

Birds of a Feather.

Scene 1: A fashion boutique that specializes in prom rentals – gowns and tuxes.

FRAN enters through a door, stage right, and a bell tinkles as it opens and closes. She looks around seeming a bit lost until EVELYN sweeps in from the opposite direction. She's dressed like Morticia Addams.

EVELYN: Welcome to Secondhand Rose. How can I help you darling?

FRAN: I - I need a prom dress. I really love the blue one in the window.

EVELYN: Oh, no my dear, that blue is too pale for a woman with your... pallor. Why, you're nearly as pale as I am. That dress would simply wash you away. Come and try this one – it's a lovely shade of aubergine and the sweetheart neckline is sexy while still being demure. Has your date already secured a tuxedo?

EVELYN takes FRAN by the hand, leading her from rack to rack pointing out different options, but finally returning to aubergine gown, which she plucks from the rack,

FRAN: It's lovely, but – (she reaches for the price tag dangling from the strap of the dress, looks at it, and winces.) - but I'm afraid it's beyond my budget.

EVELYN: Just try it on, my sweet. If you're a match we may be able to work out other payment options. The dressing rooms are this way, child. Come along.

FRAN follows EVELYN to the stage right exit, and leaves the stage. While she's changing, EVELYN comments:

EVELYN: Is it fitting well? Oh, don't answer that, of course it is. I've never given a customer an ill-fitting gown.

FRAN (offstage): Ohhh. It's...

EVELYN: Come out, my dear. Let me see how you look.

FRAN returns to the stage in the dress, but not just the dress. As if by magic, she's completely transformed into a princess.

FRAN: I love it. I feel... magical. But I can't afford it. I'm sorry, I should go change.

EVELYN: I won't hear of it. As I said, my darling girl, we have other payment options: Cash, Card, Carotid, or Curse.

FRAN: Carotid?

EVELYN smiles, revealing her fangs – she is a vampire.

EVELYN: Yes, darling. You let me nip you just over your carotid artery and sip a little bit of the lovely red juice that flows through your body.

FRAN (shuddering): I don't think... what was the other option? A curse? You mean like I have to give you my first-born child or I'll wake up in the morning in the shape of a toad?

EVELYN: Why would I want a child? Their blood volume is far too low. And no, no toads. Loathsome little creatures, those, and there are enough of them in this world. No, the curse would be something temporary, and invisible. Until the dress is returned, you would be unable to feel warm, perhaps, or you might have to add the numbers in every sentence you utter.

FRAN: That... doesn't seem so horrible.

EVELYN: No, curses never seem horrible at first.

FRAN: My grandmother always said, "It takes pain to be beautiful."

EVELYN: Oh, sweet summer child, your grandmother was a very wise woman. (She reaches for the dress, strokes the skirt, then touches her fingers to the top of FRAN's head.) The curse won't begin until tomorrow evening, so go change into your regular clothes, and scurry home before the rain starts. We wouldn't want you to catch cold before prom night.

FRAN: The curse will happen during the prom?

EVELYN: Did I forget to mention that? Well, all rentals are final, dear. Don't worry, as I said, our curses are always invisible and never leave lasting scars.

FRAN: I... see. (She returns to the dressing room, then reappears in her normal clothes with the dress folded over her arm in a garment bag.) Well... thank you. I'll see you the day after tomorrow to return this.

EVELYN: Of course you will. Have fun, sweetie.

FRAN exits and the door bell chimes again. She brushes past a boy entering as she leaves and they meet each other's eyes for a moment, but neither speaks.

As the boy (MIKE) approaches a rack of tuxedos – and EVELYN approaches him – the lights fade to black.

Scene 2: A hotel ballroom. It's dressed for a high school prom, with a bandstand at one end and a table with punch and snacks off to the side. FRAN enters, looking even more princess-like than before, on the arm of a boy (DAVE). Other couples are already there, dancing, talking, laughing.

DAVE: Senior prom, Frannie. Did you ever think we'd make it to this night? (He looks her up and down) Have I told you how hot you look tonight?

FRAN: I'm sure you don't mean to sound like a broken record.

DAVE: No, no, not at all. But you do, look hot.

FRAN: Pretty is as pretty does.

DAVE: Um, yeah, sure, I guess.

FRAN (realizing what her curse is): Lather, rinse repeat. (She frowns.) I mean... You're as pretty as a picture, yourself.

DAVE (laughing uneasily): Um, thanks, Frannie. No one's ever called me pretty before. (He spies another couple across the floor) Look, there's Todd and Joanne, shall we join them?

FRAN: The more the merrier.

FRAN and DAVE go to one of the tables, where two people, TODD and JOANNE are already sitting. The light follows them and focuses on the table once they, too, sit.

DAVE: Todd! Joanne! You're here. You two having fun yet?

TODD: Sit with us, please.

JOANNE: I'm trying to convince Todd it's time to dance. Maybe you can convince Dave, and we can all have a good time.

FRAN (smiling): There's no time like the present.

DAVE: Frannie, really, whatever bit you're doing, enough already.

FRAN (apologetically): There's no such thing as too much fun.

DAVE (annoyed): No, there isn't, but this isn't fun. I feel like I'm here with – I don't know – a - a

FRAN (dismayed): A total airhead? (She doesn't wait for a response, but tries to apologize) Mistakes are always forgivable if one has the courage to admit them.

DAVE: Apology accepted. Maybe we should dance. That doesn't involve talking. (Flirting) I can think of other things that don't involve talking.

FRAN: Let's face the music and dance.

DAVE leads FRAN to where people are dancing, and they join in as the lights fade out.

Scene 3: The same ballroom, as the evening is winding down. Balloons have lost their helium and are sinking to the floor which is littered with streamers and the regular lights are on.

DAVE and FRAN are having a heated discussion.

DAVE: Geez, Frannie, you've been talking like this all night. I wanted this to be romantic, but you've made it into a joke. I had a room rented, but now I just want to go home.

FRAN (realizing her magical night is falling apart): Dave... just... shut up and kiss me.

DAVE (angry): Kiss you? Not now... maybe not ever again.

FRAN: Don't throw in the towel. Give it time. Don't jump ship just yet,

DAVE (giving up): Seriously, Frances... I just... can't.

DAVE walks off, and FRAN sinks into a nearby chair as the lights dim.

Scene 4: A bus stop bench, night. FRAN is shivering and crying, waiting for the bus. MIKE (the boy she brushed by in the store) sits down next to her.

MIKE: Is this seat taken?

FRAN (sniffing): Misery loves company.

MIKE (offering her his pocket square as a handkerchief): Birds of a feather flock together?

FRAN (staring at him and then gesturing to his suit and her dress): Dressed to kill?

MIKE nods, confirming that he, too, paid for his rental with a curse.

FRAN (smiling): Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

MIKE: (smiling back) Stick with me, kid, and we'll do lots of interesting things.

FRAN and MIKE remain on the bench chatting amiably, missing the bus, and enjoying themselves until dawn turns into a bright white light and then BLACKOUT.

Scene 5: The dress shop, the next morning.

EVELYN looks up when the door chimes. FRAN and MIKE walk in and each lay a garment bag on the counter.

EVELYN: You're both here bright and early. Did things not go as planned, my dears?

FRAN AND MIKE share a look, then utter the final line of the play together.

FRAN/MIKE: Beauty is a curse.

BLACKOUT