

Cinderella

Un.....leashed (!)

By

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WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JOHN SULLIVAN writes...This play does much more than merely satirize the film industry's penchant for playing it safe with sequels, prequels, and spin-offs of proven money makers. Cinderella Unleashed juggles the wild script demands of egomaniacs with star power, the systematic (and systemic, for that matter) salting of scripts with concepts, tropes and situations that resonate favorably with current social politics, a producer – in this case the voice of financial reason – who humors the talent while kiboshing their more insane (often inane) script ideas, with a writer's effort to salvage her work and earn some credits after the major investors in the show withdraw their bolus of money. An entertaining play that works good comedic mileage out of the industry's most mercenary tendencies and efforts at self aggrandizement*

Cinderella Unleashed

Cast of Characters 2M, 2F

CHARLOTTE RAINS:	20s, screenwriter
HARLAN HUGGINS:	40s, executive producer
STAN RICHARDS:	30s, co-star of the movie
CARLA SNOW:	20s, co-star of the movie

Time:
The present
Setting:

Writer's room at a major studio

SETTING: Present day. A writer's room at a major studio. Spartan décor. Conference table. Couple of chairs.

AT RISE: CHARLOTTE RAINS is hard at work revising a draft of a Cinderella reboot on her laptop. STAN RICHARDS and CARLA SNOW, stars of the film, enter.

Hey, you!

STAN

You there. Get your nose out of Facebook and look here.

CARLA

I'm not on Facebook.

CHARLOTTE

(turning around)
Stan Richards and Carla Snow. Honor to meet you.

Looking for a writer.

CARLA

CHARLOTTE

What kind? Novel, essay, letter, poetic, political, editorial, fortune cookie---what?

STAN

Writer of *Cinderella Unleashed*. C. Rains.

CHARLOTTE

I am C. Rains.

STAN

You know a script is bad when the writer doesn't have the guts to write his full name on it.

CHARLOTTE

I use "C. Rains" to keep from being discriminated against. Evaluate my script, not my gender.

CARLA

You guys hole up in the weirdest places. Commissary, Starbucks, Trailers. Closets. Under tables. On sofas. In corners. Surprised we didn't find anyone writing in a port-a-potty.

CHARLOTTE

That's reserved for writers named "John."

STAN

Why here?

CHARLOTTE

McDonalds was filled up.

CARLA

Thought everybody had their own office.

CHARLOTTE

Not me. This is my first paid writing assignment.

STAN

We can tell. It stinks.

CHARLOTTE

Can't be that bad, or you'd be wearing nose plugs.

CARLA

Save the humor for the script. It needs it.

CHARLOTTE

Please, I'm on deadline. What?

STAN

You might say we're from the bomb squad.

CARLA

Yeah. We're here to make sure a bomb doesn't go off and detonate our careers.

STAN

We're mega-stars. We don't want to go supernova before our time, if you know what I mean.

CHARLOTTE

I know you. Stan Richards, star of DC's *Cosmic Squad* and Warner's thriller *Poison River*. Cost \$250 million and \$74 million against a gross of \$996 million and \$646 million. Carla Snow, star of *Dark Heart* and *No Room to Run*. Cost \$20 million and \$35 million against a gross of \$235 million and \$512 million.

CARLA

You know stats.

STAN

Do you know scripts?

CHARLOTTE

If you think the script's bad, talk to Harlan.

CARLA

He won't listen to us.

STAN

Our demands pissed him off.

CARLA

He can handle big budgets but not big egos.

STAN

Big stars have big egos. Goes with the territory.

CHARLOTTE

So you figured an end run around the producer to the writer would get you what you want.

CARLA

You got it.

CHARLOTTE

What if I won't?

STAN

We'll get you fired.

CHARLOTTE

For doing my job.

CARLA

For sexual harassment. Racist comments. We'll find something.

CHARLOTTE

Quite an imagination. You should be writers.

STAN

We've got clout. We'll tell Harlan. If he won't listen, we'll go above his head. We'll stall, call in sick, threaten to quit. All of the above. Whatever it takes. But you'll be gone.

CARLA

Newbies don't last. Write that on your tombstone.

CHARLOTTE

Okay, how can I help you?

STAN

My character is one-dimensional. Static. The Prince should have a secret. He wants to transition into a woman, which gives Cindy more to deal with.

CHARLOTTE

Like a reverse of *The Crying Game*.

STAN

Yeah. After his transformation, Cindy dumps him because she falls in love with a goat.

CHARLOTTE

Why a goat?

STAN

She's an animal lover!

(laughs)

Get it?

CHARLOTTE

Unfortunately. Does it have to be a goat?

STAN

A horse. A cow. A giraffe. Doesn't matter. As long as it's an animal.

CHARLOTTE

It would be cheaper if the animal came from the U.S. Exotic animals cost more.

STAN

Yeah. Harlan will appreciate it if we keep the budget down.

CHARLOTTE

Is that all?

STAN

For the time being.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Richards, this is a PG rated film. PG-13 tops. Cinderella can't fall in love with a woman or with a goat or any other animal. That would notch us an R- or a NC-17 rating, and the studio won't go for that. They're counting on mega-money from China. All the kiddies and their parents. Multiple times.

