



“Ghost in the Camera”
A Play in Two Acts

By Kevin T. Baldwin

“Ghost in the Camera”

CAST of Characters:

Mrs. Lethou, An internationally renowned government scientist
Mabel Abramson, graduate student, apprentice for Mrs. Lethou
Meier Fievel, an international events reporter for a US publication
Veronica Barnes-Feivel, a socialite, married to Meier
Tepes, Prince of Snagovia, a province just north of Romania
Cassandra Bonham-Pembleton, assistant veterinarian, animal biologist
Sage Pembleton, Cassandra’s husband, a farmer
Nina Swenson-Hancock, an unemployed New Yorker
Michael Hancock, Nina’s husband, a comic book creator
The Queen, of Snagovia
The Queen’s Minister
Mistress of Snagovian Etiquette, wife of the Minister
Marco, a Thief
Ilona, Snagovian Waitress
Basarab, Ilona’s six year old son

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS:

Flight Attendant
London Nurse
London Doctor
Snagovian Embassy Servant
London Psychiatrist
Snagovian Palace Security Guard
Offstage Announcer
Additional Palace GUARDS
Scottish Party Guest # 1
Scottish Party Guest # 2
Second Snagovian Waitress
Snagovian Nurse
Snagovian Embassy GUESTS
Bridal Shower GUESTS
Airline Passengers

Time: The Present

The Place: Europe!

Synopsis:

It is two years since the events of “Legend of the Rain Wolf”. Most of the original characters from “Mystery of the White Spider” have graduated from Millborough University. Mabel Abramson is apprentice to Mr. and Mrs. Lethou, government scientists who have started their own business “Lethou Industries”. They also happen to be the parents of her late friend, Jazz, who perished at the end of “Legend of the Rain Wolf”.

Mrs. Lethou gets Mabel a job as a photographer to supplement her income while she accompanies Mrs. Lethou on business to London. While attending a bridal reception at the Snagovian Embassy, Mabel bumps into her friends Veronica and Meier. Meier is covering the reception for the international section of his US newspaper.

Later, Mabel wanders away from the reception looking for the elusive Prince Tepes of Snagovia. She winds up in an isolated hallway where she hears a noise coming from a locked room. As she enters the room, she sees Meier lying unconscious on the floor. The shrouded figures of two apparent thieves push Mabel aside and, as her camera starts flashing wildly, she stumbles and falls. Before losing consciousness Mabel thinks she sees the image of her late friend, Jazz.

Later, Mabel recovers in a hospital where she learns Meier has been blinded due to his injury.

Investigating the events of the crime leads Mabel back to the Snagovian Embassy where she meets and falls in love with Prince Tepes.

Mabel and Tepes plan to marry in Snagovia. The Queen pays for Mrs. Lethou, Veronica and Meier, along with Mabel’s friends Cassandra, Sage, Nina and Michael to attend.

As her friends arrive, Mabel tells them that she suspects that things in Snagovia are not as they appear and she needs her friends help to investigate and solve the mystery of the “Ghost in the Camera”!

Act One

Act One, Scene One Airplane

Time: Present

(As the curtain rises, we are on a plane full of passengers, including MRS. LETHOU and MABEL ABRAMSON who are seated next to each other. MRS. LETHOU is reading a magazine. MABEL is squirming in her seat. MABEL's phone keeps ringing in an annoying ringtone. She silences it)

MRS. LETHOU: Aren't you going to answer that?

MABEL: Nah, it's just my mom. She keeps checking in to see if I landed safely. She worries about me a lot. Always has. She can't accept that I'm an adult now.

MRS. LETHOU: We're all like that, dear. I'll bet she pushes you to get married too, huh?

MABEL: You know it, especially ever since Michael and Nina, Sage and Cassandra, and Veronica and Meier all got married. But I keep telling her that the man I marry has to be really special.

MRS. LETHOU: Special how, Mabel?

MABEL: Well first of all he has to recognize my brilliance. (BOTH laugh) No, really. He has to be secure in himself, you know what I mean? (MRS. LETHOU goes back to reading her magazine) I don't want just a husband. I want a "soul mate". (After a beat) Oh, and he has to like Bee Gees music.

MRS. LETHOU: (Slowly puts the magazine down and looks at MABEL) Bee Gees music? Are you serious?

MABEL: Oh, yeah, totally. My dad took me to see them when I was a kid. He was a photographer for a rock magazine and he got sent to cover one of their concerts.

