

DICKENS VS. ANDERSEN

(BASED ON A REGRETTABLY TRUE VISIT)

Written by

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OPEN on the melodious chiming of Big Ben.

Bong bong bong bonnnnng....

PRE-LAP the clapping of horse-drawn carriages as we CUT TO

A cobble-stoned London street. OLD-TIMEY ENGLISH PEOPLE in top hats and petticoats...

ENGLISHMAN

Yes, yes. Queen Victoria. Jolly good.

Now gazing at the fog-shrouded skyline from a London ROOFTOP. A NARRATOR (40s, F, mellow and proper) intones:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

They say never meet your heroes. I say heroes'd best steer clear of their fans. Oh sure, the adulation is nice. The letters. The homemade cookies. But you never know what happens when you cross paths...

CUT TO a FACTORY-like structure. A sign out front reads "Shoreham Poor House."

NARRATOR (V.O.)

A pleasant exchange. An autograph request or two.

Now in the countryside, on a dirty river...

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Or maybe they don't stop...

A large, two-story Georgian estate. A lonely light on in the top left. We softly linger on the house through...

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Maybe you hear a knock at night - and you answer the door and no one's there. And you're like "who's there?"... Nothing. And then you turn around and someone knocks you out with a candlestick. You wake up one morning chained to a basement window with a collar around your neck and you're like "PLEASE LET ME GO" and they say "YOU'RE MY DOG, NOW! YOU'RE MY DOG!!"

See a GUEST ROOM. Seemingly-empty. Sprawled on the table a pile of written works.

There're copies of Charles Dickens (Christmas Carol, Oliver Twist) and Hans Christian Andersen (Little Mermaid, Emperor's New Clothes).

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Or maybe...it's something worse.

SEE a a large mirror. And scrawled across it...

"Hans Andersen slept in this room for five weeks—which seemed to the family AGES!" - Charles Dickens, 1857

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Much...much worse.

FADE OUT...

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - HANS' ROOM - MORNING

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN (30s/40s) tosses in bed. He's lanky, with a prominent nose, and filled with doubt and self-loathing. (*Note: he speaks with an American accent.*)

COPENHAGEN - 1857

PAN ACROSS his small, cluttered room. SEE scattered clothes and **half-finished, handwritten stories**. Stacks of novels, and an opened Bible. Plus several strategically-placed Go-Bags (*Dane's Choice: Emergency Supply Kit.*)

We're interrupted by loud door-banging.

MAGDA (O.S.)

Hans! Hans, wake up!

As Hans rolls onto his back, we see around his neck a painted wooden sign:

"I am Asleep, Not Dead"

Hans stirs. Crosses to the door, revealing MAGDA (20s) an aspiring actress and Hans' bestie.

We freeze on Hans, and list out:

"Hans Christian Andersen, Author. Most Popular Works: Ugly Duckling, Emperor's New Clothes, Frozen (look it up)."

MAGDA (CONT'D)

Hans it's 9. Do you know what day it is?

HANS
(thinking, still groggy)
Why today...

MAGDA
You're late.

Hans snaps to.

HANS
Why didn't you tell me sooner?!

MAGDA
Why was your door locked?

HANS
I don't know, Magda, maybe because
of Copenhagen's absurdly-high home
robbery rate?

She looks down.

MAGDA
Hans...did you sleep in your
clothes?

REVEAL: He's fully dressed.

HANS
Yes, I did. For emergencies like
today.

He goes back to hunt for his wallet and watch, as a concerned
Magda observes.

HANS (CONT'D)
You know what? I can't go today.
I'm too ugly. I can't be seen in
public.

He crosses back to Magda. Covers his nose with palm.

HANS (CONT'D)
If I hold my nose like this, does
that make it better?

MAGDA
...I think that would draw *more*
attention to you if you did that.

HANS
You are of NO HELP!

He throws down the sign from his neck and rushes out.

EXT. COPENHAGEN STREET - DAY

Over credits, and upbeat '80s New Wave, Hans rushes through the crowded urban center.

TRACK Hans through the excellent production design. He weaves around the 19th century pedestrians, grossed out.

HANS
(muttering to himself)
You are such an idiot!! // How
could you oversleep? // Some body
clock, Hans!

He passes by a dog, which immediately BARKS. Hans jumps.

HANS (CONT'D)
Leash laws, people! Leash laws!

Almost trips over a neat little bundle of straw.

HANS (CONT'D)
(to no one)
Who left straw here?! That's
Denmark for you. Straw everywhere.

Continues. Looks both ways before crossing street -

He walks by a SHOPKEEP (M, 50s) sweeping up.

SHOPKEEP
Mr. Andersen, that story you told
about the "Red Shoes" was so
delightful! When are you going to
write it down and publish?

HANS
Stop pressuring me!

He brushes past the confused Shopkeep.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Yes, Hans was, as the Ancients say,
just a weird motherfucker.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

An overflow crowd spills out through the front doors, as a SECURITY GUARD (40s, burly, thick Scandinavian accent) tries to control the situation.

SECURITY GUARD
(shouting over)
We can't let in anyone else. I'm
sorry!

Everyone *awwws*, as Hans shoves his way through.

HANS
Hi I'm here for the reading.

SECURITY GUARD
I'm sorry, we're at maximum
capacity. No one else is allowed
in.

HANS
Okay, I don't think you
understand...

SECURITY GUARD
Gregers.

HANS
Mr. Gregers.

SECURITY GUARD
Gregers is my first name. My last
name is Brömberg.

HANS
I'm sure it is. But -

SECURITY GUARD
- It means "Broom Mountain" -

HANS
- Yeah. Okay, but please
understand, I've been waiting for
this for months. I can't miss it.
So if I could just maybe sit in the
aisle or even onstage with -

SECURITY GUARD
I am horribly embarrassed I cannot
accommodate you. But if I don't do
my job, I'll be fired. And then
I'll have to send my son to the
silver mines.

Hans grumbles and walks off.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Very good to meet you!

Hans is fucked. He looks around, desperate for a plan....

REVEAL: an empty alley next to the auditorium. Hans crosses. Goes to a window and peers over, next to two DUDES (20s). His eyes widen.

HANS

There he is...

REVEAL: CHARLES DICKENS (30s/40s) well-dressed, with a kempt goatee. A distinguished and gracious Englishman. He's standing at a podium, reading from his latest.

We freeze on Charles, and list out:

"Charles Dickens, Author. Most Popular Works: Oliver Twist, A Christmas Carol, The Muppet Christmas Carol

HOLD on Hans' awe. Inside, the packed audience silently hangs on Charles' every word, as he reads in his soothing accent.

CHARLES

"Her couch was dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour..."

DUDE #1

What is this?

HANS

Oh my God, it's Little Nell's death from "Old Curiosity Shop". Doing the deep cuts. What a boss.

DUDE #1

Boo! Read the hits!

DUDE #2

We should've waited in that standby line to look at a pineapple.

CUT TO Hans mouthing the words, as Charles continues on, getting visibly more emotional with his own work.

CHARLES

"The ancient rooms she had seemed to fill with life...the noiseless haunts of many a thoughtful hour...
(tearing up)
-the paths she had trodden as it were, but yesterday-could know her never more."

Sniffles, shuts the book. The audience breaks into applause (with Hans clapping ecstatically).

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(dabbing eyes)
I'm sorry. Even I get carried away sometimes. I have time for a few questions, if anyone has...

HANS
I have to talk to him.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

An audience-member raises her hand.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1
Do you have an idea for your next book?

CHARLES
I'm actually taking a break from writing. Next I'll be directing and starring in a play - adapted from my own works, of course.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2
What was your inspiration for your latest novel?

We look out into the audience as Charles speaks -

CHARLES
Who's to say what that one brilliant bolt is...

- as a narrow back window starts to **THUMP...THUMP**.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
But I'd say all of them have similar running themes...

Hans is trying to break the window. Hear his muffled grumbling...

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Poverty, class, the quiet dignity of children...

Hear the **squeaky...squeaky** of the window slowly opening. Hans tries to **squeeze** through.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 But at least one of my inspirations
 is to keep you all purchasing
 copies!

Off polite laughter, **Hans is now stuck halfway through.** As Charles drones on, Hans turns to a WOMAN in the back row.

HANS
 (sotto)
 Hey...Hey.

She turns to him, as he just dangles there.

WOMAN
 (annoyed)
 What?

HANS
 Can you raise your hand and gesture
 to me so I can ask a question?

WOMAN
 No! You're trying to sneak in.

HANS
 Wow...wow. I'm in such a vulnerable
 space right now, and you bring *that*
 up? How dare you, madame. How dare
 you.

WOMAN
 What are you even doing -

HANS
 How dare you.

CHARLES
 My apologies, but I must begin my
 voyage home. Thank you so much!

Off the applause, Hans curses. Now what??...

EXT. AUDITORIUM - LATER

Charles exits to more applause. He signs autographs and
 climbs aboard the open-top carriage.

CHARLES
 To the port, please.

HANS (O.S.)
 Right away, Mr. Dickens.

REVEAL: Hans has replaced the driver.

EXT. CARRIAGE - DAY

The carriage clomps through Copenhagen. Hans is vibrating, constantly looking back at Charles, too giddy to speak.

CHARLES

What happened to the usual driver?

HANS

He had to leave. He said his...
mom...turned into a pumpkin.

CHARLES

Excuse me?

HANS

I know. He told us and I was
like...whaaat?
(then)
Honestly I think he's kind of
losing it at his age. Once I walked
in on him talking to a stove.

They pass by the Shopkeep from earlier.

SHOPKEEP

Hello, Hans! What are you doing in
that carriage?

Hans nervously waves and continues past.

HANS

He's also insane. It's such a
crisis right now. For society.
(then)
Is London like this? I bet there's,
like, piss and shit everywhere,
right?

CHARLES

I live in Kent now, actually.

HANS

Oh I don't know Kent, is he nice?

CHARLES

(checking watch)
It's a place. Needed more room for
the children and guests -

HANS

My God, to be one of your guests.
You could so auction that for
money, or good yarn -

CHARLES

Sir, we're running quite a bit
late. Do you think you could -

HANS

I'm so sorry. I'm such an... *ucch* -
I will get you there immediately.

He leans into the horse and whispers:

HANS (CONT'D)

Okay, Mr. Horse, I understand that
we come from different backgrounds,
but if you fuck this up and he
misses his boat, I swear to Christ -

Charles angrily clears his throat. Hans fumbles, snaps the
reins hard, and we...

INT. COPENHAGEN STREET - SHORTLY AFTER

It's quiet. A trail of nuns cross the street. Just then, the
carriage comes swerving from around the corner. The nuns jump
out of the way.

HANS

Hello?! Genius on board!

We gallop through Copenhagen as the coach rocks back and
forth. Charles is hanging on to the sides.

HANS (CONT'D)

(shouting back)

I'm Hans Christian Andersen, by the
way! I'm a great admirer!

CHARLES

(holding on for dear life)

Thank you.

PEDESTRIAN (O.S.)

You're a madman!

HANS

Eat my ass, dickhead!

(then, to Charles)

I'm actually a writer, too.

(MORE)

HANS (CONT'D)
But compared to you, I'm nothing.
I'm a a dumb baby putting blocks
together-

CHARLES
Please focus, sir!

HANS
You're right. Always.

EXT. HARBOR - DAY

Hear a foghorn. Charles' ship looms over...

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
Last call!

PORTERS assist other passengers as a disheveled and flustered
Charles hops off the coach. Hans helps him with his luggage.

HANS
And that's so exciting about the
play! I'm sure it'll go well, Mr.
Dickens. You can do anything you
set your mind to.

CHARLES
Thank you, well -

HANS
An old fortune teller told me that.
And the next day she was sliced in
half by a windmill.

CHARLES
...Indeed.

He tries to get away, but -

HANS
Wait, umm, I was wondering if you
had any advice about being a
writer? Or if I could - ?

CHARLES
(rushing out)
I'm sorry, I'm terribly late//
Pleasure meeting you//But if you're
ever in Kent...

He trails off, not serious.

HANS

Wait, you're *inviting* me -

CHARLES

(not listening)

Apologies, I can't sign anything
now. Farewell, *Hans*.

HOLD on Hans' joy, watching Charles go up, framed in a brilliant halo. Off another foghorn...

EXT. STEAMSHIP DECK - DAY

Charles looks out over the deck, alongside his agent, MR. MORRIS (40s, scuzzy and gregarious, think: Ricky Gervais or Russell Brand).

MR. MORRIS

Another successful reading tour
with my most successful client.

CHARLES

Mr. Morris, were you at the
reading?

MR. MORRIS

The point is, you refilled our
coffers. So no more frettery about
putting out your next book. The
stage adaptation of your first
novel, *starring you*, is the next
great step for your career.

