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THE SLEEPING BEAUTIES

by Robert Alan Evans

SAMUEL FRENCH

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First performed by Sherman Cymru on 11th December 2013

Author's Note

When I think of fairy tales it's usually a jumble in my head; a pair of red shoes, a frog or two, a little pig, an evil stepmother, a house made of sweets, a wolf, sharp teeth, some pebbles in the moonlight, forests and forests and forests, the crying of a baby, a world frozen, a billy-goat bleating, turkish delight, flying through the night, a flash of red amongst the trees. But through all of it runs something dark, something terrifying, the thing that keeps us going back for more. I think it is this darkness that keeps a fairy tale alive. It is what we start wanting when we are little; to be scared, to imagine ourselves lost in the woods, to think what we would do when the wolf came to our door or the witch started to cackle.

These stories aren't suitable for children, which is what makes them so irresistible. Hack off her toe, pluck out his eyes, starve her, beat him, pull her hair out, kill his parents, leave them in the woods, let the bears eat them, lock them in a cage, burn them, burn them, BURN THEM!

We need to feel terror, we need to care, we need to see that some little children go wrong. Why else would Roald Dahl be so popular? And so it is with fairy tales. Whatever we do we mustn't make them feel safe. And I think that this is as true today as it ever was.

Once upon a time a child would go off the path, probably see something unexpected and then get eaten, the end. Don't go off the path! Then, somewhere along the way the girls in these stories seemed to lose the ability to fight, run or even, on occasion, speak. Their words were the words of their elders, their fathers or the prince that would save them. To me this is as great a danger as anything you might find in a forest at night or in winter. It is the danger of being told you must fit into a certain story and it crosses over from fiction into real life all too easily.

My friend told me that at parties her young boys are always being asked 'What are you doing at the moment? Are you going to go and climb that or run over there?' Whereas to girls it's often 'You look lovely. You look so pretty. Your dress is lovely.' I think this is why we need our fairy tales to be dangerous. They need to challenge. They need to tell people that there are a million different stories and

probably one of them will be about someone like you. Boys are not always action and girls are not always appearance. You don't have to get married to a prince, or even married. You might not always be happy ever after, but you can understand, you can know the world and see how it creates and controls your narrative.

And so to *The Sleeping Beauties*. I hope it is funny. I hope it still feels like a fairy tale. I hope, on occasion, it is scary. And I hope that if I were, say, ten-years-old again, with all the worries and insecurities a ten-year-old has to deal with, I would think it was for me.

Robert Alan Evans
2016

ACT I

Scene One Once Upon A Time
Scene Two A Promise Made, A Friend Saved
Scene Three The Queen Lies
Scene Four The Pregnancy And Birth
Scene Five The Naming Ceremony
Scene Six Rose Is Executed And The Girls Grow Up
Scene Seven Preparing For The 15th Birthday Party
Scene Eight The Dress Fitting
Scene Nine The 15th Birthday Party
Scene Ten A Pact To Run Away
Scene Eleven Eve Discovers The Curse
Scene Twelve The Spinning Wheel
Scene Thirteen Time Passes And The Prince Arrives
Interval

ACT II

Scene One Time Has Passed
Scene Two The Glowworms
Scene Three Queenie Meets Dawn And Eve
Scene Four The Palace And The Facemakers
Scene Five Echo
Scene Six Getting Ready For The Pig Ball
Scene Seven The Pig Ball
Scene Eight Eve Finds Echo And A Spell Is Cast
Scene Nine A Near Kiss And A Fight
Scene Ten Eve Goes Into The Wilderness
Scene Eleven Cold Feet
Scene Twelve The Stories Untold
Scene Thirteen The Wedding Ceremony
Epilogue

To Mum and Dad

Who help me always

CHARACTERS

ROSE/EVE
QUEEN/DAWN
CLOVE/QUEENIE
FERTILITY WIFE/PAVLOVA/ECHO
PRINCE
MAXI/BONE/SANDÉ
KING/MINI/POKE/JOILÉ

ACT I

Scene One
Once Upon A Time

An old woman is sitting as the audience comes in. She is playing a strange tune on the harmonica. She is magic. She is the forest. She watches us come in and sit. Then, when we are sat down…

FERTILITY WIFE Old.

I'm old, aren't I?

Just an old woman.

But you know, when I close my eyes there's so much more.

It's how I remember nowadays.

Yes.

She closes her eyes. A sound starts to swell.

Once…

Once upon a time there was a great forest.

Hear it.

Hear it as it once more creeps across the land.