MRS. LETHOU: Sounds like he had a fun job.

MABEL: Uh-huh. But the Bee Gees was great for him because he just loved their music.

MRS. LETHOU: That's nice.

MABEL: Yeah. It was one of the most fun times we ever spent together just before he died. So it means a lot to me.

MRS. LETHOU: (Shocked) Oh. I didn't know. You've never mentioned...I mean...I'm so sorry to hear that, Mabel.

MABEL: No, really. It's okay. (MABEL's phone starts ringing again) He was sick for a long time. I have nothing but good memories of him.

MRS. LETHOU: That's good.

MABEL: Yeah, and my mom and me became real close through it all, too, which has been really...(MABEL answers the phone) What? What? What? Why do you keep calling me? Why? I told you I'd call when we land. Now quit worrying. Stop bugging me and go back to sleep! All right? Good! I-- (MABEL holds phone away for a second. She looks at MRS. LETHOU for a beat then speaks into the phone again) I love you, Mom. Enjoy your cruise. Hey! Got your lap top? Good. And don't forget your laser pointer. Bye. (Hangs up. Starts to wiggle in her seat again. Struggles with something under her. Pulls out a headset. The headset has no cord) Darn.

MRS. LETHOU: What is it?

MABEL: I must have sat on the headset. It got all mangled up under my...under my...seat.

(MABEL pulls out a mangled cord just as a FLIGHT ATTENDANT comes up to her and MRS. LETHOU. MABEL immediately hides her headset)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Would you like a headset?

MABEL: Wow. You're good. (MRS. LETHOU nudges MABEL) I mean, why yes, thanks. (FLIGHT ATTENDANT hands MABEL a new headset. MABEL puts on the headset)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Is this your first time to London, ladies?

MRS. LETHOU: It is for her. I've been here many times. Which reminds me, I know we had that delay in New York.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Yes, Mum.

MRS. LETHOU: Taking that into consideration, about what time do you think we will arrive at Heathrow?

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Three thirty A.M. Mum.

MABEL: (Takes off headset) Actually, it'll be four thirty-seven A.M.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: I'm sorry, Miss, but an hour ago we confirmed with Heathrow Ground Control that it would be three thirty.

MABEL: Absolutely, but I guarantee you it'll be four thirty-seven. Winds coming off the ocean will give us some turbulence to deal with, making us late.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Miss, I wouldn't worry. I think Ground Control would know better if...(There is a high pitched bell sound followed by the VOICE OF THE PILOT)

PILOT: (In a British accent) Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We just wanted to let you know that we have been informed by the folks at Heathrow that due to a spot of inclement weather en route our flight will be delayed. We will be landing at Heathrow Airport at four thirty-seven A.M.

(General disgruntled reactions from PASSENGERS)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: (Stunned) My goodness, Miss. How could you possibly have known that?

MRS. LETHOU: I apologize. She does that to people.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: (Still bewildered) Very good, Mum. I shall bring you your pillows shortly. (To HERSELF) And myself a tranquilizer, I think. (FLIGHT ATTENDANT exits)

MABEL: Sorry, Mrs. Lethou.

MRS. LETHOU: Mabel, you are a brilliant young woman which is why we have enjoyed having you in our apprenticeship this past year, but on occasion you do need to let other people provide answers.

MABEL: I know. I just can't help it sometimes. Thanks again for bringing me along on this trip. Lethou Research really seems to be taking off these days.

MRS. LETHOU: Yes, thanks to a few government contracts like this one in London.

MABEL: Too bad Mr. Lethou couldn't come.

MRS. LETHOU: Well, with our latest grandchild just born, one of us needed to stay home. And since he was close to completing his anti-matter array project, we decided it should be him. (Looks at MABEL's wrist) I noticed you have on Jazz's watch. I haven't seen you wear it before.

MABEL: Yeah. You know, it was weird. She loaned it to me in Canada, remember? I forgot to give it back and she never asked me for it and then, y'know, she died. After that, I stuck it in a drawer and haven't thought about it for like two years. But today, as we were leaving, I had this sudden urge to put it on. Strange, huh? You want it back? You can have it if you want. I mean she was your daughter.

MRS. LETHOU: No, dear. You can wear it. I think my Jazidua wouldn't have minded you having it. I was just curious.

MABEL: Thanks. England! Wow, this is going to be exciting. I don't know what I want to see first: Stonehenge, Saint Paul's Cathedral, Portmeirion, Buckingham Palace...