CHARLES

You think I can make it work?

MR. MORRIS

Look in my eyes, Charles. Do it.

He obliges.

CHARLES

Something's in the left one.

MR. MORRIS

I don't know what that is. The
point is, you are the greatest
author of your generation. And soon
you will be the greatest actor of
your generation. You just focus on
that.

Charles takes it in.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)
By the way, my daughter and I ran
into your son... Is he still - ?

CHARLES
It's just a phase.

MR. MORRIS
...Seems a little old -

CHARLES
NOTED!

Morris nods. HOLD on the awkward, and...

INT. COPENHAGEN SALOON - NIGHT

We're inside "The Drunken Olaf", a boisterous watering hole.
PAN ACROSS inebriated Danes clinking their ale glasses.

At a back table an excited Hans sits with Magda and PHILLIPE
THE MIME (30s, white makeup and beret).

MAGDA
What's wrong, Hans?

HANS
Charles Dickens never responded to
my letters. I thought I made such a
good impression.

MAGDA
Come now, it's not all lost. Did he
give you any advice when you met?

HANS
It doesn't matter. He's *Dickens*.
I'll never be as good as him...

Phillipe mimes something.

HANS (CONT'D)
No Phillipe, I'm not going to
graduate school!

KLAUS (20s) runs over with his violin. Greets his friends.

MAGDA
How were your street performances,
Klaus?

KLAUS

I made four thalers today! Double
what I'd make in the marsh circuit.

HANS

(not)

I'm very happy for you, Klaus.
You're really tapping into the
zeitgeist.

He finishes his ale.

HANS (CONT'D)

See, you guys are set. You're
performers. You can get out there.
I'm just stuck writing in my room.

MAGDA

I thought you were too nervous to
write your stories down.

HANS

Thanks, Magda, tell everyone! And I
have all the ideas in my head.
Whenever I try to set them all to
paper, I just feel...blocked.

MAGDA

Well maybe you should reach out to
Charles Dickens once more.

HANS

(realizing)

He did say I could stay with him if
I ever went to England...

KLAUS

There you go!

HANS

But he was probably just being
polite.

(then)

I'll never be part of that world.

KLAUS

What kind of crazy person would
offer you something and not really
mean it?

MAGDA

I can't imagine that's even
remotely possible.

Hans thinks it over.

HANS
So you think I should go?

MAGDA
Of course! He could give you advice
in person. I'm sure he'd love to
hear your stories. Writer to
writer.

HANS
You're right! If anyone can help me
achieve my potential, it's him.

He scooches out from the table.

HANS (CONT'D)
I have to pack at once.

EXT. HARBOR - MORNING

Hans stands on the bow of a large sailing ship, with a crowd
of other passengers.

His friends wave to him from the pier.

HANS
Goodbye Magda, goodbye Phillipe the
Mime!

Phillipe mimes something.

HANS (CONT'D)
Fine! You can borrow my portable
cupboard.

The ship departs, disappearing into the sunset.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And so Mr. Andersen set sail for
parts unknown, traveling tenth
class on the HMS Thickbottom.

INT. SAILING SHIP - STEERAGE - NIGHT

The ship rocks back and forth in a storm, while Hans is below
deck with the huddled masses.

All the coughing and sneezing makes him extremely
uncomfortable. He stacks his luggage around him like a little
fortress.

EXT. PORT OF DOVER - DAY

An exhausted Hans steps onto the dock. CUT TO him studying a map of England. Workers and passengers rush back and forth, too busy to direct him.

EXT. KENT TRAIN STATION - LATER

Three WORKERS (40s) stand before a train compartment.

WORKER #1

Alright, gents. Let's unload the meat before it thaws.

Slides the door open - a **freezing Hans bursts** out from amongst the hung carcasses. Dragging his luggage behind -

HANS

Not worth it.

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - ENTRANCE - ONE WEEK LATER

The country house from the opening narration. In the light we see its warm red brick, with wide, welcoming windows. It's imposing, but still charming.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

While Hans got acquainted with steerage and steers, Charles kept to more pleasant environs...

Next to the door, the obligatory Good Person lawn sign...

In this Estate We Believe:

Jews Didn't Kill Christ

Women Can Own Property

The Poor Musn't Be Whipped Without Cause

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GUEST ROOM - DAY

Charles pulls back the curtains to let the sun shine in. He sighs, taking in the verdant splendor of rural England.

He's in his happy place.

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - ENTRANCE - DAY

A humming Charles saunters past his roughhousing YOUNG CHILDREN. (DORA, 12, restless, ALFRED, 8, nerdy, plus 7 other anonymous little ones). Dora has Alfred in a headlock.

WALTER (6) tugs on his father's sleeve.

WALTER

Daddy, Frances says you'll be doing magic tricks for his birthday party.

CHARLES

I'm sorry, Walter, my stage magic days are over.

WALTER

But -

CHARLES

Play with the others now -

He leaves them, just as Dora headlocks Walter with her other arm. Charles crosses to pick up some unopened mail on the table. Sorting through, he notices something and -

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Frances?

FRANCES (O.S.)

In the kitchen, pa-pa.

CHARLES

Frances have you seen your mother -

Charles enters...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FRANCES (12) is at the table eating an overly-decorated cake slice. He looks and talks like a foppish dandy, i.e. the lad in the "Berries and Cream" Starburst commercial.

FRANCES

Good day, papa! How was your -

CHARLES

Frances, I said no stroller indoors! You must use your legs like a proper young man.

FRANCES

But the inside is so vast, pa-pa.
Inside I must be pushed!

Charles is about to say something but holds back.

CHARLES

We will discuss this later...

He leaves, as the younger kids rush in. Frances accidentally swipes his fork off the table. HOLD on the chaotic scene.

FRANCES

(indignant)
Someone pick that up for me!

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GARDENS - LATER

Charles sits in the grass next to his wife, CATHERINE (40s). She's the paragon of Victorian motherhood. Composed, proper. Devoted to family and home.

They lovingly gaze at the large trees and wide open blue sky.

CATHERINE

You've come a long way from the
Shoreham Poor House, Charles.

CHARLES

Indeed. And farther still to go.
(then)
And I have a surprise for you...

He hands her a large envelope. She opens it.

CATHERINE

My Lord...my official membership in
The Victorian Dames!

CHARLES

Long overdue, if I must say. At
last you're recognized as a
dedicated guardian of hearth and
home. I'm so proud of you.

Catherine starts to cry.

CATHERINE

I promised myself when it happened
I would stay composed...

To suppress the tears she stands up straight and hums "God Save The Queen". Charles is a little concerned...

CHARLES

Better?

CATHERINE

Yes. Oh if only our oldest Dora were as interested in carrying on my legacy. I'm worried about her. She's... so rebellious.

CHARLES

Well with you as her role model, she'll end up a proper young woman. I have no doubt of it.

CATHERINE

You're right, Charles. And soon you'll debut in your new play and be brilliant.

CHARLES

Thank you, my love. How blessed am I to have such a successful career; such a beautiful family. Truly I believe this will be a whole new era for the Dickensses.

HANS (O.S.)

Helloooo?

CHARLES

What was that?

They look across a field, down the road. Hans Christian Andersen is stumbling towards them, loaded up with luggage.

Hans sees they see him. Enthusiastically waves.

HANS

Mr. Dickens!!!

CATHERINE

Charles, who is that man?

CHARLES

I have no idea.

HANS

(panting, from afar)
Holy shit...Holy shit.

An exhausted Hans finally reaches them. Drops his bags.

HANS (CONT'D)

I'm here!

CHARLES

(beat)

My apologies...who are you?

HANS

Hans Christian Andersen!

Nope.

HANS (CONT'D)

We met in Copenhagen? I drove you to the harbor? You said I could stay with you if I'm ever in England!

CHARLES

I didn't tell you where I lived.

HANS

You said Kent, so I asked around! I was hoping I could tell you some of my stories. Or you could give me advice. Writer to writer.

(then, looks over)

And is this your wife? Great energy. Whatever you're doing, more please!

CATHERINE

Why thank you!

CHARLES

Did you walk this whole way?

HANS

I was in a coach, but the guy just had this...vibe. He was clearly planning on killing me. So I hopped out around Clerkenwell.

(then)

Sorry, is there someone who can take my bags in? I would do it, but these ripened corns are a pain. Check 'em out.

He starts to unbuckle his shoes.

HANS (CONT'D)

Don't worry they're not contagious - Well one time they were.

Charles stops him.

CHARLES

I'm sorry... We didn't plan on guests. We were hoping to just spend time together, as a family.

(Hans doesn't get it)

Just us.

Registers. His face drops.

HANS

Oh... Right. I thought you weren't serious when you verbally assured me I could stay with you. I told my friends that and they thought you were different. I get it now.

He picks up his bags.

HANS (CONT'D)

I'll go find an inn somewhere -

Catherine and Charles whisper to each other, as Hans speaks in b.g.:

CATHERINE

Charles, he did come all this way.

HANS

- They're all probably booked though. I'll have to sleep in a trough -

CHARLES

But Catherine, we don't know who this man is -

HANS

- I got sick on the boat, too. -

CATHERINE

Then you shouldn't have made the offer, dear.

Charles suppresses his hesitance.

CHARLES

Alright, you can stay with us for a short while. I suppose.

HANS

O joy! Do we have adjoining rooms, or...?

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - FOYER - DAY

Charles carries in Hans' many bags. Drops them.

CHARLES
Family! Please gather.

We hear footsteps from across the house scurry in. First the 6 little ones (or 7? Hard to keep track). Then Frances, pushed in his stroller by a MAID.

HANS
Wow, of course someone as talented as you would be so virile. That all adds up.

CHARLES
Family, this is Hands Christmas Ampersand -

HANS
- Hans Christian Andersen -

The kids ooh and ahh, intrigued.

HANS (CONT'D)
Your father and I are colleagues -

CHARLES
Not really.

HANS
In the general sense. We're part of the Capitol-C "Community." I write fairy tales. Try to.

DORA
Wow!

CHARLES
Fairy tales. How...quaint.

HANS
Your father's right. They're really unsophisticated. I'm embarrassed to even tell people about them.

Hans crosses to Frances in his stroller.

HANS (CONT'D)
And this must be your inspiration for Tiny Tim.
(then, to Frances)
(MORE)

HANS (CONT'D)

Don't worry, there are many career options for people like you. One day you will make a fine bathroom attendant.

CATHERINE

It's just a stroller.

Charles crosses to Frances.

CHARLES

It's not a permanent thing. Just a phase.

FRANCES

It's absolutely not.

He tries to **shake Frances out of his stroller**, as everyone watches in horror.

CHARLES

Just a little jest we play.

CATHERINE

Charles, stop.

CHARLES

It's a little jest.

Charles tips the stroller up, Frances clinging to the side.

HANS

He doesn't like that.

Charles gives up. HOLD on the shock and awkward.

HANS (CONT'D)

Well it's an honor to join you for however long -

At that, a cute MUTT runs and hops onto Hans. Barking, and slobbering.

HANS (CONT'D)

What the fuck is that?!

DORA

Biscuit!

Hans tries to gently push him away.

HANS

I'm sorry, I can't be near that.
Just look at him. He's probably
rabid.

We look. He's adorable.

DORA

Biscuit wouldn't hurt anyone!

HANS

Oh yeah? In Copenhagen, I once saw
a doberman walking down the street
with a severed baby's hand in its
mouth.

CATHERINE

That can't be true.

HANS

Or it was a large apricot; I don't
know.

Catherine pulls Biscuit aside.

CATHERINE

We'll keep him in a separate part
of the house. Charles can show Hans
his room.

As the commotion settles, Dora crosses to Charles.

DORA

Papa, is this man staying for long?

They look over. Hans is shimmying along the wall to avoid the
dog.

CHARLES

Unclear.

Hans keeps shimmying. **The dog starts licking his leg.**

HANS

Don't TOUCH ME!

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Hans has unpacked, recreating his cluttered boarding room
from earlier. Charles knocks, enters. Blanches at the mess.

CHARLES

Made yourself at home, I see.

HANS

This room is amazing. You have
exquisite taste.

CHARLES

Thank you...What's on the table?

SEE a large pile of dirty sticks and leaves.

HANS

I'm into crafts. When I was
wandering through the forest to get
here, I made sure to gather
supplies. It's really calming.

CHARLES

Alright...

Hans straightens his sheets.

HANS

Would you like to say prayers with
me? Gets to Heaven quicker that
way.

CHARLES

I don't do that.

HANS

A private man. I get it.

CHARLES

No, I just find religion, and its
practitioners, to be insufferable
hypocrites.

HANS

(stilly friendly)

We'll agree to disagree on that one!
I'll attach an addendum onto mine,
just so you're covered.

