

Plays for Young Audiences

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The Night Fairy

By
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Based on the Novel by
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Characters:

- Flory
- Bat/Peregrine
- Hummingbird
- Wren
- Squirrel/Skuggle
- Spider
- Raccoon

Prologue.

On a downstage scrim, a large full moon rises. Silhouetted against the moon, a small figure is kneeling or crouching. She stands. She spreads her glorious wings. She takes flight. She swoops and soars across the night sky. We only see her when she passes in front of the huge full moon, but we hear her twinkling, girlish laughter and the sound of her humming wings. The moon rises higher in the sky. The fairy – for that’s what she is – flies into the disc of light again and hovers there. Then we hear a high-pitched squeal. A bat swoops into view and grabs the fairy in its talons and flies out of the light with the fairy in its clutches. We hear her cry out in pain. We hear her struggle. We see wings flutter down, one after the other, dropping through the circle of moonlight on their fall to earth. A moment later we see the wingless fairy spiral to the ground as well. All is quiet. The moon fades.

Scene 1.

The scrim rises and we see the garden at sunrise. Flory, the now wingless fairy, lies curled up on the dewy ground. Birds chirp. A gentle breeze blows. Everything in the garden looks huge – the foliage, the blades of grass, the flowers – because Flory, our fairy, played by a human actor – is actually tiny, the size of a few acorns stacked on top of one another.

Flory wakes up with a start and a gasp. She scrambles and flails as if to fight off some monster. When she realizes the monster is gone, she hugs the ground and looks all around for any sign of danger. When she sees no immediate threats, she calms a bit, but remains wary. She stands, stretches and rubs herself painfully. She squints at the unfamiliar sunlight beginning to brighten the stage. Suddenly she remembers what has happened. She reaches behind her. She gasps again when she feels that her wings are gone. She sinks back to the ground. She buries her face in her hands.

Suddenly she hears a loud BANG! (It’s the sound of a screen door slamming, but she doesn’t know that.) She scrambles, looking for a place to hide. She ducks behind some foliage. She hears the

sound of huge, thudding footsteps approaching her, crunching leaves and twigs under each footfall. She withdraws as far into the foliage as she can. She holds her breath and closes her eyes, petrified. The footsteps stop as a huge shadow falls across her hiding place. She summons the courage to peek out and up, up, up at the giant looming over her. (Note: We never see more than the shadow.) She watches as the giant hangs something in the tree. Then the giant recedes, returning to where it came from. The screen door opens and slams shut again.

When she's certain it's safe, Flory emerges from her hiding place. She looks up at the thing the giant hung in the tree. Her face has a puzzled expression.

Then she hears a new sound: a humming, buzzing noise, deep, hypnotic. This noise isn't so frightening, but just to be sure, she returns to her hiding place. She looks for the source of the sound. A hummingbird flits into view. She has never seen a creature like this before.

FLORY

(whispered)

Oh!

She's enraptured with the hummingbird, not the least because it can fly and float and hover just like a fairy. She emerges from her hiding place and watches as it inserts its long, curving beak into a blossom and drinks nectar. She approaches slowly. The hummingbird doesn't seem to notice her. She gets closer, almost near enough to touch it. She reaches out. The bird withdraws its beak from the blossom and looks at her blithely. She moves her hand closer to the bird. The bird flits backward, hovers. She lunges for it, and the bird easily evades her and flies off.

FLORY

Wait!

Flory chases after the bird. She tries to launch herself into flight. No wings! Instead of flying, she splats to the ground awkwardly. She picks herself up and runs to the tree and begins to climb it, determined to reach the hummingbird, or at least to get a better view of where it has gone.

As she ascends, a higher branch descends into view. Suspended from the branch is a birdhouse, with traditional peg perch and round hole. Perhaps it has been painted with pleasant decorations, but if so, they are faded. The birdhouse has been there a long time. The fairy doesn't see it at first, still distracted by the now vanished hummingbird.

She finally gives up on the bird. She sits on the branch. She looks around and sees the birdhouse. She makes her way to it, carefully lowering herself onto the peg perch. She cautiously sticks her head through the hole, then suddenly pulls it out again, loses her balance and nearly falls off the perch as a bird's head pops through the hole from inside. Wren is a bustling bundle of nervous energy. She chirps fussily, then speaks:

WREN

What do you want?