STAN

Either would be a great twist for the film. No one will see it coming.

CHARLOTTE

If I put any of that in, no one will see it. You'll be playing to empty seats.

STAN

Admit it. Great ideas.

CHARLOTTE

Great ideas, but not for this film.

STAN

Think about it, will you?

CHARLOTTE

I'll mull it over.

STAN

Thanks.

CARLA

My turn. Cindy needs more of a back story. Who is she? Where did she come from? Why does she have nightmares?

CHARLOTTE

Nightmares?

CARLA

Cindy has nightmares because she realizes the gardener molested her.

CHARLOTTE

What gardener? When?

CARLA

When he kidnapped her. The Lindberg baby-grab all over again.

CHARLOTTE

How does this affect the story?

CARLA

Cindy has all this rage against men. So she distrusts the Prince. He's abusive and a bed-wetter.

STAN

Great! I like it!

CHARLOTTE

Am I supposed to show this rape in flashback? In a dream sequence?

CARLA

When she's talking to her psychiatrist.

CHARLOTTE

Psychiatrist?

CARLA

Her second one. She killed the first one. A man.

CHARLOTTE

So Cindy goes to prison?

CARLA

Now you're talking.

CHARLOTTE

How does she get to the ball?

CARLA

She breaks out, dummy.

CHARLOTTE

Does she kill a guard?

CARLA

If you want. Hotwires a car, hits an old lady. Hides out in Goodwill, steals a dress. Goes to ball.

CHARLOTTE

If I'm hearing right, you're adding kidnapping, rape, murder, and theft to a fairy tale. Over and above the sexual issues, the abusive behavior, and potty-training problems Mr. Richards wants to add. Is this a fair summary?

CARLA

Close enough.

STAN

Yeah.

CHARLOTTE

Lots of food for thought here. Your suggestions are certainly daring, I'll give you that.

STAN

It's a reboot. Anything goes. Remember that.

CARLA

It will be a blockbuster. You'll talk to Harlan?

CHARLOTTE

After the rewrites. Then pitch it. Fair enough?

STAN

Fair enough.

CARLA

Yeah.

They shake hands.

STAN

Gotta go. Getting my star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

CARLA

Got a talk show gig. Jimmy Kimmel Live! *[for another current talk show]*

CHARLOTTE

Thanks for stopping by.

STAN

Want an autographed picture? Both of us.

CHARLOTTE

Sure. Send it to the studio, care of "C. Rains."

CARLA

You got it.

They exit. HARLAN HUGGINS,
the film's producer enters.

HARLAN

Just saw Stan and Carla. What were they doing here?

CHARLOTTE

Demanded re-writes. Thought they could bully me.

HARLAN

They bully everybody. What did they want?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing much. Just stand Cinderella on her head.

HARLAN

How so?

CHARLOTTE

Stan wants the Prince to transition into a woman. He's abusive and a bed-wetter. Cindy dumps him for a goat. According to Carla, Cindy's been kidnapped, raped, killed her psychiatrist. She goes to prison, escapes, kills a guard, highjacks a car, runs over an old lady, hides in Goodwill, steals a dress, goes to ball. The usual nonsense.

HARLAN

That's the price we pay for talent. We endure their egos and tolerate their tantrums.

CHARLOTTE

If we go with their ideas, Cinderella will be D.O.A.

HARLAN

I'll deal with them. Don't worry.

CHARLOTTE

Thanks.

HARLAN

Got my new title yet?

CHARLOTTE

Cinderella Unleashed.

HARLAN

How so?

CHARLOTTE

Instead of a fairy godmother, there's a genie---

HARLAN

---a genie? Where'd he come from?

CHARLOTTE

The genie is a “she.”

HARLAN

Well, I don’t know.

CHARLOTTE

It makes “cents.”

HARLAN

I don’t follow.

CHARLOTTE

Hollywood has entered the age of female empowerment. We have more women producers, directors, and artisans working than ever before. Stars clamor for female-driven scripts. We have Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel, Jane Foster, and more. The time is now, Harlan. Opportunity means success, and success means---

She gestures to Harlan.

HARLAN

Money. Mucho money.

CHARLOTTE

Bingo. We have a winner! Cinderella, the new superhero and her sidekick, Ms. Genie.

HARLAN

Brilliant! A super Cindy and a genie from a lamp.

CHARLOTTE

A lamp? So cliché. She’s in an old iPhone 5 Cindy found at a landfill.

HARLAN

Cool. How does Cindy get super?

CHARLOTTE

Because Cindy frees her, Genie grants her wish. She gives Cindy the power to induce remote tickling in anybody. The victims laugh so hard, sometimes they wet themselves.

HARLAN

Wardrobe will have a blast designing a costume for her. Maybe have an insignia of a feather on her suit. When does Cindy use her power?

CHARLOTTE

At the end. Cindy unleashes her power on her step-mother. Fade out. A teaser for the sequel.

HARLAN

Thinking ahead. I like it.