Charles is too annoyed to respond. He looks around, as Hans
kneels at the bed and prays. Charles picks something up.

CHARLES

What is this?

SEE it's his painted wooden sign: **"I am Asleep, Not Dead".**

HANS

I wear that every night while I
sleep. You can't be too careful.
(MORE)

HANS (CONT'D)

What if someone thinks you're dead
and they bury you alive?

CHARLES

...Are you serious?

HANS

It's my greatest fear. I can't
count how many times I assume that
sign has saved my life.

CHARLES

I'm sure.

He crosses to the door.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

So just to establish some
parameters -

HANS

Boundaries. Love it.

CHARLES

As long as you're here, I'd like to
play a game. It's called
"quarantine."

HANS

Fun.

CHARLES

And what do quarantined people do?

HANS

Vomit blood.

CHARLES

They stay in their rooms. No matter
what.

HANS

Loud and clear, sir.

CHARLES

Excellent. Have a good night.

HANS

You have a *better* night!

Charles shakes his head and shuts the door.

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Charles and Catherine lie in their individual twin beds, separated by a bookshelf (true).

CHARLES

Don't you think there's something a little...off about him?

CATHERINE

I think he's just nervous around you. He's quite the admirer.

CHARLES

Yes, quite. Well hopefully it'll be a brief visit. Goodnight, dear.

He blows out the candle. Lies down...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' BEDROOM - LATER

As they snore, a Nosferatu-like shadow crosses the bedroom. Then looms over Charles.

As he shivers...

HANS (O.S.)

Charles?

(no response)

Charles?

He rouses.

CHARLES

I thought I told you to stay in your room!

HANS

I know. Quarantine. I was never really good at game rules. I'm not an auditory learner.

Catherine runs around the bookcase to join them.

CATHERINE

What's wrong? Is everything alright?

HANS

I'm so sorry to disturb you both. But there's, like, water hitting the window.

CATHERINE

(beat)

What?

HANS

It's either water, or, like, a branch. I can't sleep with that sound. Can someone cut it? Is there a town cutter?

CHARLES

This is ridiculous. Return to your room at once!

CATHERINE

Charles, if he can't sleep, what good will that do?

HANS

Well he's not moving in with the children.

CATHERINE

No. But I can.

CHARLES

(realizing)

No...please, Catherine -

CATHERINE

It's no bother at all!

She puts her hand on Hans' shoulder.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You rest well, Hans.

HANS

(touched)

Catherine, since I have to redo my night prayers, you are definitely getting mentioned.

CATHERINE

So sweet...

And on a horrified Charles, SMASH TO

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Looking down, we see Hans and Charles sleeping in their twin beds, barrier removed so the beds are now close together.

Both are wide awake.

HANS

This might be the greatest night of my life.

(then)

Thanks for helping me move the bookcase. Better air flow.

Charles just grits his teeth and stares at the ceiling.

HANS (CONT'D)

Hey Charles...do you write down your dreams?

CHARLES

No.

HANS

I figure. Your waking imagination is vivid enough.

CHARLES

(gritting)

Thank you; go to sleep now.

HANS

Sometimes my dreams are only in one color. Crazy, right?

Charles mutters and rolls over.

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GUEST ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Dora lazily daydreams on the couch, as Catherine hangs up her certificate from The Victorian Dames. Dora looks to a side wall where we REVEAL: a list of tiny names.

DORA

Why do you think father hasn't added Hans to the guest record?

CATHERINE

I don't think he wants to publicize this.

She adjusts the certificate. (We can make out a giant "V.D.")

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Dora, when you're admitted to the Victorian Dames, what do you think it'll be for?

(then)

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Do you think it'll be for your
cooking, cleaning, or just the
delightful little games you make up
for your twelve children?

DORA
Actually, I don't really want to do
that.

HOLD. Catherine is struggling to process.

CATHERINE
I'm sorry...you don't...what?

DORA
(matter-of-fact)
I'm not really interested in those
things. But that's fine if you are.

Catherine gets a little dizzy.

CATHERINE
But - I - you - but -

She has to lean against a window. Composes herself.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Dora, I'm a little...worried. You
don't sew. You don't bake. If you
won't keep a home or raise
children, how else -
(suppressing vomit)
How else will you be judged as a
wife?

DORA
(unbothered)
Why do I have to marry?

Catherine promptly **passes out, smashing her head through the window.**

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' STUDY - NEXT MORNING

Charles is in his book-lined study, reviewing his lines.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
So though his bedroom may have been
disturbed, the sanctum that was
Charles' study was still -

Hans creeps in -

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I shouldn't have said anything.

Charles scans his lines, as Hans runs his hand across the wall.

CHARLES
No, it must land harder: "How old
is *that* horse, my friend?"
(then)
Ooh I have chills...

Hans reaches for the bookshelf. His hand accidentally pushes it in. The shelf gives way. The noise startles Charles.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(annoyed)
Is there anything I can do for you?

HANS
Well, um, I was kind of wondering
if I could...tell you one of my
stories.

CHARLES
Not my highest priority, I'm
afraid. I'm trying to rehearse for
my play.

HANS
You're right. It's so rude of me.
You'll probably hate them. I'm so
STUPID!

CHARLES
Calm down. I'm sure they're fine.

HANS
Really? They're all in my head, but
I'm too hesitant. I can't write
them down. I just can't, y'know -

He mimes, like, stuffing something into a turkey.

CHARLES
Alright, how about you tell me just
one?

HANS
Great! Well...I just wrote one
called The Little Match Girl.

Pulls up a chair.

CHARLES
Sounds sweet.

HANS
(getting into it)
It is! It's about a poor young girl trying to sell matches in winter. And she can't go home because her father would beat her for failing to sell any matches. So she huddles in an alley and lights one to keep warm...

CHARLES
...Alright.

HANS
And in the flame of the matches, she sees all these visions of joy and comfort. So she keeps lighting them. And when they're all gone, she freezes to death. The next morning, people find her smiling corpse and are like, "that's awful." But what they don't realize is that she saw all these happy visions and that her soul is now in Heaven. The End.

HOLD.

CHARLES
...So your story is about a little poor girl who freezes to death to avoid being beaten, and we're happy for her because she died?

HANS
Exactly!

CHARLES
...I think it's a little morbid.

HANS
I knew it. I should've added the talking fox!

He exaggeratedly buries his head in his arm.

HANS (CONT'D)
I'm asking *the* Charles Dickens what he thinks of my stories?! Great idea.
(MORE)

HANS (CONT'D)

Why not ask God what he thinks of a toilet brush? The cheap ones.

Charles can't resist the ego stroke. Softens.

CHARLES

You know, I'm hard on myself, too.

HANS

You?! After all your success?

CHARLES

Hard to believe, I know. Whenever a novel debuts, I still get nervous waiting on the review clippings. I still haven't gotten them for my most recent, "Little Dorrit."

HANS

I don't think you've anything to worry about with that one. Instant classic. Five stars.

Charles smiles. Maybe this Hans fellow isn't all bad.

CHARLES

Tell you what. I'll block off some time to go through more stories.

HANS

YOU WOULD?!

CHARLES (CONT'D)

- after rehearsals this week.

HANS (CONT'D)

Wow... So you're, like, my mentor now.

CHARLES

I don't think so. But until then, why not engage with someone else?

HANS

Thank you! THANK YOU!

CHARLES

And shut me in, please!

He shuts the door, but Charles can still hear the clomp of Hans' skips and his giddy squeals.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Yes, Charles was tamping down one problem...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - DRAWING ROOM - LATER

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But another proved to be simply untampable..

Catherine is on the couch, comforted by Hans. She's got a couple scratches from the table crash.

CATHERINE

I just don't know where I went wrong with Dora.

HANS

And after all you and Charles have done for her. I say sub her out with someone else. Someone older...with stomach issues -

CATHERINE

She just has no idea how harsh the real world is. I've seen its cruelty.

(then)

You know when I was younger, I was terribly bullied?

HANS

You?! For what, being a delicate goddess?

CATHERINE

Far from it. They called me...

(takes a breath)

...The Ugly Duckling.

ON an intrigued Hans, we FADE into...

EXT. IDYLIC MEADOW - FLASHBACK

LITTLE GIRLS (ages 7-10) in fancy dresses chase each other up and down a hill.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Because of my awkward gait and corrective nose brim, I rarely played with the other girls. And if I tried...

The girls stop playing and look to a YOUNG CATHERINE (8) waddling over. She's also wearing one of those long-nose Renaissance doctor masks.

YOUNG CATHERINE
May I - may I please join?...

YOUNG GIRL #1
You?? Why should we play with
you... Ugly Duckling?

YOUNG GIRLS
Ugly Duckling, Ugly Duckling!

HANS (V.O.)
That name flows so well. It must
have been devastating.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
Oh it was.

INT. STUDY ROOM - FLASHBACK

Young Catherine reads a thick book by candlelight.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
I decided that if I couldn't join
them as a child, then I would outdo
them as a grown-up.

REVEAL the title: *"There No 'I' In 'Cry Yourself to Sleep': A
Guide to English Motherhood."*

INT. EMPTY BALLROOM - FLASHBACK

TEEN CATHERINE takes posture and curtsying lessons from an
older MATRON (40s, see she's wearing a "V.D." Victorian Dames
brooch).

CUT TO her learning how to properly eat soup.

CATHERINE (V.O.)
I took lessons in everything I
could. I made sure that when the
time came, I would be the most
proper of proper young women...

INT. PACKED BALLROOM - FLASHBACK

The Young Girls are now TEENS in gowns, dancing with
distinguished MALE BLUE BLOODS.

TEEN GIRL #1
Oh, Mr. Dumble, you are a pleasure.

MR. DUMPLE
 (brain-dead)
 Indeed. Quite.

A figure approaches.

TEEN CATHERINE (O.S.)
 Good evening, ladies...

They look to see Catherine, now a gorgeous young woman.

TEEN GIRL #1
 Is that... Catherine?

TEEN GIRL #2
 I told you we should've checked in
 on her once in seven years.

CATHERINE
 May I cut in, Mr. Dumble?

MR. DUMPLE
 Indeed. Quite.

Off their shock, Mr. Dumble takes her hand to dance...

CATHERINE (V.O.)
 I realized then that I was no
 longer the Ugly Duckling.

BACK IN PRESENT DAY

HANS
 You're an inspiration. The way you
 learned how to eat soup...

CATHERINE
 And as a bonus, half of those girls
 later died in childbirth...
 (then)
 Oh how do I get Dora as enthused
 about her role as I was?

HANS
 You can't give up. You just have to
 keep reminding her. Wear her down.

And on Hans, realizing that advice applies to more than just
 her...

INT. THEATER - DAY

Charles is on stage, waxing poetic with his fellow eager actors (ELLEN, 20s, SAMUEL, 20s, GENNI, 20s).

CHARLES

Sure I could've chosen to adapt and direct one of my more *populist* works. But "Pickwick Papers" has a certain wry sensibility I think will translate well to the stage.

ACTORS

Absolutely // Of course.

ELLEN

We're so honored to be performing with you.

CHARLES

It's really my pleasure. *I'm* nervous to be with you.

Ellen blushes, as from the audience, TUTTLE (60s, creepy old man) raises his hand to interject.

TUTTLE

When does everyone get naked?

CHARLES

Umm, it's not that kind of play.

SAMUEL

Also, we're a little uncomfortable that you keep suggesting that. Since you just showed up one day.

GENNI

And you sleep under the stage.

TUTTLE

(chuckles)

That I do.

JUST THEN, Hans bursts in through the double doors.

HANS

Charles!

CHARLES

I told you I was rehearsing.

HANS
I know, I'm a bad boy. But I
finally finished my forest-craft.
And I dedicate it to you.

He hands over what looks like a twiggy Blair Witch figure
mixed with potpourri.

HANS (CONT'D)
Do you like the pattern?

Charles holds it like it's infected.

CHARLES
...I don't know.
(then)
Did you use some of my hair for
this?

HANS
The final flourish!

ELLEN
Aww, that's lovely! Charles, who is
this gentleman?

CHARLES
This is...
(trying to remember)
Hahn Christine Applejack.

HANS
- Hans Christian Andersen -

CHARLES
He's a writer. Sort-of. He's
staying with us for a tick.

HANS
Do you think I could stick around
the theater?

CHARLES
Apologies, this is a closed
rehearsal.

HANS
What about him?

Tuttle is just staring and drooling.

TUTTLE
I look at everyone's bits and
crinkums.

HANS

Wow. So, like, a kind of intimacy... coordinator? You guys are so enlightened.

CHARLES

Yes, he's very essential for whatever. And that's why we must limit who -

SAMUEL

I don't think there's anything wrong with Hans staying. We were just about to go through Act One.