FLORY

I --

WREN

Spit it out. I'm busy.

FLORY

I --

WREN

I don't have time to let you talk my ear off. I have to get my house in order before I fly north.

FLORY

I ...

WREN

Haven't seen you around here before. Seen a few day fairies, but never a night fairy. Aren't you supposed to be asleep now?

FLORY

(ignoring the question)

What is this place?

WREN

I told you: it's my house.

FLORY

No, I mean --

WREN

It most certainly is! And don't even think about trying to move in once I'm gone. Squatter!

*Flory has in fact been squatting, listening to the wren, bemusedly.
She stands now.*

FLORY

What is this ... forest?

WREN

It's not a forest! It's a garden.

FLORY

Oh.

WREN

Giants make them. A lady giant in this case. The giants plant trees and bushes and flowers and sometimes vegetables. This one has a fish pond, too.

FLORY

Why?

WREN

Why what?

FLORY

Why do they plant gardens?

WREN

Who knows? Giants do all kinds of crazy things. But at least this one doesn't have a cat.

Wren shivers at the thought of cats.

FLORY

I'm not afraid of cats.

WREN

You should be. Anyway, a garden isn't a bad place to call home. If you can overlook the squirrel.

Squirrel? FLORY

A rat that climbs trees. WREN

Kuh! FLORY
(an odd, scoffing laugh)

What's your name, anyway? WREN

Flory. FLORY

Pleased to meet you, Flory. Now if you'll excuse me, time to meet up with the flock and be on my way. WREN

Flock? FLORY

You know. Other wrens, like me. My flock. WREN

Oh. FLORY

Don't you have a flock? Friends? Family? WREN

Yes! No. You like your flock? FLORY

Oh, they'll chirp my ear off the whole trip. But you know what they say: birds of a feather ...Speaking of feathers, what happened to your wings? WREN

Nothing. An accident. FLORY

WREN

That's a crying shame, honey. A fairy without wings won't last long in this world. Especially a night fairy!

FLORY

What do you mean?

WREN

When night comes you're going to be completely defenseless against all the *predators*: Cats, and owls, and cats, and possums, and cats, and badgers, and –

FLORY

Bats.

WREN

The point is, you've got no wings, no friends, no food, no shelter ... so come nightfall there's gonna be one word you.

FLORY

What?

WREN

Catfood.

FLORY

I'm not catfood! I'm a fairy. I'm a *day* fairy.

WREN

Poppycock! Just look at you: Beady black eyes. Wild hair. Questionable intentions. Once a night fairy, always a night fairy. Anyway, wish I could stick around and help you out but ... Gotta fly. Toodles.

The wren disappears back inside the house. And then a moment later we see her as a shadow flying off toward the horizon.

Flory carefully looks through the hole in the birdhouse. When she sees that the coast is clear, she climbs through the hole and disappears into the house. A moment later, she pokes her head back through the hole.

FLORY

I'm a *day* fairy. And I'm home.

Scene 2.

After a transition implying passage of time ... Flory emerges from her house, carrying a little fairy doll that she has made out of things found in the garden. She's putting the finishing touches on it. She descends to the ground. She holds the doll close. She's still nervous in the daylight world, especially down here on the ground. She explores a little.

She sees a pretty flower. She leans down close to examine it – but the flower is a butterfly which flies into her face –

FLORY

Oh!

-- and then flutters away.

FLORY

Toodles! Gotta fly! (*wistful*) Gotta fly.

She looks at her doll. Something's missing. She finds a flower with smallish petals. She plucks two petals from the flower.

She attaches the petals to the doll to make wings. She gives it an appraising eye. She puppets the doll, making it walk and fly. She sits down, posing the doll opposite her.

FLORY

Hello. My name is Flory. What's yours?

(she waits for a reply; nothing)

Glory. Pleased to meet you, Flory. I'm a day fairy. So are you.

(no reply)

You know what they say: birds of a feather ...