A forest so great it covered almost all the earth.

A forest once, was where I lived.

Me and my kind.

Those who had magic.

Great forces lay in the forest.

Forces that were older than 'good' or 'bad'.

And respect them, we did. Learned to use their magic.

Except for one. One who went bad. A great talent he had for magic, but he went too far, thought he could control a darker force and was struck down, thrown from the forest.

And so he schemed and plotted. Bided his time.

Until one day…

A king came to the throne.

A king who had just one flaw. His pride. He could never admit to being wrong.

And through this little flaw the wicked one entered.

Flattering and fawning he worked his way to the king.

And when the queen failed to conceive the blame was put on the forest and us that lived there.

The **KING** *gets up to speak. A bombastic speech. We just see his face lit high up on stage. His voice echoes across the land.* **CLOVE** *is controlling every word he says.*

CLOVE I have been informed...

KING I have been informed *(***CLOVE***'s voice runs under the* **KING***'s then trails off)* that some of those that live in the forest, the so called 'Fertility Wives' are trying to undermine our power. That they try and threaten this kingdom.

Well hear this!

From now on the forest and the witches who live there are branded enemies of the kingdom.

They will be hanged.

All visits to the forest will cease immediately and work will begin on the great wall that will protect us.

CLOVE *whispers.*

Furthermore, there shall be no more babies, no more pregnancies, until my wife is with child.

No one shall have a baby before the King.

On pain of death!

The **KING** *collapses.* **CLOVE** *strokes him.*

FERTILITY WIFE And so it was the great war started between those who loved beauty and those who would destroy it.

The **FERTILITY WIFE** *plays a screeching note on her harmonica and disappears. The note left to resonate. A scream in the forest at night.*

***

Scene Two
A Promise Made, A Friend Saved

The forest. Dark. A storm. The **QUEEN** *and* **ROSE** *appear. They are cold and wet and struggling. They hear the scream.*

QUEEN What was that?

She calms herself. Notices that **ROSE** *isn't next to her.*

ROSE *has stopped and is holding her belly.*

Rose, what's wrong?

ROSE Nothing. Nothing. I'm fine.

There is a lightning flash and again we hear the scream in the night, closer now. The sound of something getting closer. Breathing. Hunting. The slavering of an animal. The sound has something in common with **CLOVE**. **ROSE** *and the* **QUEEN** *are back to back.*

QUEEN Who's there?

I said who's there?

The sound gets closer. Terrifying.

Suddenly there is a blinding flash.

The screech of an animal that has been wounded. A yelp as it moves off.

Then something appears, a shadow.

The storm calms.

An old woman steps into the light.

She has her helpers **MAXI** *and* **MINI** *with her.*

FERTILITY WIFE Late.

Bit late. Don't you think?

Want to watch out.

QUEEN Who are you?

FERTILITY WIFE I'm an old woman, see. Mushroom picking.

MINI *laughs.*

Sorry if we… frightened you.

QUEEN Do you live here?

FERTILITY WIFE Oh yes.

Got an old gingerbread house in the woods.

Only joking.

MAXI *laughs a bit gormlessly.*

(spotting a mushroom) Ooooh there. Maxi!

MAXI *gets the mushroom and brings it back.*

QUEEN I came to find the witches who live here.

MINI Witches?!

QUEEN The Wives. Do you know them?

FERTILITY WIFE Might do.

QUEEN You have to take me to them. Please.

FERTILITY WIFE 'Take'? 'Have to'? I don't think so my dear.

ROSE We should get back, your –

QUEEN Rose!

FERTILITY WIFE Your what?

QUEEN We need to find the Fertility Wives. We need their help.

FERTILITY WIFE With what?

QUEEN My friend…she's pregnant.

FERTILITY WIFE Then she'll die.

QUEEN No.

FERTILITY WIFE Yes yes yes.

Head chopped off.

Hung from a tree.

The king says so and so shall it be.

Holding out the mushroom again.

You sure you won't have a bit?

ROSE *has pain in her belly again. She crumples over.*

QUEEN Rose. Rose.

Are you okay?

What's wrong?

The woman watches as the **QUEEN** *holds* **ROSE**.

She looks up and we hear an incantation in the air again.

ROSE*'s pain eases.*

The woman kneels down and looks at **ROSE**.

ROSE *sees her through the pain.*

ROSE Is the baby okay?

FERTILITY WIFE Yes.

ROSE*'s pain passes.*

The child is safe.

ROSE *smiles.*

QUEEN How did you do that?

FERTILITY WIFE I should not…

Sad times are here. You know that?

