

# The Blue Castle

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A Musical Adaptation in Two Acts

Book and Lyrics by Jenn Kirchner

Music by Eliana Coe and Jenn Kirchner

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We all know we're going to die; what's  
important is the kind of men and women  
we are in the face of this.

—Anne Lamott,  
*Bird By Bird*

## Setting

Muskoka, Ontario  
1920

## Cast Of Characters

VALANCY STIRLING

BEN SHRIKE

WOMAN 1

Olive, Cissy, Dancer

MAN 1

Abel, Uncle Wellington, Dancer

WOMAN 2

Mother, Dancer

MAN 2

Uncle James, Dr. Trent, Dancer

WOMAN 3

Aunt Stickles, Receptionist, Dancer

MAN 3

Uncle Bernard, Dancer

## Musical Numbers

### Act One

1. The Blue Castle
2. The Stirling Way
3. John Foster
4. No More
5. Dinner With the Stirlings
6. No More Reprise
7. Damn It
8. Too Many Stirlings
9. Shula Roo
10. To Feel Free
11. In Love
12. Letting Go
13. I Choose You

### Act Two

14. Little Old Maid
15. Today and Tomorrow
16. Sudden Shock
17. John Foster Reprise
18. Letting Go Reprise
19. The Argument
20. Finale

ACT I  
Scene 1

(Valancy sits in bed and addresses the audience)

VALANCY

It was on the day of my twenty-ninth birthday that I was faced with the reality that I—Valancy Stirling—who had never lived, was about to die

AND IT STARTED,  
AS ALL TALES DO,  
IN A MYSTICAL LAND  
FAR AWAY...

(Valancy disappears mysteriously. Woman 2 stands onstage to entice the audience and the ensemble into the world of The Blue Castle)

WOMAN 2

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED  
OF A PLACE THAT'S MORE THAN IT SEEMED?  
SHROUDED IN MIST,  
WHERE DUSK AND DAWN INTERMIX,  
AND THE SAPPHIRE HAZE  
THAT COMES WITH THE WAKING OF DAYS  
CASTS A HUE OF AZURE,  
AS YOU SPY THE CASTLE,  
THE BLUE CASTLE.

COMPANY

HAVE YOU EVER WISHED  
FOR A LIFE YOU ONLY JUST MISSED?  
TO FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT  
TO RULE OVER ALL THAT'S IN SIGHT.  
HIDDEN AWAY  
FROM THOSE WHO WON'T GIVE YOU A SAY,  
YOUR FATE IS YOUR OWN  
AS YOU GO TO THE CASTLE,  
THE BLUE CASTLE

SURROUNDED BY BEAUTY  
WE DANCE THROUGH THE NIGHT,  
FILLED UP WITH LAUGHTER  
AND FILLED UP WITH LIGHT.

WOMEN

THE LOVELIEST LADIES

MEN

THE HANDSOMEST NIGHTS

COMPANY

ALL WAITING TO SEE  
THE DEAREST OF SIGHTS:  
THE WOMAN WHO STUNS AND WHO DAZZLES.  
THE TREASURE WITHIN THE BLUE CASTLE

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT  
YOU MIGHT BE WHAT YOU'RE NOT?

WOMAN 1

BEAUTY AND LOOKS  
THE KIND YOU READ OF IN BOOKS

COMPANY

REGAL AND FAIR,  
ALL OF THIS WAITING JUST THERE  
WAITING FOR DREAMERS LIKE YOU  
INSIDE THE CASTLE  
THE BLUE CASTLE

(A bold knight enters, his face is obscured)

BEN

I'VE COME FROM AFAR  
FOR A GLIMPSE OF YOUR STAR  
AND PERHAPS TO WIN HER IN BATTLE,  
THE BEAUTY WHO RULES THIS BLUE CASTLE!

WOMAN 3

SHE WAITS FOR HER LOVE

MAN 1

SHE WON'T SETTLE FOR LESS

WOMAN 2 & MAN 2

BUT WHO HE COULD BE  
IS ANYONE'S GUESS

MAN 3

MANY HAVE TRIED

WOMAN 1

BUT ALL SHE'S DECLINED

COMPANY

THIS MYSTERIOUS WOMAN

(Valancy enters grandly)

VALANCY

THE CHOICE MUST BE MINE.

(Valancy and Ben sing to each other)

HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN  
A LOVE YOU FEEL DEEP IN YOUR BONES?  
LIKE WAKING FROM SLEEP,

BEN

FINALLY HAVING A TREASURE TO KEEP.