(she sighs, gathers the doll into her arms)

No wings, no friends, no food, no shelter: catfood.... That wren was right. I'm tiny and helpless and alone ... and I can't even fly. I can't go out at night any more, but I don't know anything about how to live during the daytime. What am I going to do? (*beat – then, to the doll:*) What do you mean, I'm not alone? No offense, Glory, but you're not going to be much help in a bat fight. What am I going to do, throw you at him? What? That's true. I *do* have shelter now. But what about food? I'm starving. Yes, I saw the thing the giant lady hung in the tree. You're right, it's full of seeds. I saw the birds eating them. If I could figure out a way to get the seeds

out of that tube, I could store them in my little house and then I'd have food for the winter. But how am I going to get to the seeds? I don't have wings. I can't fly. And what good is a fairy who can't fly?

The doll in her arm, Flory sits contemplating her fate.

A rustling sound. A squirrel enters. He's huge in comparison to Flory. "A mountain of shaggy fur and sharp claws." He sniffs, catches her scent. Approaches her slowly. She's facing away and doesn't see him. Then she senses him. She freezes. She turns and when she sees him, she screams and throws the doll at him. He catches it, looks at it, screams, and throws it back at her. He looks at her intently. He licks his lips. Then he lunges for her, paws out-stretched.

FLORY

*Bumbóg foiche cealg!**

The squirrel jumps as if stung.

SQUIRREL

(scrambling away)

Ouch! That hurt!

FLORY

Oh!

SQUIRREL

You hurt me! How'd you do that?

FLORY

I don't know!

SQUIRREL

That was a stinging spell! You're a fairy!

FLORY

I am.

* *bumbóg = bumblebee; cearnabhán = hornet; foiche = wasp; cealg = sting*

SQUIRREL

Well, don't do that again. It isn't fair.

FLORY

Trying to eat me isn't fair!

SQUIRREL

Law of the jungle, my friend.

FLORY

It's not a jungle, it's a garden.

SQUIRREL

The big eat the small, and that's how it goes.

FLORY

Not when the small can sting! Kuh! What are you? A skunk?

SQUIRREL

(indignant)

I'm a squirrel! Here, smell my tail!

He turns to present his tail to her. She recoils.

FLORY

A squirrel is just a rat that climbs trees!

SQUIRREL

Well a fairy is a just an overdressed horsefly!

FLORY

Kuh! No.

SQUIRREL

My mother warned me about your kind.

FLORY

If you ever try to eat me again, I will give you such a terrible sting!

SQUIRREL

And if you ever turn your back on me -- Oh-oh, here comes the giant. I'll see *you* later. If she doesn't catch you first, and keep you in a jar.

The squirrel hurries off.

FLORY

What's a jar? Squirrel! What's a ...

We hear the sound of giant feet crunching through dried leaves and twigs. Then a large shadow darkens the stage. Flory backs away, and scrambles to find a place to hide. The shadow pauses ... then withdraws again, and we hear the giant feet moving away. Flory comes out of hiding. She goes to where the giant had stopped, just off stage. She returns a moment later carrying two large breadcrumb cubes. She nibbles on the corner of one of them.

FLORY

Mmm!

She bites into the breadcrumb with fervor. She offers a bite to the doll.

FLORY

A little for now, and the rest for later. We'll find other food, too, Glory. You know what? I'm going to make some rope, so I can climb up to those cherries. Maybe I'll make a rope bridge! And I'm going to weave a grass quilt, to keep me warm on cold nights. Did you see me sting that squirrel, Glory? Maybe I'm not so helpless after all. You're right, we have a lot of work to do. And I think I know a way to make that squirrel help us.

Scene 3.

Transition. Flory enters a different part of the garden, exploring, foraging. She finds something on the ground. Tries eating it. No good. She notices a large spider web, currently unoccupied. She approaches it cautiously. She pulls on a loose thread of silk. She winds it around her arm. She finds another and does the same. Then a third. Happy with her work. She takes the three coils over her shoulder and pulls them away from the web.

She begins slowly braiding the three strands into a rope. But it's slow, hard work. Then she seems to hear a distant voice telling her something. She smiles. She stands and lays the three strands out parallel to one another. She closes her eyes again.

FLORY

*Figh ... figh... Figh fiarlán!**

The three strands rise up like snakes and begin braiding themselves together. When the rope is fully braided together, she takes it and tests its strength. She is pleased. She fashions the rope into a simple lariat and throws it over her shoulder. She goes back to exploring.

