze]. (*He continues to ad-lib*)

*The Lights fade and a green follow spot picks up the gaunt figure of Queen Venoma as she enters DL, clutching a jewel-topped cane. She is deathly*

*pale, and dressed in a high-necked black gown with green and red sequinned trim. A matching cape flows behind her. A black crown, heavy with red and green jewels is on her head and her taloned fingers are covered in rings*

*Unnoticed by the King, she moves DS, and arriving beside him, waits for him to notice her. King continues ad-libbing for a few moments before he glances at her, nods politely and continues speaking to the audience until realization dawns and a look of horror appears on his face. Slowly he turns his head to look at her properly and recoils in fear*

*(Recovering and forcing a smile) Queen Venoma.*

**Venoma** *(coldly)* So *this* is the welcome I receive in Euphoria? No flags. *(She indicates vaguely)* No cheering crowds. No-one to greet me at the palace. *(Thoughtfully)* Is it possible my presence is *unwanted* here? *(She fixes the King with a baleful glare)*

**King** *(gulping)* Unwanted? *(He chuckles nervously)* No. No. Of course not. Nothing of the kind. We're *delighted* to see you. *(He chuckles uneasily)*

**Venoma** Indeed? *(She smiles nastily)* Then there's no objection to my remaining here until our business is concluded?

**King** *(hastily)* No. No. Stay as long as you... *(He realizes)* Business? What business?

**Venoma** Many years ago—in the Land of the Seven Kingdoms—a certain princess was born. A child of such rare beauty, my own beloved son, Prince Ghastly, vowed that on her eighteenth birthday he would return to the royal palace and claim her hand in marriage. *(Malevolently)* Her foolish parents, however, *defied* his wishes, and placing the baby in the care of a common nursemaid, sent them into hiding. Despite my great powers, no trace of them has ever been found. *(She smiles coldly)* But now ... *now* ... I believe our search has ended.

**King** *(wide-eyed)* Really?

**Venoma** *(silky)* According to my magic crystal, almost twenty years ago, three small children were brought to this Kingdom for adoption.

**King** *(happily)* That's true. Yes. I took them all myself.

**Venoma** And what better place to hide a missing princess than the palace of another king? *(She smiles nastily at him)*

**King** *(realizing)* Oh, no. No. That isn't what happened.

**Venoma** *(snapping)* Fool. Dolt. Idiot. Do you think I'd be beaten by your pathetic attempt to hide her from me? *(Grimly)* One of your children is Princess Rosamund and today she shall marry my son.

**King** *(flustered)* But she *can't*. It's impossible.

**Venoma** *What?* *(She glares at him)*

**King** *(hastily)* I mean you don't *understand*. She *isn't* a princess. She's a *prince*. They're *all* princes. Boys. I haven't got a princess.

**Venoma** (*stunned*) Boys? All boys?

**King** Prince Fyne, Prince Dandi, and Prince Peerless.

**Venoma** (*turning away in shock and speaking to herself*) Can my powers have failed me? Have we journeyed in vain? (*She gathers herself*) No. No. I won't believe it. The crystal ball is *never* mistaken. Somewhere in this miserable little kingdom, the girl is hiding and *nothing* shall prevent me from finding her. (*She turns back to the King*) Very well. It appears we must seek elsewhere. (*Grimly and slowly*) But should I find you've misled me... (*Savagely*) *Then beware the wrath of Venoma.*

*With gritted teeth, Venoma sweeps past him and exits DL*

*The green follow spot vanishes and the Lights return to normal*

**King** (*weakly*) Ohhhh. Thank goodness she'd come to the wrong place. By the time she finds a princess, she'll be miles away from here and we'll never see her again. (*He glances off L*) Yes. There she goes. Out of the city gates and into the forest. (*Happily*) I'd better find Ambrose and tell him to spread the good news.

*The King hurries off DR*

*A beaming Dame Lovelorn enters UL, carrying a mop and bucket. A woman of indeterminate age, she is garbed in an outrageous outfit suggesting that of a housekeeper, with mob cap, apron, and a necklace of brightly coloured beads. She moves DC to speak to the audience*

**Dame** (*chortling*) Oh, I say. What a bonny looking lot. Everybody happy and smiling. Yes. Especially the lady over there. (*She indicates vaguely, then speaks to her*) I bet you're pleased to have a night out on your own, aren't you, dear? (*She chuckles*) Yes. And I'm not surprised. You must be shattered. (*To the audience, confidentially*) Sixteen children she's got. (*She nods*) Five boys and eleven girls. I saw her getting on a bus with them last week, (*to "her"*) didn't I, dear? (*She nods*) Yes. (*To the audience*) The driver took one look and said "Good Heavens, Missis. Are all these yours, or is it a picnic?" "Oh, they're all mine", she said, "but believe me, it's no picnic". (*She chortles then remembers*) But I'd better introduce meself, hadn't I? Lovelorn's the name. Hernia Lovelorn. Toast of the Town and Nursemaid to the Stars. (*She chuckles modestly and preens*) Mind you... there's not been much nursemaiding going on these past few years. That's why I went down to the Job Centre. To see if I could find something else. (*She pulls a face*) But they're not very helpful, are they? The feller behind the counter said "I'm terribly sorry, Madam, but we only have *one* job on

offer today, and that's for a film company in London who want someone to rub warm baby oil over Leonardo de Cuppachino's [or other current idol] body, so it'll glisten when he takes his shirt off". "Ooooh", I said, "It's exactly the job I'm looking for. How soon can I start?" "Well", he said, "I'm not exactly sure, but if I were you, I'd get up to Glasgow as soon as possible". "Just a minute?" I said, "I thought you told me this job was in London. Why do I have to go to Glasgow?" "Well", he said, "that's where the end of the queue is". (*Brightening*) Still... I managed to get a part-time job at the Museum. That's why I've got this mop and bucket. (*She displays them*) Have you been there? The Museum. (*Impressed*) Oooh, it's ever so interesting. Full of old pottery and statues of folks with no clothes on. Here... (*confidentially*) and you should see some of those *foreign* ones. They brought a new one in this morning. "David" by Michaelangelo. Ooooooh. It made my mou... (*hastily correcting herself*) eyes water, just looking at it. Talk about *filthy*. They must have pigeons the size of elephants in Italy. Anyway... The Head cleaner took one look at it and told me I'd have to help her give it a good scrubbing to clean it up again. "You take the back", she said, "and I'll do the front". "Well", I said, "I don't think that's fair. You're getting the best job". "No, I'm not", she said, "There's a lot more marble at the front, so there's more for me to clean". "I know", I said, "but at least you've got somewhere to hang your bucket".

*There is the sound of merriment off UL, and Princess Rosamund dances happily on to the stage in the company of several laughing friends. She is a very attractive girl of twenty, and wears a costume similar in fashion to those of her companions. Catching sight of Dame Lovelorn, she stops dead in her tracks, looking dismayed*

(*Recognizing her and dropping her mop and bucket in shock*) Rosamund.  
**Princess** (*nervously*) Dame Lovelorn. What are you doing here?

*Her companions fall silent and look puzzled*

**Dame** (*gaping*) Never mind me. What about you? (*She looks at the others*)  
 And who are this lot? Riverdance [or famous pop group]? (*To them*) Go away. Get out of it. Shoo. Shoo.

*They look baffled, shrug, then exit as Rosamund hurries down to her, contritely*

**Princess** Oh, please don't be angry with me. I know you said I was never to leave the forest but King Pat-a-cake's going to make a Royal Announcement and all three of the Princes will be here for it. I only wanted to see what they looked like.

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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