BOTH

JUST ME AND YOU,  
BOUND BY A LOVE DEEP AND TRUE,  
AND NO ONE CAN TAKE US AWAY  
FROM THIS CASTLE,  
THE BLUE CASTLE.

COMPANY

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED  
OF A PLACE THAT'S MORE THAN IT SEEMED?  
WHERE MAGIC IS FOUND,  
AND YOUR HEART SETS TO POUND-ING,

LIGHT FILLS THE AIR,  
NO BEAUTY ON EARTH CAN COMPARE,  
CURSES AND PAIN MELT AWAY,  
IN THIS CASTLE.  
THE BLUE —

(Valancy and Ben come closer and closer to their first kiss, but at the last moment Valancy recoils, clutching her chest. She falls on her bed as the ensemble melts offstage. The pain in Valancy's chest subsides)

VALANCY (acapella)

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED  
OF A PLACE THAT'S MORE THAN IT SEEMED?  
WHERE CURSES AND PAIN MELT AWAY,  
IN THIS CASTLE.  
THE BLUE —

(interrupted by a knock)

STICKLES

Valancy? Are you awake?

VALANCY

I'm awake, Aunt Stickles

STICKLES

Remember that your birthday is no excuse to be late to breakfast!

VALANCY

I'll be right down!

(We hear Stickles leave)

VALANCY

Right down into Hell. Must I always return to dreary, hopeless life? The Blue Castle is my true home—spiritually—but there are some mornings when it's almost impossible to find my way into it. Reality presses too heavily on me. I wish I could cry, but I know where that will lead...

MOTHER

(in a daydream)

Valancy, why are your eyes red? Did you not sleep? Are you not feeling well? You should be taking pills, like your aunt Stickles. Appearances must be kept up! Do you mean to ruin your complexion? Have you—



VALANCY

And suppose if I told her the truth! Mother, I'm crying because I'm a hopeless old maid! I'm a disappointingly homely girl in a family known for their beauty. I'm twenty-nine today, unmarried, and have never been desired by any man.

MOTHER

(making a face)

It is not maidenly to think about MEN!

(Valancy laughs and her mother disappears)

VALANCY

No, I am so I am cowed and subdued and snubbed and overridden that I'd never dare. Daring leads to nothing but sulky silence from mother and pedantic lectures from Aunt Stickles, not to mention what the rest of the Stirling clan would say.

(The other family members appear)

VALANCY

Uncle James would—

JAMES

Whisper is Valancy's ear: "Not thinking of getting married yet, my dear Doss?" and then go off into the bellow of laughter with which he invariably concludes his dull remarks

VALANCY

And then Uncle Bernard might—

BERNARD

Ask some of his abominable conundrums, between wheezy chuckles, and answer them himself. What is the difference between you, dear Doss, and a mouse?

VALANCY

I have no option but to ask, "what?"

BERNARD

The mouse wishes to harm the cheese and Doss wishes to charm the he's.  
(laughs)

VALANCY

Uncle Wellington—

WELLINGTON

of whom dear Doss stood in abject fear, would tell her about his daughter, Olive's, new chifon. Oh, and isn't Olive's fiancé just the perfect match!

VALANCY

Valancy would have to look as pleased and interested as if the dress and fiancé had been hers

WELLINGTON

Or else Uncle Wellington would be offended. And Valancy had long ago decided that she would rather offend God than Uncle Wellington, because God might forgive her but Uncle Wellington never would.

VALANCY

And, of course, Cousin Olive—

OLIVE

The wonder girl of the Stirling clan,

VALANCY

Who had everything Valancy had not

OLIVE

Beauty, popularity, love...

(she shows off her engagement ring)

would show off her beauty and flaunt her popularity in Valancy's dazzled, envious eyes.

VALANCY

I must be honest with myself, I do envy her. Olive had managed to achieve the only success a woman is afforded in this community: getting a man. And what's more, a wealthy man. Oh, if only they knew—in my Blue Castle, I could have any man I desire! In my day-dreams I can let myself go splendidly, But with the Stirlings, I never dare. No, I am utterly, ashamedly, unalterably *afraid* of the whole lot of them. So there you are.

(Family disappears)

Which is why today will be another dreary day like all the days that have preceded it, full of meaningless little tasks, joyless and unimportant, that benefit nobody.... Might as well begin.

Scene 2

(Transition: The breakfast parlor. Mother and Aunt Stickles are already seated. Valancy rushes in and sits)

MOTHER

GOOD MORNING, DOSS

VALANCY

GOOD MORNING, MOTHER

STICKLES

GOOD MORNING, DOSS

VALANCY

GOOD MORNING, AUNT

MOTHER

YOU KNOW THE RULES:  
BREAKFAST AT EIGHT  
EVERY DAY,  
NEVER STRAY  
AND THAT'S THE STIRLING WAY.