A thorn apple pod falls to the ground behind her, nearly hitting her on the head. She scrambles to find cover. When she sees what it is, she goes to the pod and tests the sharpness of one of its thorns. Yep, very sharp. She manages to break the thorn off. She finds a twig and inserts it into the base of the thorn. She whips her new dagger through the air as if warding off a predator.

FLORY

Back fiend, or I'll stab you through your black leathery heart!

She smiles and tucks the dagger into her belt. Continues her exploration.

The hummingbird flies in and hovers, a short distance from Flory. They lock eyes.

FLORY

Hello, bird. Don't be afraid.

Flory slowly takes the lariat from her shoulder and moves it into position to lasso the bird. Then, with a sudden quick movement, she tosses it, but the hummingbird easily avoids the lasso, flitting away.

FLORY

Oh, poppycock!

The hummingbird flies off. Flory starts to chase, but realizes she'll never catch it. She watches it in wonder until it's out of sight.

**figh = weave (2nd person imperative); fiarlán = zigzag*

FLORY

I'll catch you. I'll catch you one day, and tame you, and make you mine. And then ...

She smiles at her unspoken thought. She holds the doll over her head and flies her through the air. Goes back to exploring. Then she senses something.

Squirrel appears from behind her, trying to sneak up on Flory. She knows he's there but pretends to be oblivious. He gets closer and closer. Then he cocks his body to pounce.

FLORY

Don't do it.

His whiskers twitch. He thinks about it. Then decides. But just as he leaps:

FLORY

Bumbóg foiche cealg!

The squirrel ends up flailing and twisting in mid leap, trying to ward off the sting to no avail.

SQUIRREL

OW!!

FLORY

You've tried that thirteen times and I've stung you thirteen times! Foolish squirrel.

SKUGGLE

I'm not foolish. I'm just hungry.

FLORY

Well you'll never be able to eat *me* -- you ought to know that by now.

SKUGGLE

I can't think on an empty stomach, and my stomach is always empty.

FLORY

It's your *head* that's empty. Otherwise you might not be so hungry.

SKUGGLE

What do you mean?

FLORY

If you used your head you could think of a way to get those seeds out of that thing.

SKUGGLE

The seed tube? I tried! I can't figure it out. The giant keeps putting up new tubes, and each one is harder to get into than the last.

FLORY

Kuh.

SQUIRREL

I don't get it. Why does she put the seeds out if she doesn't want me to eat them?

FLORY

"Giants do all kinds of crazy things."

SKUGGLE

At least she doesn't have a dog.

FLORY

I'm not afraid of dogs.

SQUIRREL

Well you should be.

(Skuggle studies her for a moment.)

You're a night fairy.

FLORY

I'm a day fairy.

SQUIRREL

Why is a night fairy awake in the middle of the day?

FLORY

I'm a day fairy!

SKUGGLE

If you were a day fairy your eyes would be sky-blue. They're black, which makes you a night fairy. And if you were a day fairy you'd be nice, but you're mean and spiky, which makes you a night fairy. And your wings are all broken off, which makes you a mean, spiky, black-eyed, *loser* night fairy.

FLORY
What's your name, tree-rat?

SKUGGLE
Don't have one. Never needed one.

FLORY
Everyone needs a name.

SKUGGLE
Just call me squirrel, like everybody else.

FLORY
You need a name that suits you.

SKUGGLE
Like what?

FLORY
(studying him)
Like ... Skulk ... or Waggle ... or ... Skuggle!

SKUGGLE
Skuggle?

FLORY
Skuggle, I can help you get the seeds from the tube.

SKUGGLE
Why do you want to help me?

FLORY
I don't. But I'm too small to do it myself.

SKUGGLE
I'm big! I can do it! Do what?

FLORY
If I tell you, I want some of the seeds for myself.

SKUGGLE
What, you want me to share? Squirrels don't share.

FLORY

You'll share with me if you want to eat.

He thinks for a moment.

SKUGGLE

No. I want to eat *all* the seeds.

FLORY

Right now you have none. Some is better than none.

SKUGGLE

Some *is* better than none. But how do I do it?

FLORY

You'll share the seeds with me?

SKUGGLE

If you promise not to tell anyone.