CHARLOTTE

Part two is how Cindy copes with her superpower. She discovers she has a weakness. Any intake of chocolate renders her powerless for a day unless she eats a hot chili pepper.

HARLAN

Awesome. Can't wait to see it. What about my Transformers idea?

CHARLOTTE

Done. Look.

Harlan moves to the table as Charlotte scrolls through the Transformer scene. Harlan makes guttural sounds as he reads.

HARLAN

Good. I like how Cindy's coach transforms from a pumpkin and stomps the evil step-sisters. Let's push this Transformer idea.

CHARLOTTE

Okay.

HARLAN

Mother Nature in motion, Trees transform. Rivers and mountains transform. Wind, snow, and

HARLAN, cont.

rain transform. Mother Nature unleashed. Like Cindy. Think you can do that?

CHARLOTTE

I think I can "transform" this script into your liking.

HARLAN

All righty then.

Harlan's cell rings. He takes the call.

HARLAN

Make it good. I'm in a meeting.

(pause)

Mr. Gotthorn. Yes, sir. What can I do for you?

(pause)

No, I didn't know. First I've heard. Thanks for the heads-up. Yes, sir. Thank you. Goodbye.

Puts phone away. He takes out a small pill bottle and swallows a couple of antacid tablets.

Every time the head of the studio calls, my gastritis flares up. I have stomach lining like Swiss cheese.

CHARLOTTE

What's up?

HARLAN

The Chinese investors [*for some other foreign backer*] pulled out, so the studio is cancelling the film.

CHARLOTTE

What? They nixed a two hundred million dollar film? Stan and Carla are going to be pissed!

HARLAN

That's the only good news. Pre-production has already spent ten million on sets!

CHARLOTTE

Oh, my!

HARLAN

That's the way the franchise-cookie crumbles.

CHARLOTTE

My career, too.

HARLAN

Don't give up. You're talented. I'll try to get you on another re-write. May take a few weeks.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe we can salvage this.

HARLAN

How?

CHARLOTTE

Turn it into a low-budget horror film.

HARLAN

Compete with Blumhouse?

CHARLOTTE

That's the beauty of it. Low cost, low risk, big profit potential.

HARLAN

Pitch me.

CHARLOTTE

Cinderella as a zombie.

HARLAN

For real?

CHARLOTTE

No, not real. A parody. Like *Shaun of the Dead*.

HARLAN

Gotthorn likes that movie.

CHARLOTTE

Horror is hot. Comic-horror even hotter. *Army of the Dead, Zombie Land: Double-Tap, Freaky.*
[or more current films]

HARLAN

I know. Tell me more.

CHARLOTTE

Cindy's Asian. Gets bitten by an infected pig. She "transforms"!

HARLAN

Like it.

CHARLOTTE

Call it *Night of the Deadly Ball*.

HARLAN

Possible. If we can keep it under five million. I'll talk to Gotthorn.

On his way out---

Start a treatment!

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

Charlotte, got a new title yet?

HARLAN

Cinderella Unleashed.

CHARLOTTE

Like it. How's my Transformer idea?

HARLAN

Done.

CHARLOTTE

Harlan moves to the table as Charlotte

scrolls through the Transformer scene.

HARLAN

Good. I like how Cindy's coach transforms from a pumpkin and stomps the evil step-sisters.

CHARLOTTE

Would you believe Stan and Carla demanded re-writes? Stan wants the prince to transition into a woman. Carla wants Cindy to be a body-builder who arm-wrestles the prince for a kiss.

HARLAN

That's the price we pay for top-notch talent. Ego has its perks.

CHARLOTTE

Stressful on me, though.

HARLAN

Don't sweat it. Just got word the Chinese backer pulled out, so the studio cancelled the film. Sorry. That's the way the franchise-cookie crumbles.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe we can salvage this. Turn it into a horror film.

HARLAN

Tell me more.

CHARLOTTE

Cinderella as a zombie.

HARLAN

Give me a draft.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Cinderella Unleashed* evolved from a one-minute play I had written for a contest. In that iteration, the only characters were the screenwriter and the producer. I knew there were situations I wanted to add to flesh it out. I have always been

fascinated with the machinations of movie-making and agree with William Goldman's assessment that "nobody knows anything" about the film business. Realizing that there is no logic driving which movies get made, I wanted to show that the fate of a film can hinge on good/bad luck, whim, or unforeseen circumstances. The behind-the-scenes drama is often more exciting than the movie being made. Among my literary influences I count Mark Twain, Stan Freberg, and Art Buchwald.

AUTHOR BIO: I was born in the Golden Age of Television, so I guess that's why I like writing plays: hearing the sounds of people talking; I grew up in Syracuse, NY, I attended George Washington and Syracuse Universities, majoring in speech and theatre; I served in the Navy during the Vietnam conflict; I toured one year as a children's theatre actor; I worked retail jobs until I became a teacher of English and theatre; I retired from Pahrump Valley High School in Nevada; I am an avid supporter of the Utah Shakespeare Festival. I have plays published with Heuer, Brooklyn Publishers, Big Dog Plays, Heartland Plays, ArtAge Senior Theatre, and Smith & Kraus.