

Tess' Last Night

Music and Lyrics by
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Book by
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Tess' Last Night

Cast of Characters

Tess Gerstavsky

A sweet and plucky aspiring children's theatre actress from the mythical kingdom of Canada.

Gwen

The sarcastic narrator.

Mariana

An attractive, tough as nails children's theatre actress.

Yates Butler

An attractive, vaguely British children's theatre actor.

Griffith Greer

A cluelessly arrogant children's theatre director.

Dahlia Price

The reigning it girl/diva of children's theatre.

Cooper Hewitt

A sweet puppeteer from Buffalo.

Edmund

The kind accompanist and friend of Tess.

Oliver Showbucks (Chorus)

A wealthy, fast talking children's theatre producer.

Sinjun (Chorus)

The director of Buffalo's Magical Golden Carousel Theatre Company.

Mom & Dad (Chorus)

Tess' parents.

Auditioner (Chorus)

Conductor of children's theatre auditions.

Stage Manager (Chorus)

The stage manager of *Tess' Last Night*.

Director (Chorus)

The director of Tess' first production.

Young Lincoln (Chorus)

The actor playing opposite Tess in Griffith's *Young Lincoln*.

Chorus Boys (Chorus)

Dahlia's very helpful groupies.

Paperboys (Chorus)

Old movie style paperboys that provide useful exposition.

Fans (Chorus)

Fans of Tess and all things children's theatre.

Li'l Bo Peep (Chorus)

The keeper of the lambs in the MGCTC's production.

Buffalo Bill (Chorus)

The villain in the MGCTC's production.

Katherine (Chorus)

The supporting female in the MGCTC's production.

Accompanist (Chorus)

The accompanist for the MGCTC.

Prisoners (Chorus)

The cast of the MGCTC's production.

EPA Officers #1 & #2 (Chorus)

Equity Police Association officers.

EPA Officer #3 (Chorus)

A confused Environmental Protection Agency officer.

Actors & Actresses (Chorus)

Various actors in Tess' shows.

SYNOPSIS

Tess' Last Night is the story of Tess, a fresh-faced young girl from the mythical kingdom of Canada, and her pursuit of her twin dreams of children's theatre stardom and love. With her pure heart and plucky personality, Tess braves the treacherous world of sex, drugs and New York children's theatre. In no time at all, Tess is playing all seven dwarfs at once, marrying the director who discovered her, becoming the new children's theatre It girl, losing her fame and love, and finding it again in the wilds of Buffalo and the arms of a puppeteer. Through the successes and the heartbreaks, Tess never wavers from her dreams or loses her accent.

MUSICAL SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1: Tess' Childhood Home
"What's Around the Corner".....Tess
SCENE 2: An Audition in New York City
"If You Wanna Get Ahead".....Mariana, Yates & Tess
SCENE 3: Mariana & Yates' Apartment/A Rehearsal Studio/A Hotel in Buffalo
"The Road".....Company
SCENE 4: A Theater in Buffalo
"She Might Do".....Griffith
SCENE 5: A Theater in New York City
"Log Cabin Of My Heart".....Tess & Griffith
SCENE 6: Tess' Dressing Room
SCENE 7: Dahlia's Apartment
"Be A Diva".....Dahlia & Her Chorus Boys
SCENE 8: The Streets of New York/A Theater in New York City/Tess & Griffith's Apartment

ACT II

SCENE 1: A Theater in Buffalo
"The Magical Golden Carousel".....Company
SCENE 2: A Theater in Buffalo
"Guess Where...".....Cooper
SCENE 3: Mariana & Yates' Apartment/Griffith & Dahlia's Apartment
"Trying To Tell Us Something"....Mariana, Yates, Griffith & Dahlia
SCENE 4: A Theater in Buffalo
"Big Production Number".....Company
SCENE 5: A Theater in Buffalo
SCENE 6: A Theater in New York City
SCENE 7: A Theater in New York City
"Mind If I Accompany You".....Tess
"The Time Of Our Lives".....Company

Act I

Scene 1

In front of the curtain, enters
GWEN, our smartly dressed narrator,
carrying an oversized story book.
SHE stands in front of a stool DL.

GWEN

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.