HANS

What about warm-ups?

SAMUEL

What's that?

HANS

All my theater friends in Denmark do it. It helps you loosen up. Get the creative energy flowing.

CHARLES

Doesn't sound like a good use of -

ELLEN

What do your friends do?

Charles is taken aback.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Come now, we don't have time for this. We have to stay on schedule.

HANS

Well there's a fast one where you just scream.

ELLEN

Really?

HANS

Yeah it's like an emotional cleanse. Watch.

Hans **belts out a raw, primal**

HANS (CONT'D)

AHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HOLD. Everyone just takes that in, as Hans face simmers down from tomato red.

CHARLES
Well that was a disturbing waste of-

SAMUEL
AHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HOLD.

HANS
How do you feel?

SAMUEL
...Amazing. Genni, you try.

Genni screams. Ellen follows, overlapping with Genni's.

HANS
Yay! She screams, I scream, we all
scream for acting!

A flustered Charles tries to interject but everyone continues over him, they're yelps **echoing, bouncing across the stage**.
ON Hans shrieking into Charles' ear, we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - DEN- DAY

Charles (still trying to get the ringing out of his ear) sits with his family, save Frances.

CHARLES
- And then he made us do so many
silly games, we barely had time to
rehearse.

CATHERINE
What's wrong with playing games?

CHARLES
That's not why we're there! And
even worse, he gave me this weird
object.

He puts Hans' craft on the table.

DORA
He *made* that for you??

CHARLES
I know. Isn't it -

ALFRED
Can he make one for me?!

OTHER KIDS
Me too // I want one!

CHARLES
You can have it!

He slides it over to Alfred. The others swarm to tug it away.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
He just has me...uneasy.

ALFRED (IN B.G.)
Please...help me.

Alfred disappears under a pile-on.

CATHERINE
Charles, I don't see how that's possible. Hans is a perfectly normal, God-fearing person. In fact, he insisted we all go to church together.

CHARLES
That's not *his* decision!

CATHERINE
We just have to figure out how to get Frances up those steps.

The other little ones drag Alfred away.

CHARLES
(beat)
Wait, where is Frances?

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GARDENS - DAY

Hans strolls the vast outdoor gardens, **pushing Frances in a stroller.**

HANS
(dreamy)
Do you think your father is talking about me?

FRANCES
Probably. Left!

Hans turns him.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Pebble!

Turns.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

You really do want to please him,
don't you?

HANS

O' from your mouth to my mouth.
He's everything. A visionary. A
scholar. He inspires you with every
put-down, every dismissive glance.

FRANCES

I think he's cruel. Telling me I
can't choose how to live my life.
Where does he get off?

HANS

I understand. We all have our
preferences. When I was your age, I
had all my food mashed up, because
I thought it'd be easier to detect
for poison.

FRANCES

And let me guess: at a certain
point, you grew up and moved beyond
that, and now you're much happier?

HANS

Of course not! That was just peer
pressure. I *wish* I had your
confidence. If you want to stay in
a stroller, don't let anyone tell
you otherwise.

FRANCES

Thank you!

The stroller gets caught in a mound. The wheel are stuck.
Hans tries to push it over.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Harder. Harder I say!

HANS

It's stuck.

FRANCES

Because you're doing it wrong!

HANS

I know how to push things in
strollers. My best friends were
dolls.

Tries again.

FRANCES

Put your back into it, you ripened
flower pot!

Hans pushes so forcefully, he tips Frances **out** of the
stroller, **rolling down a steep hill**.

It looks pretty painful. He rolls like a ragdoll,

FRANCES (CONT'D)

My accoutrements!

Frances lands facedown at the bottom of the hill.

HOLD on a horrified Hans at the top.

HANS

...Frances?

Hans rushes down, as Frances stirs. Woozy. He pushes himself
up. His fancy outfit covered in dirt. HOLD...

HANS (CONT'D)

Please don't tell your -

FRANCES

That. Was. Wondrous!

He starts doing squats and lunges.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

Look at me go!

He runs around. Jumps in front of a still-recovering Hans.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

There's so much of life I was
missing confined to that four-
wheeled cage.

(then)

I don't think I need a stroller
anymore. Thank you, Hans, for your
ingenious reverse psychology -

HANS

(still nervous)

Sure. No bother.

FRANCES

Now I can do anything! Ooh, like a
forward roll!

He gets down to tumble. Head on the ground. Tries to propel
himself. Can't quite do it.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

What are you standing there for!?
Assist me, you Danish horseshoe!

As Hans rushes over, we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - FOYER - DAY

A concerned Catherine watches Charles put on his coat.

CHARLES

I'll alert the constable to the
kidnapping. You monitor the windows
if he tries to sneak back in.

CATHERINE

Charles, you're being paranoid.

CHARLES

They're missing, Catherine! We
don't know what that horrid man is
capable of.

At that, Frances rushes in through the door...**on his own two
legs!**

CATHERINE

Frances...you're walking!

FRANCES

And so much more!

He runs down the hall...

FRANCES (CONT'D)

And now I'm going back!

Then to them.

CHARLES

How? What happened?

Hans enters.

FRANCES

Him! Hans showed me how much joy
one could get out of life
bipedally.

HANS

Or however you identify.

CATHERINE

This is amazing, Charles. And after
all *your* efforts failed!

CHARLES

But...I...

HOLD on Charles, watching in horror as his family eagerly
gathers around Hans and Frances.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

That's enough. Sir, this is *my*
home, *my* play, *my* children. I've
mustered as much patience as I'm
capable of. I'm sorry, but you're
intruding where you don't belong.

HOLD on a stunned Hans.

CATHERINE

Charles, that's very rude!

HANS

It's okay, Catherine. I should - I
should probably go -

Everyone is shocked but Charles tries to hide his joy.

HANS (CONT'D)

I know when I've overstayed my
welcome. I'm familiar with the
signals. My sincerest apologies.
(to the rest)
Thank you so much for a wonderful
visit. I'm going to get my things
and leave early. I like being first
in line for ships.

He crosses to the stairwell. Stopping at Charles.

HANS (CONT'D)

You were right. My stories aren't
worth the page. They're better off
staying in my dumb head.

Everyone forlornly watches Hans slowly proceeds up the stairwell.

CATHERINE
That was quite cruel of you.

CHARLES
He's doing what's best.

Hans is almost up the -

FRANCES
Wait! You can't go. In return for your service, I declare you the guest of honor at my birthday party!

Everyone cheers!

CHARLES
But that's in two weeks!

CATHERINE
More time for you to help him with his writing!

More cheers! The kids all rush to an overjoyed Hans, and playfully tug him back down the stairs. Off a stunned Charles:

HANS
Don't worry, Charles, I'll compromise. I'll move back to the guest room.

And on Charles' disgust, cue...

HANS AND CHARLES AND FAMILY MONTAGE!!!

Cue The Ramones' "Swallow My Pride" as we SEE...

WEEK 2

- A groggy Charles enters KITCHEN. HOLD on his shock.

REVEAL: **Frances is shaving Hans** at the table. (full deal: straight razor, shaving cream, smock).

- THEATER: Hans et al joyously play Zip-Zap-Zop to warm up. Charles resists, unamused. Off the frustrated actors:

HANS

Charles, when I "Zip" to you, you
have to "Zap" to someone else.

Cue Tuttle, creepily watching them from the audience.

TUTTLE

I say you practice kissing.

Charles shudders, and we...

- BALLROOM. A formal dinner outside the home. Everyone in gowns and suits. Dickens holds out his arm out to one of the LADIES (50s). She extends... **Hans shoves her and grabs Charles' hand for himself.**

- LATER IN THE BALLROOM

SERVANT

Presenting, Mr. Charles Dickens,
with the hostess, Lady Cavendish.

A humiliated Charles walks arm-in-arm with a beaming Hans.

WEEK 3

- DRAWING ROOM: Catherine enters.

CATHERINE

Dora? I thought we'd go over how to
fold napkins...

ON a disappointed Catherine, we...

- KITCHEN: Hans and kids (no Dora) giddily return with piles of leaves and sticks for crafts. The little ones cross off as **Biscuit** runs up to Hans. He freaks, **lets him out.**

SEE Biscuit running off into the woods and Hans pretending not to notice.

- CHARLES' STUDY: Charles puts down his script as Walter hands him something. (Walt's wearing a twig necklace and crown.)

WALTER

I made this for you with Hans! It's
a bracelet.

CHARLES

Why thank you...
(then, examining)
...Walter, what is this made of?

WALTER
Bird bones!

Charles cringes.

WALTER (CONT'D)
I found it in poop!
(then)
Want to see what I did with that?

CHARLES
No!

End Montage

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GARDENS - DAY

Clearly a rich kid's birthday party. Children run about, past a pen for free pony rides, a **giant cake in the shape of Frances' head**, and a

STRONG MAN (40s, mustache, leotard) unenthusiastically lifting a giant bar bell.

ALFRED
So wonderful of father to bring
Hans' friend from Denmark!

CUT TO a very tired Phillipe the mime trying to keep up with the kids' suggestions.

KID #1
You're trapped in a box!

KID #2
There's no air in it anymore!

KID #3
Now you've lost the box but you
think you left it in the office!

FRANCES AND HANS

Take it all in near the gifts table. Hans is growing out a light beard, and dressing more like Charles. He notices Frances is a little blue.

HANS
Are you enjoying your birthday
party?

FRANCES
I would be, but we can't find
Biscuit. Have you seen him?

Hans pauses, knowingly, as we QUICK CUT to Biscuit wandering
in the FOREST. Off the **feral growling** of something o.s. we...

HANS
(moving on)
Hey I didn't I gave you my gift.

He pulls a box off the table. Frances eagerly unwraps.

HANS (CONT'D)
Last children's birthday party
means your first adult present.

Opens the box. It's a **long hemp rope**. Frances is wowed.

HANS (CONT'D)
I like to always have one nearby in
case I need to escape from fires.

CHARLES

observes Hans showing Frances how to scale down a building.

CHARLES
(to himself)
So he can get Frances out of a
stroller, and gift him rope? One
imposition after the other...

Catherine approaches from inside.

CATHERINE
Have you seen, Dora? She's never
around and I keep finding her sooty
footprints.

CHARLES
Catherine, I'm sorry Dora has
discovered soot, but I have other
problems. Hans told me the rest of
his stories.

CATHERINE
And?

CHARLES
They're inane. One's about a woman
named Thumbelina. Why is she so
small? Never explained.
(then)
(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I can't see him making a career out of it. How do I tell him?

CATHERINE

As politely as you can. But it's not fair to keep him in limbo.

Hans crosses to them.

HANS

Charles, I cut you some cake! Saved the earlobe for you to nibble on.

He's about to respond, when Alfred runs up.

ALFRED

Help! Help! The Strong Man and mime are now too exhausted to perform!

CUT TO Strong Man and Mime sitting on a bench, panting.

FRANCES

Ungrateful freaks!
(then, to Charles)
We need something else or the kids will just move on to Rory Bobble's birthday party down the street! Pa-pa, do a magic trick for them!

CHARLES

I told you, I'm retired.

Frances tries to think of something else....**Eureka!**

FRANCES

Hans! You should tell one of your stories!

HANS

Oh I don't -

FRANCES

You're so brilliant. Just pick the best one. Pa-pa? Have you heard them? Which one is your favorite?

CHARLES

Well... they're all so -
(off an eager Hans...)
Do you have any new ones?

HOLD. Hans looks to Catherine...

HANS
Well... There was one...

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GARDENS - SHORT WHILE LATER

Hans sits on a chair before a large group of skeptical, bored children. A slight hint of nerves, as he stares at their expectant faces.

Hans takes a breath. With a newfound confidence...

HANS
Hello... I'm Hans Christian
Andersen. I'm going to tell you all
a story. It's about a shy little
thing who didn't think much of
themselves... Maybe some of you can
relate.

Catherine smiles, knowingly She's next to a GROSS KID
leisurely picking his nose.

HANS (CONT'D)
"There once was an Ugly Duckling."

EVERYONE
HOW. UGLY. WAS HE?

HANS
He was so ugly, all the other ducks
made fun of him...

Charles guffaws, oblivious to the kids getting into it.

CUT TO Hans finishing the story. The kids are hanging on his every word.

HANS (CONT'D)
"But what did he see in the clear
stream below? His own image; no
longer a dark, gray bird, but -
(gasp)
- a graceful and beautiful swan."

The kids are wowed.

HANS (CONT'D)
Then he rustled his feathers,
curved his slender neck, and cried
joyfully, from the depths of his
heart, "I never dreamed of such
happiness as this!"
(MORE)

HANS (CONT'D)
 (off Charles eye-roll)
 The End.

The listeners swarm Hans.