STICKLES

ISN'T IT COLD TODAY?

MOTHER

I'M NEVER COLD

STICKLES

IF ONLY WE HAD A FIRE

MOTHER

FIRE'S ARE EXTRAVAGANT  
I WONT HAVE THEM LIT  
A DAY AFTER MAY  
FOR THAT'S THE STIRLING WAY.

STICKLES

THE RAIN IS SURE TO POUR  
AND ON DOSS' BIG DAY TOO

MOTHER

WHAT A DREADFUL INSOLENCENCE  
DOSS, EAT YOUR PORRIDGE

STICKLES

WHEN PICKING UP THE PAPER  
I COULD HEAR THE DROPLETS MUTTER

MOTHER

DOSS, SIT UP STRAIGHT

STICKLES

DID YOU SEE THE PRICE OF BUTTER?

MOTHER

ROBBERY, I MUST SAY  
I NEVER PAID  
BUT HALF AS MUCH AS FOOLS THESE DAYS  
AND THAT'S THE STIRLING WAY

(Valancy sneezes)

MOTHER AND STICKLES

DOSS!?!?!

STICKLES

A LADY MUSTN'T SNEEZE!

MOTHER

IT'S IMPROPER AND IT'S RUDE

STICKLES

UNFOUNDED AND QUITE CRUDE

MOTHER

DON'T DRAW ATTENTION TO YOURSELF,  
FOR SHAME!  
IF YOU DON'T HOLD IT IN,  
THERE'S ONLY YOU TO BLAME

STICKLES

PERHAPS SHE'S CATCHING MUMPS  
I ALWAYS SAID SHE WOULD

VALANCY

I'VE NEVER HAD THE MUMPS,  
I DON'T SEE WHY I SHOULD

MOTHER

DOSS, IS THAT IMPERTINENCE!?  
HOW DARE YOU SPEAK THAT WAY,  
DO YOU EVER THINK OF HOW IT MAKES ME FEEL?

STICKLES

DOSS, DON'T YOU KNOW  
YOU ONLY HAVE THE ONE MOTHER  
A CHERISHED GIFT FROM GOD  
YOU MUST ALWAYS BE CONSCIOUS OF HER

VALANCY

YOU'RE RIGHT,  
I APOLOGIZE,  
I NEVER MEANT OFFENSE,  
PLEASE FORGIVE MY ERROR

STICKLES

WHAT ARE YOU TO DO WITH HER?

MOTHER

DOSS, WHAT SHALL BE DONE WITH YOU,  
LITTLE OLD MAID,

AND GETTING OLDER BY THE DAY

STICKLES

AT 21 I WAS MARRIED

MOTHER

AND I AT 17.  
THAT'S THE STIRLING WAY

MOTHER AND STICKLES

WITH ALL YOUR FUSSING AND COMPLAINING,  
LOOKING OUT FOR YOU IS DRAINING

MOTHER

DOSS, EAT YOUR CRUSTS  
DON'T TOSS YOUR FOOD OUT  
LIKE OUR TRUST

STICKLES

LIKE OUR TRUST  
SURELY THE PANTRY WILL LEAK WITH RAIN

MOTHER

I SUPPOSE WE MUST HAVE ABEL GAY COME TO FIX IT

STICKLES

ROARING ABEL IS AN IRREVERENT SINNER  
I'D SOONER NIX IT

MOTHER

IT'S TRUE, ONE OUGHT NOT ASSOCIATE  
WITH SUCH A WICKED REPROBATE,  
YOU KNOW THAT I'M ONE TO APPRECIATE  
THE SOLID STIRLING WAY.  
AND YET, HE'S THE ONLY ONE HERE TO DO  
SUCH ODDS AND ENDS THAT MUST HAVE DOING

STICKLES

ODD TO NO END INDEED  
LORD KNOWS WHAT ABEL GAY'S GOT BREWING  
I HEARD HE WAS SEEN  
DRIVING THROUGH PORT LAWRENCE  
WITH THAT AWFUL CRIM'NAL  
BEN SHRIKE  
THE BOTH OF THEM DRUNK,

MOTHER

GOOD RIDDENCE!

