

The Glass Slipper Polka

A play in one Act
About ten minutes long

By

Scott Charles
Sacramento, CA

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Cast:

Ellie
Marissa
Alyse
Josef

Time: the recent past

Setting: a table, four chairs, and a mannikin.

Synopsis

The story is about a family displaced from their homes by an unnamed event. They are rural Eastern European, religious people, forced to live in a secular environment which they find difficult to comprehend. The rules seem arbitrary and restrictive. They feel like their culture is slowly being stripped away from them. They feel isolated and humiliated.

OPEN CURTAIN

(Scene opens with 4 people sitting at a dinner table. The furniture is old, mismatched. The people look unhappy. They are having an argument. Ellie's hand is injured and being tended to by Alyse.)

Ellie

No, what I did wasn't right. But it wasn't right what they said to me, either.

Josef

But now that boy has to see the doctor, and they will force us to pay for it. It will cost us money. Money we don't have. You were stupid and now we all pay for it.

Ellie

Shut up! You're the stupid one! I stood up for us, I had to, because you won't!

Josef

You're always the trouble maker! You're just a silly little girl, and worse yet you're good for nothing. The rest of us carry you like a sack of potatoes. You know what? Sometimes I even think you look like a potato – especially that nose of yours.

Alyse

Settle down. *(To Ellie)* We work with their fathers, their mothers, and this will make it harder on us.

Marissa

I'm tired of it too. We did nothing wrong to come here; we had no choice. If they didn't want us here, why did they bring us? Why did they invite us?

Josef

Don't be dumb. Nobody 'invited' us. We're here to work, nothing more. As long as we work, as long as we're useful, they will leave us alone. But if we ever stop working, they will throw us out with the trash.

Ellie

Work? You work like dogs! Like circus animals! You slave for them and take their crumbs and act happy all you want. Not me. I'm better than that. I want more.

Josef

Too bad you're too lazy to work for what you want. But then maybe you can go down to the red light district, work on your back. Ha! Best life for you.

Alyse

That's enough, both of you. Talk civil or shut your mouths. To hear you talk, Mama and Papa would be so ashamed. Neither of you were raised to be so disrespectful.

Marissa

Tell us what happened, maybe we can find some way to make it right.

Ellie

I was only trying to tell them about our home – our real home.. I told them about how Mama and Papa used to dance. You know, the Polka. How much fun it was, you remember, don't you?

Josef

So you hit him because, what, he didn't know the Polka? Which one didn't he know? Was it perhaps the "little princess fairy" polka?

Marissa

Enough! Why were you talking to him? Do you know him?

Ellie

Sort of. He's in one of my classes. I was just trying to talk to him. A group of them were talking about a dance, a party they were going to. I just wanted to talk to them, that's all. I didn't mean any harm.

Alyse

Why did you hit him?

Ellie

I said, oh a dance! Wonderful! I said, my family danced all the time! They said how could I know how to dance, because where I'm from they don't have real dances. So I tried to show them. But that boy, he laughed, and then he spit on the ground, right between my feet.

Marissa

And that's when you hit him?

Ellie

Yes! I slugged him good, just like Papa showed me! Right in the eye. Ha, he'll have that on his face for a week!

Alyse

The school policeman said that boy had to go to the doctor, he was hurt bad.

Ellie

Well, that part wasn't my fault.

Josef

How is not your fault? Did someone else do something to him?

Ellie

Well, I hit him so hard he fell down. He hit his head.

Josef

Nitwit! How is it not your fault? You hit him, and he fell down and broke his head! Dummy! Trouble-making twit!

Ellie

Stop your braying! That's all we ever get from you, donkey noises! Maybe I should be slapping you, instead of that boy.

Alyse

Shut up both of you! I'm tired of your bickering. The school policeman said he would have to talk with the detectives, so you might have to see a judge. He said you could end up in jail.

Josef

Great. Now she's a real criminal. Not just a snotty girl with a big mouth and a bad temper, but a real jailbird. Nice.

Marissa

Any more of your mouth and I'll slap you myself. *(To Alyse)* Did the policeman say the boy's name? Do you know the boy's family?

Alyse

Yes. His father is a supervisor on one of the other production lines. I've seen him, but never talked to him. Marissa, you know how the supervisors are to us. They don't like us, none of them. They think we come here to steal their jobs. I'm scared. We could lose our jobs over this.

Marissa

But we work harder than any of them! No! We won't lose our jobs! My manager said he could use a dozen more just like us!

Ellie

He called me a bohunk.

Marissa and Alyse together

Huh? Who? What?

Ellie

That boy. He said that's what I was, a filthy, dirt loving, potato eating bohunk. And he would rather dance with a pig than me. Then he spit. That's when I hit him.

Alyse

What's a bohunk?

Josef

It's us! It's you, dummy! It's what they call us. Dummy!