(Getting no response, SHE goes
into children's theatre mode.)

Come on now, I know you can do better than that. Let's try
it again. I said, good evening, Ladies and gentleman.

(The AUDIENCE responds. Hopefully.)

Very good. Tonight we have a wonderful story for you. One
of my personal favorites, actually. It's entitled

(SHE checks the book.)

Oh, my mistake. This one's called Tess' Last Night. Our
story begins once upon a time, ten years ago, in a far off,
mythical kingdom called ...

(Curtains open on TESS' bedroom:
Canadian flag, bed and bookshelf.)

Canada. Tess, the obvious main character, was packing up her
belongings to go off to college. Yes, she'd soon be
matriculating at the University of Canada. She'd cheer for
the fighting Canadians as they played a rousing game of
Canadian football against their arch rivals, Canada State.
And so on and so forth, buying Canadian bacon, known here as
ham, with Canadian dollars, known here as 60 cents.

(TESS enters, clothes in HER arms.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Why, here's Tess now. Isn't she beautiful, Ladies and
Gentlemen? Every time Tess appears on the stage, I want all
of you to say Aww. Let's try it.

(Off of the tepid response)

Seriously. One more time.

("Aww")

Good. Keep that up and I don't foresee any major problems.

(TESS drops the clothes in HER
suitcase and exits.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Tess was a wonderful student, top of her class, and all of
the teachers at Canada High knew she'd go far. But--

(TESS enters with more clothes and

(CONT'D)

2

GWEN is forced to stop at the "Aww"s.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Very good, Ladies and Gentlemen.

(TESS leaves.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

But as good a student as Tess was, she had one big problem. She didn't know what she wanted to do with her life.

(TESS enters with more clothes. "Aww.")

GWEN (CONT'D)

Well, yes, it is kind of sad, but not all that uncommon for--
(SHE sees TESS behind HER.)

Oh, you were ... for ... right. No, that's great. It really is. Good work with that.

(TESS leaves.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Sooo ... right. Tess is good at everything but she doesn't know what she wants to do. Okay. The problem was that Tess didn't really feel passionate about anything. There was nothing that truly called to her, stirred her--

(TESS enters. Again with the "Aww"s.)

GWEN (CONT'D)

You know, this is ... see, she's the main character, so she makes a whole huckabunch of entrances. Maybe we should just cut out the awws.

TESS

(Disappointed)

Aww.

GWEN

Okay, then why don't we compromise. Every ...

(SHE flips through the book.)

How about every seven entrances? Does that ...

TESS

I guess.

GWEN

That works?

TESS

Yeah, okay.

Good. So every seven entrances. That'll be ... I apologize, I kinda lost my place here.

TESS

I can take it from here, Gwen. Thanks ever so much for telling the nice Ladies and Gentlemen what my story's all about.

GWEN

Sure, Tess.

(Under HER breath as SHE exits.)

Canadians.

TESS

My packing's almost finished. I can't believe I'm finally leaving this room behind. I wonder what secrets the University of Canada holds in store for me. And for my future.

"WHAT'S AROUND THE CORNER"

TESS (SUNG)

NERVOUS, SCARED, APPREHENSIVE, EXCITED.
 THE GAMUT OF EMOTIONS RACING IN MY HEAD.
 HOPEFUL, ANXIOUS, SHY, DELIGHTED.
 I WONDER WHERE I'LL BE LED.
 WHAT'S AROUND THE CORNER
 WHAT'S AROUND THE BEND?
 WHAT IS IN STORE FOR THIS PROMISING CANADIAN?
 WHAT IS IN MY FUTURE?
 WHERE WILL IT TAKE ME?
 WHAT WILL I BECOME WHILE AT THE UNIVERSITY?
 MAYBE I COULD BE A DOCTOR OR DENTIST.
 MAYBE EVEN BE A WORLD FAMOUS COOK.
 OR I COULD BECOME A LIBRARIAN,
 AND SPEND ALL MY DAYS DOING WHAT I LOVE MOST:
 READING BOOK AFTER BOOK AFTER BOOK.

(TESS stops singing.)

TESS

Books! I almost forgot. How can a girl ever expect to succeed at one of Canada's most prominent, and only, universities without books?