STICKLES

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE SHAME?  
JUST THE THOUGHT MAKES ME WRITHE IN PAIN

MOTHER

ANYONE WHO BEFRIENDS  
THE LIKES OF THAT BEN SHRIKE  
SHOULD EXPECT THE HAND OF RIGHTEOUS PROVIDENCE  
DEMAND THAT THEY PAY,  
YES THAT'S THE STIRLING WAY

VALANCY

(Turns to the audience with a groan)

OH, THIS IS MADDENING,  
SADDENING,  
I'M LOSING MY MIND WITH THIS  
DRUDGERY,  
BEGRUDGERY,  
I WISH I COULD FIND  
SENSIBILITY,  
VITALITY,  
INSTEAD OF THESE BLIND,  
EMPTY WOMEN,  
SAYING THE SAME THINGS  
DAY AFTER DAY,  
THAT'S JUST THEIR WAY.  
EATING PORRIDGE I LOATHE,  
WEARING TIGHT FITTING CLOTHES,  
RATIONING THE CREAM ,  
I JUST WANT TO SCREAM  
THEY MAKE ME FEEL...

DEAD  
BUT ALL I CAN SAY IS:

Mother, will you please call me Valancy instead of Doss?

MOTHER  
—well, whatever is the matter with Doss?

VALANCY  
It's... I... I don't like it. It's childish and I'm twenty-nine today—

MOTHER  
I wouldn't go around proclaiming it, my dear! I don't need any more reminding of my disappointments.

VALANCY  
(to the audience) I needn't any reminding that I'm a disappointment. No one in the whole world needs me, or would miss anything from life if I dropped suddenly out of it. I've never had so much as a friend.

MOTHER  
If you're quite finished with your breakfast, I've left the quilt that needs piecing in the drawing room.

VALANCY  
I hate piecing quilts. This house is already full of quilts, there is no need for another one. Yet idleness is a cardinal sin in the Stirling household.

On this day I spent only ten minutes in idleness—I know because mother makes me tot them up in a little book and pray over them on Sundays—but those ten glorious minutes were spent when I went to fetch a thimble from my room and happened to glance into the library book I had: *Thistle Harvest*, one of John Foster's works, nature books, all about the woods and birds and bugs and things like that—not a novel, of course. I'm not permitted to read novels. And it is only under great protest that I am allowed to read even John Foster, as it is evident that I enjoy him.

FOR WHEN I READ HIS WORDS,  
I FEEL A KIND OF THRILL,  
MY SPIRIT CAN'T BE STILL.

HIS WORDS LEAD ME TO THE WOODS,  
WHERE I FEEL LIKE I AM HOME  
IN A WAY I'VE NEVER KNOWN.

I CAN SEE IN HIS WORDS  
WHO I MIGHT HAVE BEEN,



IF JUST FOR ONCE I'D WIN,  
  
AND I BELIEVE BY HIS WORDS  
THAT THERE'S MAGIC,  
AND THERE'S BEAUTY ,  
AND THERE'S LOVE  
IN THE WOODS

MOTHER  
DOSS? What're you doing up there by yourself?

(Valancy drops the book in alarm)

VALANCY  
Coming!

(As she picks up the book she glances at the page and  
we hear J.F. voice)

J.F. (PLAYED BY BEN)

TO BE AFRAID  
IS THE GREATEST OF SINS,  
FOR THROUGH FEAR IS MADE  
ALL THE EVIL THAT'S BEEN.  
IT'S A CAGE,  
IT'S TRAP ,  
IT'S A SERPENT ENTWINING,  
EXACTING,  
DEGRADING,  
SO LIFE HAS NO MEANING—  
TO LIVE IN FEAR

(Valancy shuts the book and runs back to her mother)

VALANCY  
I—Mother, may I—that is—I think I—I might go into town today

MOTHER  
Don't be foolish Doss, it's only just stopped raining and the damp weather is bad  
for your colds. Besides, what could you have to do in town?

STICKLES  
We are out of tea... perhaps Olive could go with her

VALANCY  
(to audience)

Olive would not take kindly to that idea

MOTHER

I suppose... but, Doss, you went into town only yesterday, why couldn't you have remembered tea then? It is a waste of your time to wander back and forth from town everyday

VALANCY

Of what value is my time?

MOTHER

Don't speak in that tone to *me!* Go quickly and fetch Olive; you are free to go into town as long as she is with you.

STICKLES

You must remember to wear your galoshes and your flannel petticoat, it's dreadful wet outside, and you know how you are about the flu...

VALANCY

(to the audience)

I've never had the flu, only horrible colds each winter. And I'd rather eat the rubber plant than have to wear my dreadful grey petticoat.

MOTHER

Doss, go and do as you're told!

VALANCY

Of course, Mother