ROSE *nods.*

The child can pass.

If you want.

ROSE I can't.

FERTILITY WIFE Then die you will.

QUEEN You're one of them.

FERTILITY WIFE A witch? Isn't that what your husband likes to call us? Your highness.

QUEEN You have to help us.

FERTILITY WIFE No.

I know what you want.

A baby.

A baby to save your friend.

A baby to tell your husband.

Oh the king will be pleased.

A baby at last.

But no.

QUEEN Please.

FERTILITY WIFE Do you know what he's done, your husband?

He has let evil into the kingdom.

Building this wall.

Killed off all my kind.

Until there's just me left.

An old woman. Left to bury her sisters.

Your husband… I hate your husband. I hate him.

QUEEN He thinks the witches want to destroy the kingdom. Kill his people.

FERTILITY WIFE He is a fool. We are forbidden from killing.

QUEEN Then help me. If he could see a child on the way he'd change. He's a good man.

FERTILITY WIFE *turns away.*

QUEEN Then you've broken your promise.

FERTILITY WIFE What?

QUEEN You said you're forbidden from killing. But you won't help.

FERTILITY WIFE No.

QUEEN Then you're killing any woman who falls pregnant.

FERTILITY WIFE …

QUEEN Give me a child. Let me change him.

FERTILITY WIFE You would swear an oath on it?

ROSE Your majesty…

QUEEN Shhhh

Looking at **ROSE**.

I have to save you.

(to **FERTILITY WIFE***)* Yes.

FERTILITY WIFE On the child's life?

The **QUEEN** *nods.*

Not just a nod. A nod won't do.

You swear on the child's life that you will stop the king.

Stop him building the wall. Let the forest breathe once more.

QUEEN If you give me a child, I swear on its life that the king will leave you and the forest alone.

FERTILITY WIFE A child is a thing of love.

You must love.

QUEEN I do love.

I love Rose.

FERTILITY WIFE Yes.

And the two of you must be bound together.

To **ROSE**.

Do you agree?

ROSE *nods.*

Then know this.

Incantations happen.

The world is older than you or I.

The dark has light the light will die.

And time will pass in the blink of an eye.

A promise made cannot be undone.

A promise made on not just one

But two lives.

Two lives lying in wait.

Still dreaming.

Feel them gathering.

You feel?

Two lives I weave together.

The **FERTILITY WIFE** *feels something strange. Something is not right with the* **QUEEN**.

Someone has put a spell on you.

Dark magic.

A spell that would have stopped you ever falling pregnant.

The **FERTILITY WIFE** *concentrates.*

Forest deep I call on you. Darkness I call on you. The spirits who have lived here for all memory I call on you.

Throw this out.

Throw this out.

You who cannot stand beauty.

I say to you 'BEGONE'

BEGONE!

The **QUEEN** *jolts. A scream is heard fading away into the night.*

Strong. He gets stronger.

QUEEN Who?

FERTILITY WIFE The one who hates all beauty. Wishes only to destroy it.

You know him when you see him. A pity your husband does not.

You two must not fail me.

You understand?

All our futures depend on it.

QUEEN We won't.

I just. I need a child.

FERTILITY WIFE Done. Dusted.

Can't you feel it?

Done.

I've done my part. Now you must keep your promise.

QUEEN Yes.

FERTILITY WIFE Keep your promise or you'll feel the darker side of the forest.

The **FERTILITY WIFE** *disappears.*

***

Scene Three
The Queen Lies

The **KING** *is with* **CLOVE**. **CLOVE** *is trying to get him to sign a document.*

CLOVE We need more workers your highness. The wall is nearly complete. It just needs one last push.

KING We don't have any more men. Everyone is already working double time.

CLOVE Men, no. But there are certain jobs that could be done just as well by a child.

KING You want the children working on this?

CLOVE Only those from the outlying villages. The ones from the poorer homes. They could help support their families.

KING I'm not sure.

CLOVE It is their future they would be protecting. Only say… all those over the age of five.

KING Five?

CLOVE Four then.

Beat.

Why not your gracefullness? They could collect stones, mix the mortar. It's not like they'd be doing anything else.

KING What about their schooling?

CLOVE Sire. Do these children really need school? It's not like they're going to amount to much. School should be preserved for the more prosperous families. It's wasted on the poor.

KING But my father…

CLOVE Your father lived in a different age. The king could afford to be generous. Things have changed. Our enemies in the forest grow stronger. We need to protect ourselves. I've drawn up a document, it just needs your signature.

KING I'm not sure.

