

STEPMOTHER

(watching BELINDA go)

Should I have educated her? Motherhood is such a series of difficult decisions...

(back to CINDERELLA)

I'm sure a trade could be arranged. You can have that "book" back... if you reject the Prince.

CINDERELLA

I can't "reject the Prince"! Charming?!? You know we can't change our stories!

STEPMOTHER

Cinderella. Why do you think I do this? Night after night? If I didn't think *someday* there might be a different outcome? If I didn't think at SOME point the Narrator might be "persuaded" to have the Prince choose either of my perfect—

(noticing BETANY)

Betany! No fluids! You bloat, and it's instant!

(back to CINDERELLA)

Sweetheart—if the Narrator *deigns* to make an adjustment, that's what the Great Quill is for! He wears that key for a reason.

CINDERELLA

But he never uses it...

STEPMOTHER

Sure he does. Sparingly. Remember how *dark* our tale used to be? My daughters' eyes used to get pecked out in the finale! And I used to chop Belinda's toes off, sever Betany's Achilles tendon— remember how it used to curl up, like a hound on a winter's hearth? Oh, the lengths I'd go to.

(a wink)