FLORY

And: you have to let me ride on your back.

SKUGGLE

What?! Why?!

FLORY

I have a lot of work to do to survive in this place. I need to be able to get around fast and I need a strong helper.

SKUGGLE

(a little proud)

I'm strong.

FLORY

So we have a deal? You'll share the seeds and let me ride on your back?

SKUGGLE

You can't weigh very much. All right. Deal.

FLORY

Good. Now listen: you can't get the seeds from the top. That dome is in the way. And you won't fit through the bottom.

SKUGGLE

I already know that! I thought you were going to help me!

FLORY

So you have to swing the seeds out of the tube.

SQUIRREL

Swing 'em! Wait. What?

FLORY

Climb the tree. Grab hold of the hook. Swing the tube back and forth as hard as you can. The seeds will fall out of the tube ... and we can eat them off the ground.

SKUGGLE

Climb ... grab ... swing ... eat!

(he smiles a big squirrel smile)

I love you!

FLORY

Kuh. Now climb that tree and start swinging. Afterwards you'll give me a ride back to my house so I can store my share of the seeds.

SKUGGLE

Store them? Why don't you just eat them?

Flory

It's called planning ahead, Skuggle. It's called survival. Now get to work.

Skuggle heads towards the tree. A moment later, seeds begin raining down from above, to Flory's delight.

Scene 4.

Flory and Skuggle are just back from a ride around the garden.

FLORY

You give the worst rides ever.

SKUGGLE

I do not! I'm strong and I'm fast, like a stallion.

FLORY

More like a mule. You've been giving me rides for almost a week and you still bump me around until I feel like my head will fall off.

SKUGGLE

That's called scampering! Squirrels scamper!

FLORY

And you always get distracted. I get you going one way and suddenly you get a whiff of something that smells like food and you turn and go the other way. I almost fell off three times just now.

SKUGGLE

Well, just because you lost your wings doesn't mean you can treat me like a slave or a pet.

FLORY

That's the deal. I'm the brains and you're the brawn, and if you don't like it you can find yourself another fairy.

Beat. Skuggle glares at Flory.

FLORY

What?

SKUGGLE

I'm just wondering what you taste like.

FLORY

You'll never find out.

Beat.

SKUGGLE

What's your story, anyway?

FLORY

My story?

SKUGGLE

What happened to your wings? Why are you pretending to be a day fairy?

FLORY

Because.

Because why?	SKUGGLE
Just because.	FLORY
But why because?	SKUGGLE
Oof! You're impossible!	FLORY
You're afraid to tell me.	SKUGGLE
I'm not afraid of anything.	FLORY
Scaredy-cat.	SKUGGLE
I am not!	FLORY
Are too.	SKUGGLE
Am not!	FLORY
Are too!	SKUGGLE
All right! I'll tell you.	FLORY
So tell me.	SKUGGLE
You were right. I was born a night fairy.	FLORY
I knew it!	SKUGGLE

FLORY

I came into the world at midnight, which means midnight will always be the hour when my magic is strongest. But when I was only three months old, I got blutterbanged by a night-flying fiend.

SKUGGLE

Blutterbanged? Wait -- three months?! What were you doing blutterbanging at that age?! Where were your parents?

FLORY

I don't know. I never saw them after I was five days old.

SKUGGLE

What?!

FLORY

That's how it is with fairies. Fairies make terrible parents. Babies bore us. So fairy babies have to take care of themselves.

SKUGGLE

Hey, wait. If you've been on your own since you were a baby, how did you learn that stinging spell?

FLORY

Fairies are born with the seeds of spells already in our minds. As we grow older the spells sprout, one by one. Do you want to hear my story or not?

SKUGGLE

Go on.

FLORY

(clearing her throat)

It was a windy night, cool and sweet with springtime. I was still very tiny – about the size of two or three acorns –

SKUGGLE

Mmm, acorns.

FLORY

– but I was brave and fierce, and I knew –

SKUGGLE

Just skip to the blutterbanging.

FLORY

(fine!)

I was doing what I love to do best: flying through the night, floating on the breeze, swooping and soaring, when out of nowhere, a brown, furry, black-eyed thing with huge leathery wings --

SKUGGLE

A bat.