MRS. LETHOU: Just remember you're also here to work, Mabel. We've got six months of research ahead of us.

MABEL: Uh-huh. Got it.

MRS. LETHOU: While you're studying and working with me during the day, the folks at our US Embassy Government Laboratory have also set it up for you to cover some important embassy events for them.

MABEL: Yep. I appreciate your getting me set up as their photographer. The extra cash will sure come in handy. And I'm ready. Got my old Nikon ready and everything (Pulls out her camera. The flash accidentally goes off in MRS. LETHOU's eyes) Whoops. My bad. Sorry.

MRS. LETHOU: (Blinking, trying to adjust her vision back to normal) Quite all right, dear. But why did you bring that old relic of a camera? I said you could use my digital camera.

MABEL: Uh-uh. Perish the thought. This camera was my father's and it takes high quality black and white film photos. I take it with me wherever I go. (The FLIGHT ATTENDANT returns)

FLIGHT ATTENDANT: Excuse me, here are your pillows. (She startles MABEL whose flash goes off right into the ATTENDANT's eyes. The FLIGHT ATTENDANT drops the pillows and stumbles away, blinded by the flash.)

MABEL: Sorry! (MABEL sinks into her seat as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Two **The Snagovian Embassy, London**

(LIGHTS UP on the posh Snagovian Embassy Ball. Everyone is dressed elegantly in formal/semi-formal attire. They are mingling with each other. MRS. LETHOU is not present. MABEL is wandering around the party. She positions herself to take a photo of several GUESTS. A flash goes off in front of the GUESTS who immediately get blinded and wander off)

MABEL: (Calling after the GUESTS) Sorry! (To HERSELF) Maybe I better try some without the flash.

(MABEL and others on stage listen as an OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER speaks in a Euro-Hungarian accent)

OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER: Ladies and Gentlemen. Presenting, for the first time, Lady Poienari, daughter of the Royal Duke of Snagovia and her husband, Edward the Grand Chancellor of Ustasia.

(ALL applaud as MABEL tries to adjust her camera lens to get a shot ready. She steadies her camera to shoot. She looks through the lens and sees the bride. She lowers the camera and shouts)

MABEL: Oh, my Lord. (The applause fades) She's huge! (SEVERAL PEOPLE look at MABEL who, realizing her faux pas, looks down at her camera)

MABEL: Uh, I mean...(Looking down, humming) Fuge. Fuji. Yeah, Fuji. (Holds up a roll of film) Need to buy more film. (MABEL begins to wander around the party. She bumps into a MAN and WOMAN whose backs are to the audience)

MABEL: Excuse me. Man look at her go at that buffet table.

(The MAN and WOMAN turn around and MABEL immediately recognizes them. It is reporter MEIER FIEVEL and his wife, MABEL's friend, VERONICA BARNES-FIEVEL.)

VERONICA: Mabel!

MABEL: Veronica! Meier! (They ALL hug) What are you doing here?

VERONICA: We just arrived today. Meier's covering this event for his newspaper.

MEIER: That's right.

VERONICA: But it's been one of the few times we could afford for me to accompany him, so we're making it like our second honeymoon.

MABEL: But you've only been married like two years.

VERONICA: (Excited) I know. Isn't it great?

MEIER: The Snagovian Prince is rumored to make an appearance here tonight at the London Snagovian Embassy and I want to get an interview. He's very elusive.

(PRINCE TEPES enters from sl, crossing behind the trio unseen accompanied by his MINISTER, an older man)

MABEL: Tell me about it. I've been here for an hour and haven't seen him once. (TEPES bumps into MABEL) Hey, buddy! Watch where you're going! (TEPES, surprised, gives a stern look to MABEL and continues past) It's so good to see you. Say, Meier, you look fantastic! It's seems like ages since we last saw each other.

MEIER: (Smiles) Probably since the wedding, right?

MABEL: (Smiling) Probably longer. (Smiling sternly to VERONICA) I wasn't invited.

MEIER: (Embarrassed) Well, we ahh...umm...hmmm...

VERONICA: It was my fault, Mabel. We could only invite four hundred people.

MABEL: Four hundred! *Four* hundred? And you couldn't invite me?

VERONICA: I have a large family. You wouldn't like them.

MABEL: I'm not crazy about *one* of them right now.

MABEL: You invited Cassandra, Sage, Nina, Michael... You even invited that Verall guy from Canada.

VERONICA: Absolom.

MABEL: It's true, I tell you.