(SHE goes to HER bookcase and grabs a very dusty book.)

What's this? A photo album? It must've been stuck back there a long time. Look how ever so dusty it is.

(SHE blows off the dust dramatically.)

Oh my goodness, I don't think I've seen this album my whole Canadian life. I'll have to check it out.

(SHE opens up the album and flips through.)

Look at this, pictures of Grandma and Grandpa. But why are they dressed so funny? Unless ...

TESS (CONT'D)

4

(SHE pulls out a delicate old program.
SHE gasps.)

They were children's theatre performers! It looks like they were pretty good too. But why didn't anyone tell me that I had such a noble and dignified professional heritage? I bet Mom and Dad were just jealous. Stupid surgeon, stupid judge.

(SHE closes the album, hugging it to HER.)

I came from this. Children's theatre is in my blood. That has to mean something, doesn't it?

TESS (SUNG)

WHERE WILL MY ROAD TAKE ME?

WHO WILL I BECOME?

WILL I STRIKE OUT, OR WILL I HIT THE BIG HOMERUN?

WHAT'S AROUND THAT CORNER?

WHAT'S BEYOND THAT BEND?

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THIS PROMISING CANADIAN?

TESS (CONT'D)

Well, it's now or never.

(SHE picks up the phone and speaks.)

Hello, Canadian Bus Lines? Do you have any buses leaving for New York City? You do? When? Why, tonight? Hold on, please.

(HER hand over the phone, SHE calls out.)

Mom, Dad, I'm gonna forget about college and run off tonight to join the children's theatre racket in New York City.

MOM & DAD (OFF)

'k.

TESS

(Into the phone)

That'll be perfect.

(SHE hangs up the phone.)

Tonight. My destiny begins tonight.

(SHE closes the suitcase and
rushes off. Lights down on HER room.)

Scene 2

Lights up on GWEN at HER stool, book in hand.

GWEN

And so Tess rode the express bus from Canada Town straight to New York City, the place where children's theatre dreams are bought and sold like so much cattle. Tess made it to the Big Apple, fresh faced and ready for her new life to begin. In fact, our plucky little Canuck was so eager to get started

that before she even found a place to stay ...

(TESS enters, suitcase in hand.
SHE goes to GWEN with three dollars.)

TESS

One copy of Backstage please.

(GWEN gives HER the paper and
takes HER money. TESS exits.)

GWEN

She was on her way to her first audition. Luckily, she had already procured a number of headshots and resumes, along with memorizing and perfecting a monologue. You'd be absolutely right to wonder when and how she did this.

(GWEN turns the page, beat.)

Tess picked the first children's theatre audition she could find, a touring production of Snow White.

(TESS enters, suitcase still in hand.)

GWEN

Remember, folks, five more entrances before the ...

(SHE motions with HER hand and exits.)

TESS

My very first audition. Oh, Ladies and Gentlemen, how can I describe just what I'm feeling? I'm nervous and anxious, sure, but excited too. Ever so excited about the wonderful new people I'll meet.

(MARIANA, an attractive actress,
enters walking backwards, yelling
at the unseen AUDITIONERS.)

MARIANA

Oh yeah? Well blow me, you syphilitic fucks!

TESS

Didn't get the part, eh?

MARIANA

What? No, they want me to read again in a few minutes. "To be sure." They know they're gonna cast me, those pricks, they just like making me sweat.

(SHE looks TESS over.)

You new?

TESS

How'd you know?

MARIANA

6

The suitcase. Little tip: props in a monologue never help, they only hurt.

TESS

Oh, no, this isn't for my monologue. I just got in town from Canada.

MARIANA

Is that one of those Midwestern states nobody visits?

TESS

Actually, Canada's a whole 'nother country. With a population of over thirty million and exports that include newsprint and crude petroleum, Canada is--

MARIANA

Right. So what shows did you do in Nebraska?

TESS

Canada.

MARIANA

Whatever.

TESS

Well to be honest ... um ...

MARIANA

Mariana.

TESS

Such a pretty name. My name's Tess, Tess Gerstavsky.

MARIANA

Sure it is.

TESS

Well to be honest, Mariana, this would be my first show. My first audition even.