KIDS
 Do you have other stories? // Tell
 us, tell us! // I'm ugly, but I
 don't think I'll get better,
 because my dad's ugly and -

Charles watches this with growing concern.

CATHERINE
 (impressed)
 With this reception, I don't see
 Hans leaving *any time soon*.

Nope.

CHARLES
 Hey, children! Who wants to hear a
 chapter from "Bleak House"??

No takers. Charles is baffled. How can he let Hans steal the
 stoplight like this?

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 How about a magic trick?

That stops 'em. The kids move to him.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 Does anyone have a top hat I could
 borrow?

GENTLEMEN WITH TOP HAT
 I do.

He hands it over.

CHARLES
 Alfred, fetch me the ingredients
 for Christmas pudding.

He giddily runs off.

CATHERINE
 How long has it been since you've
 done this?

CHARLES
 Oh this is the easy one.

Alfred returns with a wagon-full of cooking apples, milk, sugar etc.

ALFRED
I always keep it on hand, just in case.

Charles adds the ingredients to the hat. Each one *disappearing*.

CHARLES
Who will be the lucky one to pull out the most scrumptious Christmas pudding in the land?

The kids eagerly raise their hand.

FRANCES
What about the mime? Will that reinvigorate him?

The mime thinks about it... Nods! Everyone applauds as the mime crosses to Charles.

CHARLES
Don't be shy. Just reach in. But do it with both hands! It's quite dense.

Phillipe reaches in...

A spark! His arms catch on fire.

CATHERINE
What's going on?!

CHARLES
I think I mixed up the tricks.

The flames quickly spread up Phillipe's arms to his torso.
Frances limply tosses the rope over.

FRANCES
Hans, the rope isn't working! What do we do?!

Hans is stunned. As everyone stares in horror, Dora turns.

DORA
Look, the Strong Man!

Everyone pivots to the Strong Man, running towards them in heroic slo-mo. They cheer him on as he reaches the mime...and unthinkingly **steps on him** to get to the cake.

Oh well. Through all this, the mime is covered in flames, writhing in agony **and total silence.**

FRANCES

Amazing that he never says a word.

HANS

What a professional.

Off more writhing, we PULL OUT:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And Phillipe burned and burned,
though he was eventually doused.
And after intensive physical
therapy, he even lived to perform
at the Grand Mime Expo in
Hartfordshire.

(then)

But what of Hans and Charles? Their
story holds just as many surprises.

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - ENTRANCE - DAY

Hans' goatee is coming in. He and Charles enter an idling coach.

HANS

Such a crazy coincidence that your
agent's daughter was at the party.
And now he wants to meet with me!

CHARLES

...Yes. What a joyous turn of
events.

HANS

And none of this would've happened
if you hadn't encouraged me to tell
a new story. It's like you know
just the right thing to do at all
times.

CHARLES

(to Driver)

On with it!

They turn to the family, waiting at the door.

KIDS

Goodbye, Hans! // We'll miss you!//
Be back soon! //

Hans leans out.

HANS
O' dear children. It's just a
meeting. I'll be back by sundown.

KIDS
Yay!!

Charles, not wanting to be one-upped:

CHARLES
Goodbye, my little ones! I shan't
be gone long, either.

HOLD.

ALFRED
Whatever.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A horse-drawn carriage clomps along a lonely dirt road. It
passes a road sign:

Manchester: 10km

Manchester-By-The-Sea: 30 km

Ye Olde Weigh Station: 5 km

INSIDE the carriage, an expectant Hans turns to a boiling
Charles.

HANS
Charles, I can't thank you enough.
You've changed my life forever.

CHARLES
(begrudging)
It's no bother. Just taking
valuable time away from rehearsals.

Charles leans out to the Driver.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
How much longer?!

DRIVER
30 minutes, sir.

CHARLES

Well go faster, if you can.

(then, to Hans)

I don't want you to get your hopes up, though. These general meetings are usually just introductory. Could be a long way before anything's formalized.

HANS

Of course. Whatever happens, I'm grateful.

CHARLES

You should be. He's a tremendous agent. Even broke Walt Whitman into Europe with a three-stanza deal.

HANS

Wow...*Three stanzas.*

Hans peers back out, as the carriage continues, and we...

EXT. LONDON - INTERCUT

Imagine any random street in *Oliver!* (Sorry, I'm just not that creative.) Crowds of people in overcoats and/or top hats push against each other. Hans is amazed, as they turn onto

EXT. HYDE PARK - SPEAKER'S CORNER - CONTINUOUS

HANS

What's this?

CHARLES

Speaker's Corner - where politicians and evangelists of all stripes can get on their soapbox.

Cue RELIGIOUS GUY (30s, robes):

RELIGIOUS GUY

I'm not saying I'm *the* Messiah. There are many of us. On weekends we play bridge!

Pass a WOMAN with a small crowd:

WOMAN

If you have freckles, you're probably a demon!

Everyone nods. Pass a raving LUNATIC (20s, bearded).

LUNATIC

I've seen it in my visions! In the future, we'll have electric horses and electric razors. And we'll have picture devices that'll fit in the palm of our hand, and we'll never look away again!

At that, two ASYLUM WORKERS lift him up.

ASYLUM WORKER

Alright, ya nut. That's it.

They drag him away. Charles shakes his head...Then notices:

CHARLES

We're here.

They get out, enter the gaudy headquarters of

WME

(William Morris. Englishman)

INT. WME - AGENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Charles' agent leans back in his chair. He's reading the latest issue of VARI'E'Y.

Headline: *"ELEPHANT MAN BRINGS BOFFO B.O."*

A knock at the door. The ASSISTANT (20s) peaks in.

ASSISTANT

Mr. Morris, your 11 o'clock?

He ushers in Charles and Hans.

MR. MORRIS

Here he is, the mysterious Dane himself!

Goes up. Shakes Hans' hand. Then Charles.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)

I owe you a finder's fee, Charles. Just kidding. Never doing that.

Charles suppresses disgust, as they sit down.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)

Alright, first off, love the three names. Hans Christian Andersen. Makes you sound important. And that middle name - Christian - great branding. Christianity is very mass. Broad appeal. Smart move.

HANS

Thank you!

MR. MORRIS

Now we at William Morris Englishman - our bread is buttered by the old workhorses like Charles, here -

CHARLES

(is that an insult?)

Thank you...

MR. MORRIS

But we're always on the lookout for new talent. And usually, I don't listen to anything my daughter says...

(leans in)

But y'know what? She was right about Jane Austen, and I think she's right about you.

Hans is drawn in. A rush of ego.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)

Here's my pitch, my vision, my several step plan for global literary domination for H.C.A. Are you rea-day?

(eagerly nods)

First, we take all your stories. Translate them. Done. But anyone can do that. But where *I* come in? I'll get your work out *there*.

HANS

(eyes wide)

More live readings?

MR. MORRIS

Live readings, tours, *staging* your stories as plays.

HANS

Just like Charles!

MR. MORRIS
With my help, Hans, you'll be the
new Charles Dickens.

CHARLES
Excuse me!?

MR. MORRIS
(catching himself)
I mean, not - you're still you.
That wouldn't work, logistically.

Hans is wowed, as -

CHARLES
I see. Well he'll take all that
into consideration.

Gets up. He gestures for a still-dazed Hans to rise.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You'll be in touch by letter, I
suppose?

MR. MORRIS
I want to sign him right now!

	CHARLES		HANS
WHAT?!		WHAT?!	

MR. MORRIS
Assuming you're okay with having
your dreams come true overnight?

HANS
Uhh...YES!

CHARLES
But he can't even write anything
down! He's too...jittery.

MR. MORRIS
Is that true?

The mood dampens. Hans looks to the ground. Could this
threaten everything??

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)
That's no bother at all! Build up
momentum. As long as you can
remember them, after the tours,
word-of-mouth will be so great,
they'll be chomping at the bit!

Hans is bursting.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)
My assistant has the paperwork.

Hans vigorously shakes his hand.

HANS
Thank you!
(then, to Charles)
And thank you!

He smooches a horrified Charles on the cheek, and rushes out.

CHARLES
You waited months before signing
me.

MR. MORRIS
Things move fast these days, my
friend. Got to take advantage.

CHARLES
Certainly has been Hans' m.o.

MR. MORRIS
Also, I did want to mention: Not
something to be alarmed or
hopelessly anguished about -

He crosses to his desk. Picks up a stack.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)
The reviews for "Little Dorrit"
arrived.

Charles snatches them away. Starts flipping through. His eyes bulge.

CHARLES
"Little Dorrit is a Big Miss,"
(then)
"Little Dorrit is small potatoes."
(then)
They're all just like that?

The agent equivocates.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
"Little Dorrit is a little like
watching a pile of sand become an
even larger pile of sand."

HOLD on Charles, taken aback.

MR. MORRIS

Trust me, Charles, don't think for a second that this is the end of your career.

CHARLES

Why would I think that?

MR. MORRIS

You just have to, maybe, put the play on hold and quickly push out another novel.

CHARLES

You TOLD me EXPLICITLY, not to worry about another novel. You TOLD me to focus on the play! *"The next great step for your career, CHARLES."*

MR. MORRIS

That's what I love about you, Charles. Such an impressive memory.
(then)
But now we have to adjust to a new landscape.

CHARLES

But I don't have any new book ideas. And the premiere is already set. *That's* my priority.

The agent puts his arm around him.

MR. MORRIS

Well, word of advice from a man who's seen, if not *it all*, *it most*.

He opens the door to see Hans, excitedly signing the contract.

MR. MORRIS (CONT'D)

The window is open for you only briefly. Before someone else crawls through.

HOLD on Charles, boiling with jealousy.

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Off Charles' utter annoyance, Hans skips down the street.

HANS

I am so HAPPPYY!!!! Let's celebrate.

CHARLES

Absolutely not! I can't afford to miss another minute of rehearsals.

They approach Charles' carriage - now missing a wheel.

DRIVER

I'm sorry, Mr. Dickens. Coach needs repairs.

CHARLES

Then fix it at once, you dullard!

DRIVER

Not until morning, I'm afraid. My wheel man is in Plumpton-on-Sodsbush.

CHARLES

HOW IS THAT A NAME!?! I HATE THIS COUNTRY!

HANS

It's alright. We'll just find an inn somewhere.

Charles relents, as Hans blithely hums and skips, dancing around him.

CHARLES

SMALLER MOVEMENTS!

He scales it back, as we...

EXT. LONDON - EAST END - DUSK

Hans and Charles proceed past grimy and dangerous surroundings.

CHARLES

How is everything booked?!

HANS

The place the rat miller recommended should be a little further.

They walk a bit. Stop.

CHARLES
I think this is it.

REVEAL: They're in front of a large...what looks like a boarding house. Charles reads the sign -

CHARLES (CONT'D)
"The Humping Ass"?

HANS
Maybe it's one of those city barns?

They go inside.

INT. THE HUMPING ASS - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Scantily-clad women brush past Charles and Hans. Through the walls we hear various moaning and banging.

HANS
It sounds haunted.

CHARLES
(glumly realizing)
No, it's -

At that, the MADAME (40s, Cockney) enters.

MADAME
Welcome, welcome to The Humping Ass
- the East End's premiere pudding-
house for all your erotic and
amorous needs.

CHARLES
I'm sorry, there's been a mistake.
We were looking for a room
without...any of this.

MADAME
Without what? Blanket hornpipes?
Rubbing the vittles? Blowing the
grounsils? Our girls even sing -

CHARLES
I don't care. Just two beds. Clean.

MADAME
Alright, spoiled sport. Name on the
room?

CHARLES

His...

(struggling)

Half Crystal Antechamber.

Hans dutifully bows. Just then, a MAN enters, totally nude and **fully erect**.

ERECT MAN

Sorry, I tried to get back into my room, but my key isn't working.

The Madame removes a key from a giant ring set.

MADAME

Here you go, luv.

He hangs the key off his, again, fully erect dick. Squeezes by Charles.

ERECT MAN

How's it goin', mate?

And on his disgust, we...

INT. THE HUMMING ASS - ROOM - NIGHT

Hans and Charles (very annoyed) sleep on a single mattress. Hear the slams and moans of people in other rooms having sex.

HANS

Seems no matter what happens, we always end up sleeping together.

No answer. Too pissed.

HANS (CONT'D)

Honestly, I'm a little sad we haven't heard the prostitutes sing once.

CHARLES

For the best, I -

Suddenly, three delightful PROSTITUTES, smash through the door:

PROSTITUTES

(singing)

*When you got a dick in your mouth/
you think to yourself -*

PROSTITTUE #1
How did it come to this?

PROSTITTUE #2
Where are my be-ne-fits?

CHARLES
 Wrong room!

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - HALLWAY - MORNING

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The next day, far away from...
 whatever that was...