CLOVE *gets impatient and we see the kings eyes glaze over.*

CLOVE You will build this wall.

KING *(repeating)* I will build this wall.

CLOVE Whatever it takes.

KING Whatever it takes.

CLOVE Now sign the document.

KING I will sign…

The **KING** *goes to sign, but the* **QUEEN** *comes in before he can and the spell is broken.* **CLOVE** *is annoyed.*

QUEEN What's going on here then darling? All this muttering.

CLOVE The king is undertaking serious business.

QUEEN What business?

CLOVE It's really not…

QUEEN I wasn't talking to you.

KING *(confused)* Darling I was… I believe I was…

The **QUEEN** *takes the document and reads it quickly.*

QUEEN I presume you're not going to sign this.

KING Well…

The **QUEEN** *rips up the document, to* **CLOVE***'s horror.*

CLOVE Your majesty you –

QUEEN *(ignoring* **CLOVE***)* Children? Working? Your father would never have allowed it. And neither will you.

KING Darling the wall –

QUEEN I'm sick of it. This whole wall business.

Have you forgotten how we used to meet together in the forest?

KING *(smiling)* Of course not.

QUEEN That wasn't strictly 'allowed' was it?

KING Your father would've blown his top if he'd known.

QUEEN Lovers. Lovers in the woods. It's happened forever, don't you think?

CLOVE Changed times your highness. The threat to our whole way of life –

KING I loved you from the very first moment I saw you.

QUEEN Then stop building this wall. Let others meet, like we did. Let them love.

We *need* the forest. Your people have connections to it.

CLOVE Like your maid?

Rose, isn't it?

ROSE, *who has been standing in the corner, tries to make herself invisible.*

Yes.

Your family came from the forest, didn't they?

QUEEN Leave her alone.

CLOVE But your highness. As chief physician and advisor I have responsibility for your health and that of all the women in the royal household and I must say Rose is looking a bit pale.

Yes.

Definitely.

Are you okay, Rose?

ROSE *is feeling queasy.*

I wonder…

CLOVE *has come close to* **ROSE** *and is sniffing her, getting closer to her belly.*

Yes.

If I didn't know better I'd say that Rose here… is carrying a child.

KING What?

CLOVE Against the law of the land.

Rose seems to be pregnant before the queen.

QUEEN *(to* **CLOVE***)* Get your hands off her.

KING Is this true Rose?

ROSE *nods.*

CLOVE Your highness. You are left with no option. She must be executed.

QUEEN No.

CLOVE No one is above the law, your highness?

Not even you.

QUEEN How dare you speak to me like that.

I am your Queen.

CLOVE *(bowing deeply)* Of course.

(to **KING***)* I was merely –

QUEEN *(to* **KING***)* Well?

KING I…

I have no choice.

QUEEN You do.

The law is wrong.

The ban shall be lifted.

CLOVE Your grace –

QUEEN I said enough!

The ban will be lifted because… I am pregnant.

CLOVE Impossible!

QUEEN I beg your pardon?

CLOVE It can't be…

QUEEN What makes you so sure Clove?

CLOVE *realises he's staring and looks away.*

It's funny. I feel a great curse has been lifted.

KING Is it true?

The **QUEEN** *nods, suddenly just happy.*

You're…

We're going to…

It's…

QUEEN Yes.

The **KING** *sweeps her off her feet. He runs and horses about, then remember she is pregnant and puts her down, carefully.*

It's fine.

KING I can't believe it.

We're going to have a son.

We're going to have a son.

QUEEN It might be a girl.

KING Yes. It might be a girl, but it'll be a boy. I know it.

I know it'll be a boy and we'll call him…

Pickles.

QUEEN Pickles?

Are you mad?

I'm not calling him Pickles.

KING Kingsley then.

QUEEN King Kingsley?

KING It was my favourite horse's name.

QUEEN You want to name him after a horse? Anyway, it might be a girl.

KING I don't care. I just don't care. Girl. Boy. It's wonderful.

IT'S WONDERFUL. Isn't it?

And Rose! You're pregnant too? How marvellous. How jolly… bloody marvellous!

QUEEN Language!

KING Clap!

Everyone clap.

All the advisors clap.

Look at them clapping.

All of you honk. Honk like seagulls. Like pelicans.

HONK!

They all start honking.

QUEEN Stop it.

I'm sorry your lords. His highness is overexcited.

KING I'll make them all honk. The whole world will honk for you. We're going to have a baby.

QUEEN Yes.

And now that I'm pregnant you can stop all this nonsense about a wall. We can leave the forest alone. There's no need for any of it.