VERONICA: I'm sorry, Mabel. Really I am. I just didn't think we were ever really all that close. I just didn't want you to feel...

MABEL: Left out? Well, I did.

VERONICA: Mabel, tell the truth. Look at all these people around you. Don't you feel a little out of place?

MABEL: (Insulted) What's that supposed to mean?

VERONICA: Well, you don't exactly come from money, you know.

MABEL: Veronica, I may not have three rooms full of nothing to wear like you, but I'm proud of who I am. Are you?

MEIER: Girls, maybe this isn't the best ti--

MABEL: Hold onto your notepad, Meier. (To VERONICA) Have you even once, I mean once in your life, Veronica, ever thought about anyone else but yourself?

VERONICA: (Insulted) Of course I have.

MABEL: Yeah? When? (VERONICA starts to answer, but can't) That's what I thought. Well I'll tell you this: If I ever get married, I'd certainly invite you.

VERONICA: (Surprised, she smiles) Aww. You would?

MABEL: No! Ha! There! Now we're even!

MEIER: Girls. Knock it off. Someone's coming.

(The MINISTER comes up with a ROYAL SECURITY GUARD and takes MABEL's camera. He walks off as the GUARD stands between MABEL and the MINISTER)

MABEL: Hey! Watch it there, buddy! That's my bread and butter you're messing with.

GUARD: Your invitation, please.

MABEL: What? Oh, yeah, sure. Here's my pass. (Takes out her credentials and hands them to the GUARD) I'm with Lethou Research but I'm here as a photographer for a government website. I'm supposed to get pictures.

GUARD: (Examining her credentials) What kind of pictures?

MABEL: I'm supposed to take pictures of the royal family and the brass attending this reception. Yeah, that's my camera...so give it back! (GUARD stares her down. MABEL responds timidly) Um, please?

(The MINISTER returns with MABEL's camera and hands it back to her. The MINISTER and GUARD walk off, saying nothing. MABEL examines her camera)

MEIER: Is it all right, Mabel?

MABEL: He didn't damage it, but what a jerk.

VERONICA: Looks like you make friends wherever you go, don't you, Mabel?

MABEL: Oh, so now you wanna start up with me again?

ANNOUNCER: Presenting His Royal Highness, Prince Tepes of Snagovia.

MEIER: (Seeing the PRINCE) There he is. Oh, shoot. Now he's gone again, vanished into the crowd. (To MABEL and VERONICA who are arguing again) Okay, girls. Stop it. Veronica, honey, I've got to find the Prince.

(BOTH GIRLS grumble at each other)

MEIER: Mabel, it really is good seeing you again. Tell you what. Why don't you go that way, and I'll go this way? And whichever of us finds the Prince we'll let the other know. But no matter what we'll all get together after the reception tonight and the two of you can clear the air between you. Okay? Deal?

MABEL: (After a quick nasty look to VERONICA) Deal.

VERONICA: (Same to MABEL) I suppose.

MEIER: Good. By honey. (kisses VERONICA then exits right) See you, Mabel. (VERONICA grumbles then exits off left)

MABEL: Bye.

(MABEL wanders up to a couple of SCOTTISH PARTY GUESTS who are sipping their drinks and looking bored. They BOTH speak in strong Scottish accents)

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: I had hoped the Queen of Snagovia would have convinced the Duke to hold this gala at Holyroodhouse for Lady Poienari.

MABEL: Excuse me. Did you say Hollywood House? You mean L.A.?

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2: No, dearie, Holyroodhouse. In Edinburgh. Ach, 'tis a bonny castle. The Queen, the English Queen, that is, stays there.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: Mary Queen of Scots stayed there, too.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2: Aye, sure his Grace would have enjoyed it.

MABEL: Wait a minute. Mary, Queen of Scots. If I remember correctly, wasn't she beheaded?

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: (Draws a line across throat) Aye, lass. In Fotheringhay Castle. (After a beat, holds up index and middle fingers on one hand to indicate the number two) Twice.

MABEL: T-T-twice?

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: Aye. (Thinking, speaks to SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2) Or was it three times? I canna' quite remember. (To MABEL, demonstrating) But y'see, lass, 'tis told that they dinna' quite get it right the first time so they...

MABEL: (Disgusted) I get it. I get it. Well, then, considering how Mary fared why would any Queen want to stay there? Oh, do you know where Lady Poienari is now? Or the Duke? I need to get some pictures of them.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2: Oh, I saw Lady Poienari at the buffet table.

MABEL: Thanks. (Does a double take) Wait. Again?