FLORY

Who's telling this story? A *bat*, yes – a cousin of yours, I believe – snatched me out of the sky with its ugly, skuggly feet. I hadn't learned my stinging spell yet, so all I could do was thrash around, but that only made the bat clutch onto me more tightly, which crushed my wings and tore them off. Have you ever had your wings torn off, Skuggle?

SKUGGLE

I don't actually have --

FLORY

Let me tell you, it hurts!

SKUGGLE

So how'd you get away?

FLORY

I didn't. All of a sudden the bat looked down at me and it seemed surprised to see me and then it dropped me.

SKUGGLE

Oh, no! Did you crash?! Did you die?!

FLORY

I fell through the night, spinning like a maple seed – a maple seed has a little fairy wing that makes it rotate and fall slowly instead of plummeting like a stone. That's how I fell, otherwise I *would* be dead now and your head would probably be stuck in the seed tube.

SKUGGLE

So you landed in the garden. That still doesn't explain why you're pretending to be a day fairy when you're really a night fairy.

A troubled expression comes over Flory.

FLORY

I just like daytime better now, that's all.

SKUGGLE
Maybe because bats hunt at night?

FLORY
Kuh. That's ridiculous.

Beat.

SKUGGLE
I don't like night-time either. But not because of bats.

FLORY
Then why?

SKUGGLE
That's when IT comes out.

FLORY
Who?

SKUGGLE
IT!

FLORY
Who's It?

SKUGGLE
I can't say.

FLORY
Why not?

SKUGGLE
Too scary.

FLORY
Well I have no idea who you're talking about.

SKUGGLE
(checking to make sure it's safe, then whispering)
IT. The ... raccoon. You know:

(makes rings with fingers and thumbs and holds them to his eyes like goggles, then shivers audibly)

Urrrrrrgh.

FLORY

I'm not afraid of raccoons.

SKUGGLE

Well you should be. Big teeth, big claws, big eyes. Vicious. Horrible.

FLORY

If I ever meet a raccoon I'll just sting him with my stinging spell and stab him with my apple-thorn knife.

SKUGGLE

Flory, the fearless warrior.

FLORY

I *am* fearless.

SKUGGLE

Look out! Bat!

Flory ducks and holds her arms over her head, then realizes he was pulling her leg. Skuggle laughs.

FLORY

I only put up with you because you're useful. Once I can fly again, that will be the last you hear of me.

SKUGGLE

How are you going to fly without wings?

FLORY

Just wait and see.

SKUGGLE

You'll never fly again. And you're scrawny and weak and all alone. That's why you need *me*.

FLORY

I *don't* need you.

SKUGGLE

Good! Then I'm leaving.

FLORY

Where are you going?

SKUGGLE

Over to the side of the house to see what's in the garbage can.

FLORY

Well good riddance. I hope you fall in. Then I'll laugh and laugh and laugh.

SKUGGLE

You won't be able to see me from here.

FLORY

Yes I will. I learned new magic today. It just came to me -- a seeing spell. I closed my eyes and pressed my palms against my eyelids and said (*half-hissing, half praying*) "Go bhfeice mé: Let me see Skuggle!" – and I saw you in my mind. You were picking your nose. Kuh.

SKUGGLE

Well close your eyes and see this:

(Skuggle sticks out his tongue at her.)

That's my tongue waving goodbye. Forever!

He turns in a huff and exits.

FLORY

(backing down)

Wait, Skug. Skuggle.

A bit forlorn, Flory begins climbing up to the birdhouse. Then she hears the back door of the giant's house open and close. Having become used to the giant, Flory calmly positions herself so she can't be seen. Flory watches as, in a different part of the garden, the giantess hangs a sugar-water tube from a limb of the oak tree. We may see this as shadow-play, or perhaps we only see Flory watching it happen. Then the giantess goes back into the house. Flory scampers from out of her hiding place and runs or climbs to get a better view of the new addition to the garden. She has no clue what it is.

FLORY

Skug! Skug! Skuggle!

SKUGGLE

(off)

Leave me alone.

FLORY

Come here, look at this.

SKUGGLE

(entering, still in a sulk)

What do you want?

FLORY

What is that thing? The giant lady hung it there. It looks like a seed tube, but it doesn't have seeds in it.