MARIANA

Wow, cherry fully in tact. Impressive.

TESS

I guess. But I have to admit I'm a little nervous.

(YATES, who could be James Bond, enters.)

YATES

Mariana, is that you? You look smashing.

MARIANA

Yates, it's so good to see you.

(THEY kiss each other on the cheeks.)

7

YATES

It's been too too long, my dear.

MARIANA

Absolutely. But I didn't know you were auditioning for this.

YATES

I heard tell they were in need of a handsome prince. That's where I usually come in. And who, may I ask, is this new lark that's seen fit to land in our meadow.

MARIANA

Yates Butler, Tess Gerstavsky.

YATES

(Kissing HER hand)

A pleasure.

MARIANA

Tess here is Indian.

YATES

You mean Native American.

TESS

She means Canadian. You've heard of Canada, right?

YATES

I think so. Used to belong to Her Majesty's empire. Lots of trees and caribou?

TESS

That's the place.

YATES

Yes, well, welcome to America.

MARIANA

Yates is from Oxford.

TESS

Oh, near London, on the Thames?

MARIANA

Oxford, Mississippi.

YATES

You can't hear the Southern accent, can you? I've tried dreadfully hard to lose it.

TESS

I was completely fooled.

YATES
You're all right, Tess. You'll do fine. You're auditioning for what, a dwarf?

TESS
Yes, I suppose. I mean, since Mariana is going to be Snow White.

MARIANA
Bet your fuckin' ass I am.

YATES
Mariana, such language in front of the new starling.

MARIANA
(Coy)
Sorry, Yatesy.

AUDITIONER (OFF)
Yates Butler!

YATES
'tis I. It has been absolutely lovely meeting you, Tess. Here's hoping.

TESS
Thank you.

YATES
And Mariana, we mustn't be so long between these chance meetings.

MARIANA
Who knows, Yates, maybe you'll be my handsome prince.

(HE laughs and gives a fingers
crossed gesture as HE exits.)

TESS
(Dreamily)
Wow.

MARIANA
I know.

TESS
He's so handsome and charming.

MARIANA
Yates is amazing.

TESS
Plus, he's the first gay person I ever met.

MARIANA

9

Yeah, too bad about that, huh?

TESS

Yeah. How do you know him?

MARIANA

We've done a lot of shows together. Plus he's my roommate.

TESS

But I thought he said--

MARIANA

Yeah, he's really clingy. And I'm not altogether sure about his short-term memory.

TESS

Oh. Listen, Mariana, you don't know me from Adam, and I know this is a really competitive business, but I'd be ever so grateful if you could, maybe, show me the ropes, give me some idea of what I might expect in there.

MARIANA

Well it's not really my style, but ... hell, why not? You seem like a good kid. And if you really are the main character, I better do what I can to secure myself a good sidekick role. So ... your monologue, do you plan on doing it sitting or standing.

TESS

Standing, I think.

MARIANA

There's a chair in there, so you can just strike it.

TESS

I should hit the chair.

MARIANA

Sorry, technical theatre term. Strike it means get rid of it, move it off to the side.

TESS

Okay, strike, check.

MARIANA

Then you say your name and what you're doing. Go ahead and take a moment after that, find your sense memory.

TESS

My what?

MARIANA

Another technical theatre term. Call up an emotional

MARIANA (CONT'D)

10

experience of your own that informs your character's ... you know, most of that stuff's bullshit nonsense anyway.

TESS

Sense memory nonsense. Got it. And then?

MARIANA

That's it, you do your monologue. You knock 'em dead.

TESS

Okay, great.

MARIANA

Also, if I really really want the part, I usually end up--

(But before SHE can finish, YATES enters.)

TESS

How did it go, Yates?

YATES

That's your highness to you, my dear.

MARIANA

(Embracing HIM)

You got it! Congratulations, Yatesy!!

YATES

Well it's not official yet.

MARIANA

They have to "make sure" about you too?

YATES

I swear, Mariana, unless you're Dahlia Bloody Pryce they won't give you anything outright.

TESS

Who's Dahlia Pryce?

MARIANA

Stay in this business long enough and you'll find out. Yates, I was just giving young Tess here the basics on audition technique.