Catherine ushers in a group of distinguished ladies with
 "V.D." brooches.

VICTORIAN DAME #1
 Well that was a delightful
 discussion on etiquette and
 withholding affection.

CATHERINE
 Dames, might I suggest we withdraw
 to the parlor to practice turning
 up our noses at something?

Opens the door to...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FIND a dirty Dora crawling out of the fireplace with a
 scrubber.

CATHERINE
 Dora! You're... a chimney sweep??

DORA
 I'm just experimenting.

VICTORIAN DAME #1
 (turning up her nose)
Hmmph. No proper lady can be a
 chimney sweep.

VICTORIAN DAME #2
 Most likely a result of poor
 mothering.
 (off Catherine's horror)
 Not V.D. material.

The Dames exit. Catherine smashes the door behind them.
Storms up to Dora.

CATHERINE

How dare you embarrass me like
that!

DORA

The flue was obstructed! I had to
clear it.

CATHERINE

So that's where you've been
spending your days. Halfway up a
dirty smokestack, scrubbing away
like a pauper.

DORA

Cleaning chimneys makes me
feel...alive.

CATHERINE

Well I wish I was dead after you
humiliated me in front of my
friends.

DORA

Why are you so obsessed with what
people think of you?

CATHERINE

Because they're right! I care about
your future. You should be a wife;
a mother. You should be a Victorian
Dame!

DORA

But I'm not you! I don't care about
V.D.

CATHERINE

V.D. is in your future, whether you
want it or not!

Dora's pissed. She starts to back away.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Don't...

Dora dashes for the chimney. She's trying to crawl up, but
her mother barrels towards her, catching her feet. Off
Catherine trying to drag Dora down, we...

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GARDENS - LATER

A stewing Catherine and Dora (both covered in soot) watch as Frances and the other kids play croquet in total silence.

Frances hits the ball through the wicket. The toddlers give polite golf claps. Cue Hans and an aggrieved Charles.

FRANCES
You're back!

The kids swarm Hans.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
I thought I was going to have to
use the rope to rescue you.

HANS
(humoring)
One day, if I'm lucky.

CATHERINE
What took you so long?

CHARLES
We were waylaid. Spent the night at
an inn.

HANS
The most delightful brothel. The
prostitutes sing! Very creative
bunch.

CATHERINE
Is this true, Charles?

CHARLES
(stammers)
I'm - I'm sick of everyone riding
me like this!

HANS
Another one of their tunes!

CATHERINE
Charles, we have to talk. Dora has
taken a dark, vertical path.

DORA
You don't understand me! No one
does!

CHARLES
Enough!

Dora frowns.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
I want you all inside! The match is over.

Hans joins them.

HANS
It's alright. We'll get ready for church.
(then, to Charles)
You can do rehearsal without me.

CHARLES
Always the plan, thank you.

They exit, leaving Charles and Catherine.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Don't you see Hans is ruining us? Ever since he's gotten here, the children have changed. My career is hanging by a thread. I feel like everything's being taken away.

CATHERINE
Did Hans make your last novel sell poorly? Did Hans make Dora a chimney sweep? I think your hatred is distracting you.

CHARLES
Catherine, he's replacing me.

CATHERINE
That's ridiculous.

Hans leads the children single-file, all in white, singing a Christian hymn.

HANS
Praise the Lord, His glories show -

EVERYONE
Haaaallelujah...

KIDS
Saints within His courts below -

EVERYONE
Haaaallelujah...

BACK on Charles and Catherine.

CHARLES
I'm going to the theater.

Leaves. ON a worried Catherine...

INT. THEATER - DAY

The actors sit on stage, waiting for Charles.

SAMUEL
- And so I say, "I don't care how many people are here; this is a giant waste of my time."

ELLEN
And then what?

SAMUEL
I didn't finish the eulogy, I'll tell you that much.

Just then, Charles barrels through.

CHARLES
Alright, I'm here. Let's start from where Mr. Pickwick arrives in Fleet Prison.

The actors nervously glance at each other.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Come on, people, we only have a week!

ELLEN
Yes... We wanted to talk about that. Obviously we love "Pickwick Papers", but we feel it's not very, as the French say, *au courant*.

CHARLES
Oh I don't give a shit what you think right now. So let's -

GENNI
That's why we want to switch to something newer.

CHARLES
Well my latest was not exactly well-received so -

ELLEN
 Actually...we want to adapt "The
 Ugly Duckling."

...**Fuck.**

Charles loses his balance a bit.

CHARLES
 You want to replace *my* story...with-

ELLEN
 We think it can reach an even
 wider, more "popular" audience.

CHARLES
 (beat, stunned)
 Does everyone agree with this?!

The actors nod.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 None of this matters. We can't
 rehearse a totally new play in a
 week.

ELLEN
 We just have to work harder. It's a
 simple story. And we're bringing on
 Hans to direct.

CHARLES
 He's *directing*, too?

SAMUEL
 We already got the approval of his
 agent.

CHARLES
 My agent.

Ellen crosses to comfort him.

ELLEN
 Charles, I know this is a
 disappointment, but you can still
 star. You're our Ugly Duckling...

CHARLES
 I'd rather die.

ELLEN
 We need you. Unless you're busy
 working on something else...

PAUSE. He's not. He needs this.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
They're expecting a stage debut of
the Charles Dickens...

HOLD on Charles, with only bad choices...He turns to creepy Tuttle in the audience.

CHARLES
What about you? Do you *approve*?

Tuttle thinks about this for a second.

TUTTLE
...Do the ducks fuck?

EXT. THEATER - ONE WEEK LATER

Well-heeled guests stream in. HOLD on the sign out front.
"Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*" has been papered over with
"Hans Christian Andersen's *Ugly Duckling*".

INT. THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Hans peaks out from behind the curtain as the seats slowly fill up. **He has a full Charles Dickens goatee** and wearing a similar fancy coat. He's amazed, taking it all in.

Closes the curtain and turns to his ACTORS (all in elaborate duck costumes).

HANS
Well it's official. Queen Victoria
politely declined my invitation.
Now I'm on some sort of list.
(then)
But just go out there and remember
this is still the most important
night of your lives. And that means
you, Charles -

Stops. Realizes -

ELLEN
He won't come out of his dressing
room.

INT. THEATER - CHARLES' DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Charles is staring at himself in the mirror. He has on deep eye shadow and just the bottom-half of the duck costume. Hans enters.

HANS
Charles, it's time!

He looks. Sees Hans's completely appropriated his appearance.

HANS (CONT'D)
Are you nervous?

Just glares...

CHARLES
I'm not nervous. I'm humiliated.

HANS
I think you're gonna do great.

Charles sighs.

HANS (CONT'D)
Where's the duck's top?

PAN TO the goofy-looking, bulbous top half.

HANS (CONT'D)
Just ask if you need help topping.

CHARLES
(seething)
...Understood.

HANS
Well let me know, because we're running behind. Already had to bring in the standby entertainer.

CUT TO the STAGE and a Marc Maron-esque BROODING AMERICAN COMEDIAN (40s) pacing back and forth.

COMEDIAN
- I don't know, man... You ever notice how when one person in your house gets typhus, *everyone in your house* gets typhus?!

Audience laughs, knowingly. The lights flip on and off.

COMEDIAN (CONT'D)
That's my time. Thank you, Kent!

He rushes off-stage, as Hans crosses on. The crowd goes wild. Hans basks, and WAVES to Catherine and Charles' children taking their seats in the center. They wave back.

HANS

Thank you so much for coming out tonight. I'm just - I'm just so grateful...

He's welling up. Overcome with emotion.

HANS (CONT'D)

I've had these stories in my head, pretty much, my whole life. But I never thought anyone would care. I thought that if I just set my sights low, I would never get disappointed. But, honestly, this is so much better.

(audience chuckles)

My life has changed so much these past few weeks. And it's all thanks to our star, and my everything... Charles Dickens.

The audience applauds.

HANS (CONT'D)

Now without further ado, The Kent Regional Theater presents, *in a co-production with HCA Studios...* THE UGLY DUCKLING.

Everyone applauds as Hans exits, and the curtains part.

REVEAL: A fake-looking lake and forest. The actors, save Charles, are all in their bulbous duck costumes (plus bald cap and beak).

ELLEN

Another fine day as a duck.

BACKSTAGE, Hans is mouthing the lines.

SAMUEL (O.S.)

Truly. Oh look, here he comes...

Hans gently-yet-firmly shoves Charles out onstage.

REGULAR DUCKS

Ewwwww!!!

Charles' duck really is grosser. The beak is longer. The torso is spotted and his wings are misshapen.

GENNI

I can't even look at him; he's so hideous.

Charles waddles forward.

CHARLES

(begrudging)

But please, I just want to play and be accepted by you.

Catherine wipes away a tear.

ELLEN

No! Begone, for you are so big and ugly!

She shoves him.

CHARLES

(sotto)

Ow! Your wings are sharp.

REGULAR DUCKS

Begone! Begone!

The audience watches, rapt, as the ducks surround Charles and start swiping him with their wooden wings.

CHARLES

Ow... Hey...

The ducks get carried away. Aggressively shoving him, as Charles pleads for mercy.

DORA

Spellbinding.

A few more prods and Charles is triggered. **Pushed too far.**

CHARLES

ENOUGH!!

He's not in character. The others stops.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

This story is garbage! What lesson is it teaching us? *Gee, if you're ugly, your only hope is to turn pretty - and if not, I guess you should just kill yourself.*

The audience gasps.

CATHERINE

Oh, no...

FRANCES

Hush! It's interactive now.

CHARLES

How can you enjoy this?! There's no depth, no growth, no character arcs-

AUDIENCE MEMBER

That's not true! The duck is ugly, and then he's not.

The audience "yeah's" in agreement.

CHARLES

Oh for - This man is a neurotic mess. He can't even write a page, so we just transcribed his ramblings.

QUICK CUT to a hurt Hans.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

But fine, *sign him* to William Morris Englishman. Even though all his stories are full of plot holes. I mean, why is Thumbelina so small?!

The audience murmurs and shrugs. Who?

CHARLES (CONT'D)

FOR FUCK'S SAKE, WHY IS THUMBELINA SO SMALL!!

(no response)

I see it now. You don't deserve me. I'm too good for you. I'm too good for all of you!

They all boo him. Off the cacophony, Charles gets on his duck knees and lets out a **SCREAM!!!** CUT TO Hans, backstage.

HANS

A little late for the warm-up, but glad he got there.

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - DINING ROOM - LATER

Just Catherine and Frances are with Charles, who's vacantly staring at the wall.

CATHERINE

Given the circumstances, I think it went quite well. People only started to leave after you began cursing at them.

FRANCES

I, for one, think it was a bold new exploration!

CHARLES

My life is over.

(then)

Where is that foul man? Where is he?

CATHERINE

Still at the theater. Signing autographs.

CHARLES

...I have to be alone now.

He rises and shuffles off, like a zombie. Hear the front door open and close.

FRANCES

Is pa-pa going to be okay?

CATHERINE

He's just going through a rough patch. He'll figure it out and be back to normal!

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But Charles was *far* from normal...
All that trauma made him seek
solace from an unlikely source...

INT. ANGLICAN CHURCH - NIGHT

HEAR an *Amadeus*-like requiem dirge play, as Charles kneels in pew, praying to God.

CHARLES

I'm not a religious man. But I don't know where else to turn.

(sighs)

I'm filled with so much animus.
Fury. Towards one man. I welcomed him into my home. And in return, he has imposed himself on my family.
Trampled my career...

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 (silence, then)
 After how hard I've worked. After
 how far I've come. My God, why have
 you forsaken me?!

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Charles exits into the black night. Turns. Sees an animal approaching.

BISCUIT, their lost dog, emerges out of the shadows.

CHARLES
 Biscuit! You've returned. Oh God
 really is good!

He comes a little closer. REVEAL: he's foaming at the mouth.
 Growls. He's **rabid**.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
 Biscuit?

The rabid dog runs and **leaps at Charles**, snarling and biting his hand. Then the rest of him.

LINGER on the violent tragedy and Charles' pained cries, as we FADE OUT...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' BEDROOM - DAY

FADE IN on a bandaged, scratched-up Charles in bed. His left hand is particularly swollen and bloody.

Charles' eyes flutter open. He's looking at a DOCTOR (40s, distinguished) and Hans (who, just a reminder, has adopted the same clothes and facial hair as Charles).

HANS
 Thank the Lord!

CHARLES
 Oh no. I'm in hell.

DOCTOR
 No, you're very lucky to be alive,
 Mr. Dickens.

CHARLES
 My mind is a fog. What happened?

DOCTOR

Unclear. You were found outside a church with these many strange, bites and scratches.