The **KING** *looks like he's about to agree.*

CLOVE On the contrary your grace.

Now that the queen is pregnant. The witches will be itching to get their hands on her. They will want this baby dead.

QUEEN That's a lie! They are forbidden from killing.

CLOVE How would you know, your majesty?

KING Clove's right darling. We must be careful this time.

CLOVE She must be locked in her chambers.

QUEEN No.

KING We don't want the witches getting their hands on you.

QUEEN They're not witches.

KING It's just until the baby's born.

CLOVE And our purges of the forest must continue. Your hand must be strong and firm your highness. Until every last one of those foul women is dead.

QUEEN No. Please. You have to listen.

But the king has once more come under the influence of **CLOVE**.

CLOVE The forest ripped up.

KING The forest ripped up.

CLOVE And all the witches burned.

KING And all the witches burned.

The **QUEEN** *feels a pain in her belly. She nearly falls.*

QUEEN Oh!

CLOVE *rushes towards her.*

CLOVE Is everything okay, your majesty?

QUEEN DON'T!

Don't touch me.

CLOVE I am your physician ma'am.

QUEEN I wish to be alone.

Rose. Help me to my chambers.

CLOVE As you wish, your majesty.

The **QUEEN** *exits, beaten.* **CLOVE** *smiles.*

(trying to continue with his hypnotic voice) The wall will be finished.

KING What? Yes yes yes. But I'm going to be a father, Clove. A big, lovely, jolly Daddy. Haha!

The **KING** *chases* **CLOVE** *off in delight.*

Scene Four
The Pregnancy And Birth

FERTILITY WIFE And so the time passed, most royally.

Time expanded with the ladies.

A moon filled slowly, night by night until one morning there was an omen.

Only the queen and Rose knew what it meant.

Two pigs had given birth and died in the night. Two squealing piglets left to fend for themselves.

A sign from the fertility wife, but still the Queen did not tell the King… the promise she had made. The deal she had done. She just kept saying.

QUEEN Tomorrow. I'll definitely tell him tomorrow. I need to. I have to.

FERTILITY WIFE And so it was that little by little the promise got pushed to the back of her mind. Dwarfed by the huge expanse of her belly. The stretching and groaning. The murmurs of the king.

KING Are you okay love? Is it all okay?

FERTILITY WIFE Until finally one night the labour began and went on and on and ON until there!

A popping sound.

Just as the night was turning to day, in that in-between time, two babies were born.

Two mouths opened and sucked in the first lungful of air.

QUEEN OH

ROSE OH

KING A girl.

ROSE A girl.

QUEEN Dawn.

ROSE Eve.

QUEEN And I will love you

ROSE Forever and ever

QUEEN And nothing will take you away.

ROSE And nothing's going to come between us.

QUEEN And I will tell the king.

ROSE Everything.

QUEEN I'll tell him how I love you and how he loves you, and he won't mind the promise I made one little bit. The wall? What's the wall compared to you?

ROSE And there's something in you. I can tell that. There's something in your eyes of me. And something not.

QUEEN Something special.

ROSE Way beyond.

FERTILITY WIFE And looking in their eyes the two new mums felt a shiver run through them. And again there was an omen. A swarm of brightly coloured birds flew across the sky that no one had seen the like of before.And two of them were found in the little girls' nursery. Protecting them, who knows, but the two babies slept on.

QUEEN And still.

ROSE And still

FERTILITY WIFE And still the queen did not say.

Until it was upon them, the baby's naming day.

Scene Five
The Naming Ceremony

QUEEN Darling.

Darling.

There's something I need to tell you. Before the ceremony.

Something important.

The **KING** *is totally engrossed by the baby, gurgling and making baby sounds.*

KING Who's a gorgeous little girlie then? Yes you are. Yes you are.

QUEEN Darling!

KING Look at her little feet.

Aren't they gorgeous?

QUEEN I need to say about –

KING Oh! And look at her little hands. Aren't they tiny?

QUEEN I did go to the forest. Clove was right.

KING And her tiny little bellybutton.

Yes.

Yes it is.

QUEEN I went there and I made a promise.

KING And she's got my eyes. Definitely got my eyes.

Wushywushywushywoo…

QUEEN I promised on our baby's life that you would leave the forest alone, you would stop building the wall. And now I'm worried it's too late. I haven't stopped a thing.

KING What's that darling?

QUEEN …

KING Oh look! She did a woopsy. Isn't that lovely?

Daddy's going to change you.

Yes he is. He is.

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