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2: (Nodding) I swear the woman has the appetite of a two-thousand pound Highland cow. God help the groom.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: Aye. I hope he's got a large estate. He'll need it just for the grazing rights.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 2: Is that a relish stain on her bridal gown or the outline of Australia? (Both SCOTTISH PARTY GUESTS laugh)

MABEL: (Slowly reconsidering) Maybe I better try getting some shots of the Duke instead. Then come back with a wide angle lens.

SCOTTISH PARTY GUEST # 1: His Grace and his party went off in that direction. If you follow along I believe y'should be able to find them, I think.

MABEL: Thank you. Nice meeting you.

(MABEL exits as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Three
A Secluded Embassy Hallway

(LIGHTS UP on an empty hallway. MABEL wanders around)

MABEL: (Softly calling out) Hello? Your highness? Your Grace? Your pryncedom? (Shouts) Hey! Anybody around?

(MABEL stumbles upon a closed door. She leans in, listening closely. She hears voices then a loud crash, like glasses being smashed. She enters the room as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Four
An Embassy Room

(As LIGHTS UP, Mabel has entered the darkened room. Nobody else is around. A SILHOUETTED FIGURE rushes past her and out the door, pushing her hard against a wall)

MABEL: Ow! Wait! What--? (MABEL turns back to see a large cup broken into pieces on the ground. She then turns to see MEIER lying unconscious and bleeding on the floor)

MABEL: Meier.

(Before she can approach MEIER, A SECOND FIGURE bumps her. MABEL's camera begins to flash sporadically, wildly, as if taking numerous pictures. During this Mabel is partially blinded, loses her balance and collapses. Before losing consciousness, with the camera flash still going off, she sees someone resembling her dead friend Jazz standing in the darkened doorway)

MABEL: Jazz?

(The FIGURE says nothing but a VOICE is heard)

VOICE: Find them.

(MABEL then loses consciousness.)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Five
London Hospital, Mabel's Room

(LIGHTS UP as MABEL awakens to find herself in a hospital room. A NURSE is standing near her bed.)

MABEL: (Drowsy) Where am I? What happened?

NURSE: (Speaking in a strong Cockney accent) Try and rest, Luv. You 'ad quite a scare tonight, 'aven't you?

MABEL: Scare? (Awakens, remembering) Meier! Is he--?

NURSE: Your chum is fine, Miss. 'Is wife is wit' 'im now. 'E took a bad bump on the noggin' but 'e'll live.

MABEL: (Looks around the room) My camera. Did someone get my camera?

NURSE: Yes. All your things is 'ere. I put 'em in the closet for you, Miss. Now you rest and I'll be back in a jiff. Doctor says you'll be right soon and can go 'ome tomorrow.

(MABEL closes her eyes. NURSE starts to exit as PRINCE TEPES, dressed in a simple business suit, enters the room. MABEL doesn't see the following exchange)

TEPES: (Speaking in a mild Euro-Hungarian accent) May I speak with the young lady?

NURSE: (Recognizing the PRINCE, in awe) Aye! Yes, M'Lord.

(NURSE bows and exits. TEPES sees that MABEL is resting and crosses to sr of the bed to sit in a nearby chair. As he begins to sit MABEL opens her eyes and, startled by the sight of TEPES, screams. TEPES falls backward out of the chair. He regains his composure and tries to calm MABEL down.)

TEPES: Calm! Calm there, Miss! I am sorry. I did not mean to disturb you.

MABEL: Yeah? Well you did! Who the heck are you?

TEPES: (Curiously surprised and amused) You do not know?

MABEL: No. Why should I?

TEPES: No reason. We bumped into each other at last night's reception.

MABEL: Oh, yeah. Now I remember.

TEPES: I am (Pauses and then decides not to reveal his identity) I am with the Snagovian Embassy. I was the one who found you in my office unconscious with your friend.

MABEL: Oh?

TEPES: Can you tell me what happened?

MABEL: Not really. It's mostly a blur. I was looking for the Prince so I could take some pictures, wound up in that hallway where the room was. I heard some voices on the other side of the door, then a crash. I entered the room, these guys ran past, one guy bumped me and...(Pauses) My camera. I saw Meier on the floor but before I could get to him my camera just went crazy. The flash was going off incessantly. I saw...(Opts not to speak of her vision of Jazz) I mean, I stumbled over something and passed out.

TEPES: That is strange because when I entered the room and found the two of you unconscious the camera was not flashing.