CHARLES

Where is my family? Why am I all alone with this irritant?

DOCTOR

Your wife doesn't want the children to see you like this. And *this irritant* has been dressing your wounds and checking your bedpan all morning!

HANS

Everything looks great, by the way.

Charles moans in dismay.

DOCTOR

Mr. Dickens' wounds will heal, but I do recommend he be monitored for rabies.

HANS

What are the symptoms?

DOCTOR

I don't know. I only went to half the lectures.

He hands over a syringe.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

But if he seems "rabies-y" -

CHARLES

You mean, rabid?

DOCTOR

That's the word! I can tell you're a writer.

(then)

If he seems 'rabid' just plunge him with this syringe. I'd also recommend a daily dose of these cocaine drops.

He sets both on the nightstand.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Get better soon, Mr. Dickens.
Farewell!

As the Doctor exits, Hans moves in close.

HANS
I know you didn't mean all those
terrible things you said at the
play. This has all been such a
stress on you.

CHARLES
I don't know how my life can
possibly get worse.

HANS
Well you think about it and I'll be
with you through your whole
recovery.

Charles moans.

HANS (CONT'D)
Also this letter from our agent
came for you.

Hans hands it over. He struggles to open the letter with his
bandaged hand. Hans does it for him. Charles scowls and
reads...

MR. MORRIS (V.O.)
Charles, mate! Heard about your
injuries. Damn shame. Look, long
story short, I'm sorry but we can
no longer represent you at WME. Our
client list is quite full now. Must
focus on the ones with output, and
who haven't humiliated themselves
in front of a paying audience. You
know how it is. Anyway, you just
rest up. All the best!

He lets the letter fall to the floor.

CHARLES
I'm being dropped.
(then)
That's it. It's all over.

HANS
It must be some mistake!

CHARLES
He said his "client list is full."

HANS
Well maybe someone else will leave,
and you can get back on.

Charles realizes. Stares at Hans, like he's going to eat him.

CHARLES
I have an idea of one.

HANS
Yay, who?

INT. COACH - DAY

An eager Hans sits next to Charles as the carriage proceeds through London.

CHARLES
Now before you become a famous and
important author, you must look and
feel your best. That's why I've
booked you at a very exclusive spa.

HANS
Sounds great!

Charles winces at the pain in his hand.

HANS (CONT'D)
Are you sure you're alright?

Cringes. Nods.

CHARLES
Just keep going! Almost there...

EXT. INDUSTRIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NEXT DAY

Hans and Charles approach a large, factory-like structure.

HANS
It's a little...rough.

CHARLES
That's how you know it's exclusive.

HANS
Oh!

CHARLES

Just go inside, and I'll meet you
after.

He quickly ushers him past the sign for "SHOREHAM POOR
HOUSE". (Below, in smaller type: "More Gruel? Don't Ask.")

Charles stays outside with the OVERSEER (think: the guy from
the opening of Oliver!, 40s, fat, sideburns, Napoleon hat).

OVERSEER

Thought we'd never see you again,
Mr. Dickens.

(then)

Are you here for the alumni panel?

CHARLES

Just to drop him off. He's a bad
debtor, that one. Just horrible.

OVERSEER

What's his name?

CHARLES

Not a clue. Ham Cuntty Artichoke, or
something.

OVERSEER

Well cheap labor is in demand these
days. He'll be working off his
debts...forever.

They both start laughing and then seamlessly transition to an
evil laugh.

INT. POOR HOUSE - DINING HALL - DAY

Cavernous and disgusting. The indentured (all in ratty
clothes) sit at impossibly long tables, eating gruel.

Hans sits beside a bunch of hunched debtor prisoners,
including CRAIGIN (60s, thin beard, hunched and decrepit,
like Fagin from Oliver Twist).

HANS

So when is the spa? I could really
use a steam. Or massage.

CRAIGIN

We get one bath a month.

HANS
Oh, I'm not applying for
membership. This is just a day
thing for me.

The Overseer passes. Hans tugs at his wrist.

HANS (CONT'D)
Hi! I'm ready for the spa now?

OVERSEER
The spa? But everyone's too afraid
to work there.

HANS
Oh they can work me as hard as they
want.

And on the intrigued Overseer, we...

INT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Charles approaches his carriage.

CHARLES
On with it! Let's leave at once.

The driver gives a pissy glare, as Charles gets in.

DRIVER
What about your other passenger?

CHARLES
Who?

The door slams shut, and we...

INT. CARRIAGE - DAY

We trod on, as Charles smiles to himself. Mission
accomplished. He looks out the window as they again pass
SPEAKER'S CORNER.

CHARLES
Huge crowd at Speaker's Corner, I
see...

See them listening to a PUNDIT (40s, bowtie, like someone
you'd see on cable news).

PUNDIT
Charles Dickens is a hypocrite!

CHARLES

What the -

PUNDIT

Just a typical liberal hypocrite.
"Oh the poor houses are inhumane.
Shut them down." But where was he
just seen depositing someone?

(pause, no guesses)

A POOR HOUSE!

Shocks and guffaws from the crowd.

MATRON

He's a menace! My son read his
stories and now he's obsessed with
ghosts and pickpocketing!

CROWD MEMBER

Saw him going into a brothel, I
did.

PUNDIT

And it gets worse. He's also
rumored to have said, and I quote,
"*I hate this country.*"

The crowd is revved up. Someone turns.

CROWD MEMBER

Hey, there he is!

CHARLES

Go, fool!

But it's too late. The mob surrounds the carriage, breaks in.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Driver, please help!

DRIVER

(feigns)

What's that? Can't hear you. Too
much commotion.

The mob drags Charles out, and we...

INT. SPA - HALLWAY - DAY

The sound of torturous screams intermix with the hiss of
steam. Hans is mopping up a puddle of blood.

HANS
 Must be pretty intense massages.
 (then)
 I don't know why mopping is part of
 the package.

He sets it down and crosses to

INT. SPA - SAUNA - CONTINUOUS

SIMINTOV and MAZELTOV (40s/50s, burly, Russian mafia) sit with towels around their waists. They're covered in intricate tattoos à la *Eastern Promises* and speak in thick accents.

HANS
 Hey, Simintov, Mazeltov, is it okay
 if I join you? Would love a steam.

The Russians look puzzled.

SIMINTOV
 (in Russian)
He refuses to work.

MAZELTOV
 (in Russian)
Then we sell him to Siam.

HANS
 Yes I *am* thirsty.

They rise and cross to him. The Russians examine Hans. Lift up his arms.

HANS (CONT'D)
 That tickles!

SIMINTOV
 You no talk.

HANS
 Got it. Embrace the serenity.

MAZELTOV
Thin wrists. Can't carry much.

SIMINTOV
He can carry a servant's tray.
 (then)
Take him to eunuch room?

MAZELTOV
 Da.

HANS
 Sorry, I'm just so curious; what
 are those tattoos?

LINGER on the creatures and scenes covering Simintov's chest.

SIMINTOV
 They are stories of my entire life.

HANS
 (looks)
 Lot of people getting stabbed in
 the face.

SIMINTOV
 It's been hard life.

HANS
 And what's that one? Over your
 heart?

INSERT: One of a crying Simintov lying on a mattress.

HANS (CONT'D)
 Is that you? You look so sad.

SIMINTOV
 I don't want to talk about it.

HANS
 Why not?

SIMINTOV
 It is too painful.

HANS
 Take it from me. Life is a lot
 better when you take a risk, and
 open up...

SIMINTOV
 (sigh)
 I wanted to marry love of life.
 Wealthy father suspicious of my
 peasant background. He put pea
 under mattress to -

HANS
 - To test whether you could feel it
 in your sleep. Makes total sense. -

SIMINTOV

Yes. But I couldn't feel. Next morning he says, "Man who marry daughter must be sophisticated enough to detect pea."

(then, forlorn)

I lost her forever.

Simintov starts tearing.

SIMINTOV (CONT'D)

If only I were sophisticated.
Delicate. Like princess!

Simintov starts bawling and embraces Hans. Off Hans comforting, we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - FOYER - DUSK

The sound of thunder. The door slams open. Charles is disheveled, bruised from his mob beating.

CHARLES

Catherine, I need ice.

He shuffles along, **his bitten hand throbbing**. He hears laughter in the drawing room.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

But good news, I got rid of -

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charles enters to find Catherine with the Russians plying a **plastered Hans** with vodka.

HANS

Hiya!

CHARLES

What's going on!?

CATHERINE

(buzzed)

These nice Russians brought Hans back from his spa. So generous of you, Charles.

SIMINTOV

He promises to adapt my story.
Memorialize me for all time.

CATHERINE
 Oh Hans Christian Andersen, is
 there any limit to your
 beneficence?

Hans hiccups and swigs from the bottle, as Simintov and
 Mazeltov get up to leave. As he takes another shot:

HANS
 (slurring)
 G'bye Simintov and Mazeltov. And
 Mazeltov and Simintov.

They squeeze by Charles.

SIMINTOV
 You are fortunate to live with such
 great man.

CHARLES
 Get out of my house.

Shrug. They leave. Hear the door shut. A wobbly, drunk Hans
 stumbles past.

HANS
 Ima gonna - Ima gonna go to sleep.
 (then)
 Hey...Whodja buy this place from?

CHARLES
 A wealthy and esteemed merchant
 named Peter Prindiville.

Hans takes that in. Giggles.

HANS
 (exaggerated, high-pitched
 English accent)
 PE-TER!...PE-TER PRINDIVILLE!

Doffs the hat he's not wearing. Giggles again, and exits.

HANS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 ...PE-TER!

Catherine clocks Charles cradling his hand.

CATHERINE
 Are you sure you're well?

CHARLES
 Yes. I've got more pressing things
 to worry about.

HANS (O.S. EVEN FURTHER)
PE-TER PRINDIVILLE!

CATHERINE
Charles, I'm concerned. So much has
happened to you. It can't be good
for your health.

CHARLES
(feral)
DON'T YOU THINK I REALIZE THAT?!

Catherine backs off. Hear an o.s. crash. They rush to

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Hans is passed out on the floor, snoring loudly.

CHARLES
Maybe we should just leave him
here. Hope he swallows his tongue.

CATHERINE
Oh hush.
(then)
What's that?

SEE Hans' hand outstretched towards the painted wooden sign:
"I am Asleep, Not Dead".

CHARLES
He sleeps with that around his
neck.
(then)
Really.

CATHERINE
Why would he wear it?

CHARLES
He told me his greatest fear was
being buried a-

HOLD. Charles cracks an evil smile.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Catherine why don't you go to bed.
I should clean up and help him.

And on the snap of some ominous lightning, we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - STAIRWELL - LATE NIGHT

Charles carries Hans' passed-out body down the stairs.

At the FOYER, Charles opens the door with one hand. Tries to prop it open.

Try to go through, but Hans (still asleep) swipes his hand and shuts the door.

CHARLES
(sotto)
Dammit.

They try again. **Hans drunk shuts it again.**

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Seriously?

Open... He rush-drags Hans out, and we...

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Charles, and now Tuttle, carry Hans through a spooky cemetery. Charles' condition is getting worse. His hand is leaking pus. He's sweating, feverish.

TUTTLE
You alright, boss?

CHARLES
Fine, Tuttle! Remember our deal.
You help me bury him alive, and I
give you enough money to buy a belt
and socks.

TUTTLE
Always wanted to change out my
paper ones.
(then)
Where's the empty grave?

Charles points his gnarled hand to a nearby tombstone and open grave, à la the Ghost of Christmas Future in "A Christmas Carol".

CUT TO a bound and tied Hans placed in a simple pine coffin.

CHARLES
(a little maddened)
Goodbye forever, you horrible
person.

Tuttle shuts the coffin, and lowers him into the shallow grave. Charles pays him off.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Now you do the rest.

Charles leave, as Tuttle piles on dirt. HOLD.

TUTTLE
Ehh, good enough.

He leaves only a thin layer of dirt on the coffin, as we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - FOYER - DAWN

Charles shuffles back in. Eyes bloodshot. Foaming at the mouth a little.

A yawning Frances is waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs.

FRANCES
Pa-pa? Why are you covered in dirt
and muttering like so?

CHARLES
Ask what's-his-name.

He brushes past Frances. Off a hunched Charles shuffling up the stairs.

FRANCES
Hans? I would but he's mysteriously
missing.
(no response)
Pa-pa?

INT. COFFIN - DAWN

Hans rouses from his drunken sleep. Big yawn...

Looks around.

HANS
Hello?? Charles??...Where am I?
...This isn't fun for me...

Off his heightened concern, we...

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - CHARLES' STUDY - DAY

Lightning and thunder crackle through the window, as a stark-raving Charles paces. He's going full rabid. Twitching, foaming. Crazy.