SKUGGLE

Oh, that. She put that out last year, too. It's slippery, but I was able to climb on it. Turns out it wasn't worth the trouble. It's full of water. Sweet water.

FLORY

Crazy giant. Why would she do something like that?

SKUGGLE

Because she wants to lure us, so she can catch us and kill us.

FLORY

But she *doesn't* kill us. She hasn't killed anything in the garden since I got here.

SKUGGLE

'Cause we're too quick for her. If she could catch us she would kill us and cook us and pick the meat off our bones.

FLORY

That isn't what chickadee says.

SKUGGLE

Chickadee is a bird, which means Chickadee has a birdbrain.

FLORY

I like Chickadee. He's a daredevil.

SKUGGLE

Exactly! Have you seen the way he eats seeds out of the tube when the giant lady is standing right there watching? She'll catch him one of these days, and then he'll be sorry.

FLORY

But Chickadee says the giant lady puts out seeds because she likes animals.

SKUGGLE

Well, Chickadee is sadly mistaken. I happen to know she eats birds. Big birds. I've found bones in the garbage.

FLORY

You really should stay out of the garbage. It makes you stink even worse than you already do.

SKUGGLE

Why'd you call me, anyway, if you're only going to insult me?

FLORY

Because of that tube.

SKUGGLE

What about it? It isn't for us, it's for the hummingbirds. They like that sweet water.

FLORY

They do? Then I want to go there. Take me to the oak tree.

SKUGGLE

Do I need to remind you the oak tree is full of bats?

FLORY

They won't come out till dusk. Anyway, I'm not scared of bats. I just hate them.

SKUGGLE

You hate them because you're scared of them. (*singing:*) Fraidy-cat! Fraidy-cat! Flory-dory fraidy-cat!

FLORY

You're singing for a stinging, fuzzball. Now turn around so I can climb on. I want to go to the oak tree.

SKUGGLE

Why?

FLORY

Because I want to talk to the hummingbirds.

SKUGGLE

What's in it for me?

FLORY

If you take me there now, I'll give you some breadcrumbs later.

SKUGGLE

Where'd you get breadcrumbs?!

FLORY

The giant lady. She threw them on the ground.

BOTH

Crazy giant!

SKUGGLE

Why not give me the breadcrumbs now?

FLORY

If I give them to you now you won't help me.

SKUGGLE

True. But I don't see why you're interested in hummingbirds. They're nasty. I tried to steal one of their eggs once and the mother almost pecked my eyes out.

FLORY

I know! The other day I saw two of them fighting over an orange lily! They used their beaks like swords! They're tiny, but they're fierce! And so beautiful!

SKUGGLE

Ha! They're ugly and they're mean. Like you.

FLORY

Just turn around so I can climb on.

SKUGGLE

Breadcrumbs?

FLORY

Breadcrumbs.

SKUGGLE

Let's go.

Scene 5a.

Transition to imply passage of time. When Skuggle enters, carrying Flory on his back, we're in a different part of the garden – near the oak tree. Perhaps we see the sugar-water tube hanging.

SKUGGLE

You've made me bring you here to the hummingbird tube every day for the last week. What's the point? Those nasty little hummers just hover and drink and completely ignore you.

FLORY

I'll win them over. I think one of them is starting to like me a little. She smiled at me yesterday.

SKUGGLE

Hummingbirds can't smile. They have beaks.

FLORY

She smiled with her eyes.

SKUGGLE

You're crazy.

FLORY

Just go away, Skug. Come back and pick me up at dusk, like always.

SKUGGLE

If I feel like it.

FLORY

You'll do it if you want dinner.

SKUGGLE

Fine. Happy hunting.

Skuggle exits. Flory sits and begins watching the hummingbird tube, a smile on her face. Time passes, shadows shift. It's late afternoon. Maybe a thunderstorm lights up the sky in the distance.

FLORY

Where are you? You should have been here by now. *(has an idea)* Oh!

(She closes her eyes and presses her palms to her eyelids.)

Go bhfeice mé: Let me see the hummingbird!

We see what she sees, projected somewhere on stage: the hummingbird, caught fast in a spider's web.

FLORY

Oh no! Skuggle! Wait. No, I can't call Skug. He'll eat her.