Alyse

I don't know what's gotten into you, but you talk to me that way and I'll throw you out of this house. I'll toss your clothes out into the street and be done with you. Don't you ever speak that way to me again. Ever. Do you hear me?

(Josef is dismissive, shrugs and looks away, Alyse grabs him by the ear and twists it.)

Alyse

I said do you hear me?

Josef

Yes!

Alyse

What else!

Josef

I'm sorry!

Alyse

That's it? Nothing more? *(Alyse twists harder)*

Josef

I'm sorry I was disrespectful to you. Forgive me. I will not talk that way to you again.

(Ellie pounds on the table with both hands.)

Ellie

Stop it! We're family! All those years we were kids, we were so happy together. What happened to us? (To Josef) What turned you against me? Against us? Why do you speak to us that way?

Josef

Why? Why? Because my hands hurt. Because my legs hurt. My back hurts. Because every day I go into the fields and the sun burns my neck. And I'm tired, every day I go to bed tired, I wake up tired. And one day is like the next. And I'll never be free of it. Until I die.

Marissa

We all work. It's not easy for any of us. But it's not the end of the world.

Josef

You don't understand. You two are older, but Papa said to me, you be the man now. You take care of the family until we come and find you. But they will never find us. If we're lucky we'll get to see their graves, and that's all. I hate these people, I hate the weather, I hate the food! And most of all I hate those fields!

Ellie

I'm sorry, I wish it hadn't happened. But I just couldn't stop myself. That boy made me feel so little, so worthless. So I stopped his mouth up good, and I'd do it again! But I won't. I promise. I promise to be good.

Josef

It's not you. I know it's not your fault. You're young, and pretty. You're not cut out for the factory, or the field. I know that. So you go to school. Good for you. But me? I go into the fields and work harder than anybody! And those men treat me like dog. I say a prayer, ask for God's blessing, they laugh at me. They say what do you know about God? They go to a beer garden, they don't want me around. I drink alone. And if I want to talk to one of their sisters? They would cut me down so fast it wouldn't be funny.

Marissa

We'll work, we'll save our money, and we'll get out of here.

Alyse

Yes. The factory pays us good, and we live smart just like Mama and Papa told us to. We'll go somewhere else and you can go to school. Or whatever you want – it will be your turn to have a life.

Josef

I'm sorry I lost my temper. Ellie, I'm sorry about what I said about you working the red light district. I know you would never do that.

Ellie

What about my nose?

Josef

Not at all like a potato. *(To Alyse and Marissa)* But that's boys head – what about that?

Ellie

Well, maybe it's too thick to crack?

Marissa

Well I'm guessing if it was really bad the detectives would be here by now.

Alyse

You're right, they would be pounding on our door by now. But even so, his father could get us fired.

Marissa

Well, I'll go to my manager in the morning, right before shift starts. I'll tell them that boy dishonored our sister, and she had a right to defend herself. Those men have daughters too, they don't want boys to think they can treat young girls that way. You go talk to your manager too.

Alyse

Yes. The production schedule came out yesterday, everybody is full time for the rest of the year, all the machines going full cycle all day long. They let us go, they can't make quota. That's all they care

Alyse (cont.)

about, making quota. Plus my manager likes the little tea cakes I bring in.

Josef

Oh?

Alyse

He shares them with his brother, from the other building. His brother works with the people who keep the books, comes over to our building to have lunch with us. He likes me, so maybe we can get some help that way.

Josef

Hey, wait a minute! What kind of talk is that? He likes you? How does he like you? In what way?

Alyse

Don't worry about it. He's a nice man. He says I'm as sweet as the cakes!

Josef

He told you that? What kind of talk is that? I don't like it. Next thing you know his hand is up your blouse!

Alyse

Well he didn't actually say it to me. I heard about from one of the other women who works on the line. A cousin of his. *(To Marissa and Ellie)* I was going to mention it to you, but I hadn't had time. And nobody is going to put their hand up my blouse. At least not without my permission.

Josef

Hey! Enough of that kind of talk.

Ellie

See, everything is going to be OK! *(Grabbing Josef's hand)* Come on let's do the Polka!

Josef

Here? We can't dance here. Not nearly enough room. We'd go right out the window! Or through the floors.

Ellie

Then let's go to the beer garden, we can dance there!

Josef

Well, first off, you're not old enough. And you're my sister, and I'm not taking my sister to a beer garden. And they don't allow the Polka there. They have a big sign that says 'absolutely no polka allowed'.

Alyse

How could anyone not allow Polka dancing? How uncivilized is that?

Josef

OK, tell you what, let's have some dinner, then we'll see about Polka dancing right here? How does that sound?

Ellie

Does my nose really look that bad? Like a potato?

Josef

I already said it didn't, Ellie.

Ellie

OK then. But no more making fun of my nose? No more jokes about me being a sack of potatoes?

Josef

No. No more jokes about potatoes. I promise.

CLOSE CURTAIN