CHARLES

That'll teach 'em. Yes it will...

Thunder rumbles. Cue banging on the door...

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Charles, is everything alright? I can't get in.

CHARLES

(snarl)

Leave me alone!

He starts to writhe in pain. Clutches his head. He bangs on the **fake bookshelf**, which gives way -

REVEALING, not a crawlspace, but a **snowy, wooded path**.

A jabbering Charles shuffles in, as the bookcase magically shuts behind him, and we...

INT. COFFIN - DAY

He's really fucking losing it. Hans is crying and banging his head on the coffin.

HANS

I knew it. My pride has done me in!
I should've stayed in Denmark. Now
my stories will go with me to my
grave, which I'm already in.

(then)

O God! I accept your just
punishment! Just don't make my
death any more painful than it
must!

Suddenly, hear lightning. The soft patter of rain.

CUT TO outside the coffin as a storm begins. Rainwater begins to fill the grave, and we...

EXT. SNOWY FOREST - DAY

Think: Narnia. Perfect snowflakes lightly fall on a now-normal Charles.

He's astonished, giddy at the scene. After a couple beats he hears

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)
Please, sir -

Looks down. Sees the LITTLE MATCH GIRL (9, rags, unwashed) holding a bushel of matches.

LITTLE MATCH GIRL
Would you please buy some? Eight
for a shilling.

CHARLES
Leave me be, Little Match Girl.

He shuffles past her, deeper into the snowy forest.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
...Little Match Girl, thinks she
can rip me off...

He bumps into someone about his height.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Excuse you...

Looks. REVEAL: A BUCK NAKED EMPEROR (the naked guy from the brothel, but he's wearing a crown).

Charles tries to shield his eyes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
My apologies, I...I...

NAKED EMPEROR
What? It's quite alright. You can
gaze at my new clothes.
(then)
Can't afford them. But you can
certainly look...

Puffs out his chest.

CHARLES
But you're...you're fully nude.

NAKED EMPEROR
Wow. You're *that* jealous, huh?
(then)
Look, I understand your
astonishment. Everyone says they're
the finest clothes that have ever
been tailored.

CHARLES
Because they're too afraid to
question you!

The Emperor's taken aback.

NAKED EMPEROR
Wow... Really?

CHARLES
Yes!

NAKED EMPEROR
Wow. That changes everything.
(beat, then)
So I'm just fully naked then?

CHARLES
Full penis. Out.

NAKED EMPEROR
Oh... Well I guess that teaches us
all the value of speaking truth to
power.
(then, embarrassed)
I'm gonna go find some leaves to
cover my cock.

He walks off. Charles hears a soft crying.

CHARLES
Who's there?

He moves away some branches to a FROZEN POND. Crying at the
edge is...

CHARLES (CONT'D)
The Ugly Duckling?

It turns around.

UGLY DUCKLING
It's *that* obvious, huh? Jesus I'm
so fuckin' ugly! And it'll *never*
get better! Quack quack quack.

HOLD on the duck crying. Charles is moved.

CHARLES
It's alright. Things do change!

UGLY DUCKLING
They *do*? Quack quack quack.

CHARLES

I began poor; Hans was a nobody.
Nothing is permanent. There's no
telling what beauties life has in
store for us.

UGLY DUCKLING

Wow...So you mean...there's hope?
(sotto)
Quack quack quack?

Charles nods...**Eureka.**

CHARLES

Wait...*that's* the message of your
story. It's not frivolous at all.

Charles eyes widen as other characters start to join him
around the pond.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

His fairy tales aren't silly.
They're vivid. Filled with depth
and pathos. I just couldn't see it
until you were staring right back
at me -

THUMBELINA

That's right. Just ask me,
Thumbelina.

ELSA FROM FROZEN

Or me, the Snow Queen.

OLAF FROM FROZEN

Or me! A comic relief snowman!

Olaf slips and falls.

OLAF FROM FROZEN (CONT'D)

Whoops!

CHARLES

As wonderful as you all are, the
man who created you needs my help.
Farewell, dear creatures!

They wave goodbye (Emperor covering his junk) as Charles runs
off. Emperor notices everyone staring.

NAKED EMPEROR

What?? It's winter. There are no
leaves!

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - OUTSIDE CHARLES' STUDY - DAY

A terrified Catherine bangs on the door.

CATHERINE
Charles!! Oh dear, it's locked. How
do we get in?!

At that the door opens. **REVEAL: Dora, changed from a dress into a full-on chimney sweep outfit** (dirty coat and pants, pageboy cap).

DORA
The room has a fireplace. Crawled
in through the chimney.

Catherine gratefully embraces her daughter. The family crosses to and looms over Charles' twitchy, frothing body.

FRANCES
He's definitely dead.

Catherine plunges the doctor's syringe into his thigh.

Charles springs up, screaming. Off everyone else's screams,

CATHERINE
My dear, Charles!

CHARLES
Family... in my addled state, it
appears I've done something
not...very...ethical.

INT. FOREST - DAY

Day is as black as night, as the storm rages, whipping rain at the Dickenses.

We INTERCUT with the GRAVE SITE. The grave has nearly filled with water, lifting the coffin up.

HANS (O.S.)
Helloooo!! I'm concerned this is
getting much worse!

INT. CEMETERY - DAY

The Dickenses enter the flooding cemetery. They wade through the ankle-high water.

FRANCES
I hate this kind of walking!

CHARLES
Just a little further.

They reach the grave site, only to find...

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It's empty!

Dora looks off.

DORA
There it is!

The coffin flows down a hill into nearby rapids.

CHARLES
Curse you, Quiet River Cemetery!

DORA
I hope Hans is maintaining.

QUICK CUT TO Hans inside the coffin, screaming his head off.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The coffin flows down until it's stopped on a boulder. The force of it nudges the coffin open, allowing Hans to push the top off.

The family catches up at an EMBANKMENT.

FAMILY
Hans! Hans! Swim to us!

HANS
No!

CHARLES
Please, Hans. I want to rescue you!

HANS
I realize now you hate me! I'll never be...part of your world.

CHARLES
You're wrong, Hans! Your stories are wonderful! You must write them down.

HANS

Really??

CHARLES

Whether I wanted it or not, you are
a... part of our world!

Hans hesitates. Looks to them. Then the raging river. He takes a deep breath. Arms and legs still bound, he tumbles into the sludge-y water.

The family waits with bated breath as he disappears under -

Suddenly - BUBBLES - Hans bobs up! Off their cheers and an **instrumental "Part of Your World"**, Hans (limbs constricted) swims like a mermaid through the runoff. But -

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Oh no, the current is too strong!

Hans is struggling.

FRANCES

Wait!

Frances throws in the ROPE he was gifted. Hans takes it in his mouth. As "Part of Your World" crescendoes, the family each take part of the rope.

FRANCES (CONT'D)

All together!

They heave...and pull out Hans, **covered in muck and shit.**

The kids rush to hug and untie him. Something electric is rippling through Hans.

HANS

I need...I need paper!

Hans rushes off, as Dora joins her mother at the river. Catherine is admiring her Victorian Dames brooch.

CATHERINE

There you are, my hero!

DORA

I was just doing what I loved.

CATHERINE

Without you, we couldn't have saved
your father, or Hans. You know I
always wanted what's best for you.

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Maybe you are meant to be a chimney sweep.

DORA

But what about you? Can you still only find happiness in The Victorian Dames?

Catherine touches her brooch.

CATHERINE

Oh my sweet daughter. V.D. is part of who I am. I can feel it burning in my loins. And yes, maybe I was hoping one day...

(re: brooch)

My V.D. could become your V.D. But I trust you. When you're older, you'll have something else.

DORA

I sure hope so!

And as they walk away, hand in hand, SEE Tuttle, listening from behind a gravestone.

TUTTLE

That's disgusting.

EXT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - ENTRANCE - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

The sun shines brilliantly as a coach idles in the driveway. Hans looks over Charles' shoulder, as he flips through a stack of papers. The last one being, "**The Little Mermaid.**"

CHARLES

My word, they're all here.

HANS

Being buried alive and escaping was the biggest confidence boost I could hope for! In that raw sewage, I could feel my fears wash away.

Charles smiles takes the scene in.

CHARLES

You know this place and I have a history? Before we went to debtor's prison, my father took me to this very house when I was a boy. Said if I worked hard, I could one day own it.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Everything I wanted to achieve, I did. And you almost ruined it.

HANS

Sorry about that.

CHARLES

No, it was as much about how I reacted. I saw your career rise as mine fell. My children take to you. I was worried I'd turn around and you'd betroth my wife.

HANS

(nervous grossed out)

Haha maybe...

CHARLES

But I understand now that the world can handle at least two eccentric artists.

Hans blanches.

HANS

I'm just so grateful. I knew staying with you would help unlock everything. Make me into the person I always wanted.

(beat, then)

And you got from me...?

CHARLES

Nothing. I'm Charles Dickens.

HANS

Right.

(beat, then)

Maybe the value of friendship?

CHARLES

No. Absolutely nothing.

HOLD. It's still a little awkward.

HANS

For the record, I never wanted to do anything to hurt you. I wanted your help to be you. But I just mucked things up for you, I guess.

CHARLES

It's alright. That's what life is: ups and downs. Twists and turns -

HANS
The best of times, and worst of
times.

Charles smiles. Nods.

Hans crosses to the coach. As it starts to clomp away, Hans
leans out the door.

CHARLES
Farewell...Hans Christian Andersen.

HANS
Farewell, my dear Charles Dickens.
I will write you often.

CHARLES
Please don't.

HANS
What's that? I didn't hear you...

As he disappears from view, Charles thinks to himself.

CHARLES
The best of times, and the worst of
times...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And so Charles took those lines and
made it into his first new novel,
all about his crazy experience with
Hans. But friends thought it was
too dark and upsetting, so he
turned it into "Tale of Two
Cities."

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - COPENHAGEN - DAY

Hans scribbles at a table.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And freed from his crippling
anxiety, Hans continued to write,
becoming one of the most celebrated
fairy tale authors of all time.

A knock at the door. Opens. Sees a wrapped book has been
delivered. Hans tears off the note.

CHARLES (V.O.)
Dear Hans, my agent sent me an
advanced copy...

He tears open the paper.

REVEAL: "THE ILLUSTRATED HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN"

HANS
OH MY GOD!!!!

Hans flips to the inside cover.

HANS (CONT'D)
(confused)
Okay...

An autograph: **"To one Great Dane - Charles Dickens"**

INT. GAD'S HILL PLACE - GUEST ROOM - DAY

Charles convenes with his adoring wife and kids.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And with his own career and health
revived, Charles revived his
relationship with his family.

Charles turns to Frances and Dora.

CHARLES
I'm sorry I was a little
territorial with Hans. However you
are, whatever you do, I'll always
love you.

FRANCES
So I can go back in the stroller?

CHARLES
I will disown you.

CUT TO the family gathered in the guest room. Charles is
scrawling something.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And to commemorate their celebrity
encounter, Charles finally added
Hans' name to the guest record...
And did it most prominently.

REVEAL, WRITTEN ON THE MIRROR: "Hans Andersen slept in this room for five
weeks—which seemed to the family AGES!" - Charles Dickens, 1857

Charles admires his handiwork. Kids AD LIB their approval.

CATHERINE

Let's watch the sunset in the garden.

CHARLES

O' my Catherine. I will love you to the end of time.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The next month, he left her for Ellen the nubile actress.

EXT. LONDON ROOFTOP - FLASH FORWARD

REVEAL: the NARRATOR (30s/40s, F) is a chimneysweep. She talks to camera.

NARRATOR

So what's the lesson of this story?
Pride cometh before the Fall? The
Lord giveth and the Lord taketh?
Men are scum?

(then)

All of the above, I suppose.

Our narrator is interrupted by a CHIMNEYSWEEP (20s, M) popping out of a chimney.

CHIMNEYSWEEP

Hey, Dora! Me and the lads are gonna stop by The Humping Ass.

DORA

Enjoy.

He pops back down. Dora crosses to the edge of the roof. Looks out over the Victorian skyline. The fog from p.1 has cleared. It's grimy, but beautiful.

DORA (CONT'D)

Well that's all for now. I guess just remember the basics: find your passion, look for the good, and always keep a song in your heart.

She hears, in the distance:

PROSTITUTES (O.S.)

*O' my fav-rite matinee is light.
ass. play.*

PROSTITUTE #1 (O.S.)

Tickle the bum.

PROSTITUTE #2 (O.S.)
Just use a thumb!

PROSTITUTE #3 (O.S.)
Wait 'til you come!

The prostitutes laugh. Dora joins in with a hearty chuckles.

DORA
O' God bless you, Singing
Prostitutes. Every one!

FADE OUT and **End**