Flory runs off.

Scene 5b.

The scene shifts to the site of the spiderweb, which appears on one side of the stage. Just as in Flory's vision, the hummingbird is caught in the web. Flory runs on, then brakes hard. She approaches the web slowly, cautiously. The hummingbird sees her coming and is leery of her.

FLORY

Don't be scared. I've come to help you.

HUMMINGBIRD

You're a night fairy.

FLORY

(a little fed up with this)

I used to be. Now I'm not.

HUMMINGBIRD

Why are you awake in the middle of the day?

FLORY

I'm here to help you, but first you have to promise me something.

HUMMINGBIRD

And you have no wings. Just my luck to be rescued by a confused night fairy with no wings.

FLORY

I *will* rescue you! If you promise.

HUMMINGBIRD

Promise what?

FLORY

Once I set you free, you have to be my very own hummingbird and you have to let me ride on your back.

HUMMINGBIRD

No.

FLORY

No?!

HUMMINGBIRD

No. I won't belong to you. I belong to myself. And I have eggs. If I get free, I'll have to look after my nestlings. I won't have time to bother with you.

FLORY

Then I won't free you! Stay there and get eaten by the spider, if that's what you want.

HUMMINGBIRD

It isn't what I want. If I die, my eggs will die. Night will fall and it will grow cold and my little chicks will die inside their shells.

Flory feels a funny ache in her throat. She gives herself a little shake.

FLORY

(angrily)

Well it's your own fault! All you have to do is promise to give me what I want and I'll set you free. Then you can warm the eggs and the chicks won't die.

HUMMINGBIRD

I can't promise.

FLORY

Why not?!

HUMMINGBIRD

Because I can't lie. Hummingbirds never do.

FLORY

You wouldn't have to serve me all the time. Just once in a while. I only want to ride on your back so I can feel what it's like to fly again.

HUMMINGBIRD

It doesn't matter what you want. I can't think about that. My eggs are growing cold.

Flory makes a sound of utter exasperation. She turns her back and begins to stomp away. Then she stops. She turns to look at the hummingbird again.

FLORY

All right! I'll set you free. You don't deserve it, but I'll do it anyway.

She returns to the web. She cautiously takes hold of one strand of silk, but it immediately glues itself to her forearm.

HUMMINGBIRD

It's no use. You'll just get caught yourself. Can't you say a spell?

FLORY

I don't know any spells to get a hummingbird out of a spiderweb.

HUMMINGBIRD

A confused, wingless fairy who doesn't know spells. What good are you?

FLORY

If I had my dagger I could cut you loose. It's up in my house in the cherry tree. I'll go get it.

HUMMINGBIRD

No. There isn't enough time. The spider will return at any moment and poison me.

FLORY

Then what am I supposed to do?

HUMMINGBIRD

Go to my nest and warm the eggs.

FLORY

Why? I don't care about eggs. I only care about you.

HUMMINGBIRD

I don't matter. My babies matter. If you want to help me, save them.

FLORY

Well ... I suppose I could do that. And then I'll come back with my dagger and save you!

HUMMINGBIRD

Just save my nestlings.

FLORY

Where's your nest?

The hummingbird hesitates.

FLORY

Don't worry. I don't eat eggs. They're disgusting.

HUMMINGBIRD

Between the fence post and the wall. The fence post close to the fishpond. The nest is hidden by the barberry bush. You'll have to climb the bush to get to it.

FLORY

The barberry bush is prickly.

HUMMINGBIRD

Yes it is.

FLORY

(pulling loose from the web)

I don't care! I'll do it! I'll find the nest and warm the eggs! Then I'll come back! I promise!

HUMMINGBIRD

Be careful.

FLORY

Don't worry about me. I'm tiny, but I'm fierce.

HUMMINGBIRD

I'm not worried about you. I'm worried about the eggs. They're very fragile.

FLORY

I'll be careful.

Then, from a corner of the web, the spider appears: argiope aurantia – the black and yellow garden spider. Huge. And beautiful. And terrifying. Flory gasps.

HUMMINGBIRD

Hurry!

After a moment of hesitation, Flory dashes off. The spider begins its slow descent toward the hummingbird. Lights fade to black.

End of Act One.