YATES

Top Shelf! And how far had you gotten?

MARIANA

The, uh, perfect end to a perfect monologue.

YATES

Ah. Perhaps I can be of assistance.

YATES (SUNG)
HUNDREDS OF ACTORS, JUST ONE PART

MARIANA (SUNG)
HOW WILL THEY REMEMBER YOU?

YATES
HUNDREDS STRUGGLING TO GET THEIR START.

MARIANA & YATES (SUNG)
WHAT'S A YOUNG ACTOR TO DO?
IF YOU WANNA GET AHEAD,
YOU GOTTA GIVE SOME HEAD.
IF YOU WANNA GO UP,
YOU BETTER START BY GOING DOWN.
ALL OVER TOWN.

MARIANA (SUNG)
SHAKESPEARE IS GREAT.

YATES (SUNG)
AND SO IS CHEKHOV.

MARIANA & YATES (SUNG)
BUT IF YOU WANT THE JOB FOR SURE
JUST GET THE DIRECTOR OFF.
IF YOU REALLY NEED THE JOB
JUST DO THE OLD HEAD BOB
BOB BOB BOB BOB
IF YOU WANNA PLEASE
MAKE SURE YOU GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES
OH PRETTY PLEASE

MARIANA (SUNG)
JULIET'S A GREAT PART.

YATES (SUNG)
AND SO'S HORATIO.

MARIANA & YATES (SUNG)
SO IF YOU WANT TO DO THOSE ROLES
JUST PERFORM FELLATIO.

MARIANA (SPOKEN)
Sing with us Tess.

YATES (SPOKEN)
Splendid idea.

MARIANA, YATES & TESS (SUNG)
IF YOU WANNA GET AHEAD,
YOU GOTTA GIVE SOME HEAD.

MARIANA, YATES & TESS (SUNG) 12

IF YOU WANNA PLEASE
YOU GOTTA GET DOWN ON YOUR,
DON'T MATTER IF IT'S A HIM OR HER,
YOU GOTTA GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES.

YATES (SUNG)

OH PRETTY...

MARIANA & YATES (SUNG)

OH PRETTY...

MARIANA, YATES & TESS (SUNG)

OH PRETTY PLEASE!

TESS

I think I've got it. Thanks, you two.

MARIANA

We're gonna go out and get a smoke, Tess. You're okay here by yourself?

TESS

Now I am.

YATES

Out of curiosity, Tess, where are you staying in the city?

TESS

Well, I hadn't really thought about that. I figure in a city like this it can't be too hard to find cheap yet spacious housing.

(MARIANA and YATES exchange a look.)

MARIANA

Maybe you should stay with us.

TESS

Oh, I couldn't do that, impose on the both of you.

YATES

I won't hear otherwise, Tess. All right?

TESS

Thank you. Thank you so much. Now you guys go smoke. If I have any questions, I'll ask the auditioners.

MARIANA

Break a leg, Tess.

YATES

Here, here.

(MARIANA and YATES exit.)

1.

TESS

New friends and a place to stay. I must be the luckiest girl in the whole world.

AUDITIONER (OFF)

Tess Gerstavsky!

TESS

That's me. Let's see if today really is my lucky day.

(SHE picks up HER suitcase and exits.)

SHE comes right back on stage and goes to DC, facing the unseen AUDITIONERS.)

Hi there, my name is Tess Gerstavsky, and I'm so excited to be here. But before I begin, I hope you don't mind me asking one question: What's a blowjob?

(Lights down on TESS.)

Scene 3

Lights up on GWEN at HER stool.

GWEN

But sadly, Tess did not get the part. And when she went to look for Mariana and Yates they had already gone. Without a job or a place to stay, dejected, Tess returned to the Great White North. The End.

(SHE closes the book. The STAGE MANAGER peeks HIS head out.)

STAGE MANAGER

Cut it out, Gwen.

GWEN

Fine.

(SHE goes back to telling the story.)

Tess returned home with Mariana and Yates that day, pleased with her audition, yet still unsure if this is where her true destiny blah blah blah. Anyway ...

(YATES, MARIANA and TESS enter Y&M's apartment.)

TESS

Oh, I hope you don't mind, but I used your number on my contact sheet.