MABEL: What? You think I'm lying?

TEPES: Could be. I do not know. How did you get into the room in the first place? It was supposed to have been guarded by Snagovian security.

MABEL: Buddy I'm telling you there was nobody in sight when I entered the room. That whole hallway was like the stands at a Clippers (or other more current horrible sports team) game.

TEPES: How's that?

MABEL: Empty. Like everybody cleared out of there for some reason.

TEPES: I see. And what about the broken chalice?

MABEL: What chalice?

TEPES: On the floor there was found a broken chalice. It is...was...a priceless fourteenth century Snagovian artifact stolen just two weeks before the party.

MABEL: I told you I couldn't really see--

TEPES: The chalice had a hand-painted image on it which symbolized Vlad Tepes, son of a man who belonged to the order of the dragon.

MABEL: Vlad? Who is? Wait. No. (Remembering world history) You mean Dra--No.

TEPES: Yes. You Americans call him "Dracula". The cup was a priceless porcelain replica of the gold chalice Vlad put out in his realm for all his subjects to drink from.

MABEL: Ew. Germs.

TEPES: Very valuable. Due to Vlad's ravaging of the countryside, the materials used to make the porcelain wouldn't be found again for another three centuries. Is there any reason not to suspect you or your friend being involved in either its disappearance or its destruction?

MABEL: Look, Mister Whatever-your-name-is. I'm sorry about your historic Dixie cup, but you don't have to be rude and condescending about it. My friend and I just arrived in London yesterday. We couldn't have been involved--

TEPES: (Holds up his hand to stop MABEL) I do not mean to accuse. I merely wanted to see your reaction. I believe you. (Rises) I have no reason not to.

MABEL: Is that supposed to be an apology?

TEPES: (Smiles down at MABEL) No. (The NURSE returns)

NURSE: She really should rest now, M'Lord.

TEPES: Yes. I shall leave. (Heads to the door. Turns back) When you are feeling better, Miss Abramson, please come by the Embassy and allow me to escort you around and we can talk more. You might learn more about our culture. Good day.

MABEL: Good-bye. (TEPES leaves with the NURSE)
Pompous jerk.

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Six **London Hospital, Meier's Room**

(LIGHTS UP in another hospital room where MEIER sleeps, his face partially covered in bandages. VERONICA stays near his bedside. A DOCTOR enters the room)

VERONICA: Doctor, how is he? Will he be awake soon?

DOCTOR: (Speaking in a mild British accent) Yes, Miss. He will live, but I'm afraid what we feared before is true. The blow he suffered to the face has caused blindness.

VERONICA: (Stunned, she slowly stands up) Then what are the options, Doctor? Can we operate?

DOCTOR: The damage to the optic nerve was far too extensive and is inoperable. His blindness will be permanent. I'm sorry.

(Not sure of what to do or how to react to the news, VERONICA slowly sits down next to her husband and is expressionless)

VERONICA: Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR: If there's anything I can do, I'll be in touch.

(The DOCTOR exits. VERONICA slowly, gently caresses MEIER's head as he sleeps. As lights dim, she begins to cry.)

Act One, Scene Seven
Mabel's Hotel Room

(As LIGHTS UP, we are back at MABEL's hotel room. It is the next day. She is sitting on her bed with pictures taken from her camera. MRS. LETHOU is sitting next to her)

MRS. LETHOU: Are they all like this?

MABEL: Yes. All overexposed. Every single picture I took at the Embassy. A total washout.

MRS. LETHOU: I can't believe how many pictures you took.

MABEL: Yeah. At first I thought it was because the flash kept going off in that darkened room, but now I'm not sure.

MRS. LETHOU: You aren't?

MABEL: No. (MABEL hears a knock at the door. She gets up to go answer it) I've got some other photos which should be ready by Friday. Hopefully there will be something useful on them.

(MABEL opens the door and VERONICA is standing there. It's obvious she has been crying.)

VERONICA: (Timidly) Can I come in?

MABEL: Of course you can. (VERONICA enters and MABEL hugs her)

VERONICA: I didn't know where else to go.

MABEL: How is Meier?

VERONICA: He's awake but he doesn't talk much. Ever since the doctors told him what happened he has just totally withdrawn.

MRS. LETHOU: Give him time, dear. He'll come around.

VERONICA: I don't know what to do. I've never been in a situation like this before.

(MRS. LETHOU gets up and approaches the girls)

MRS. LETHOU: But you still love him, don't you?

VERONICA: Of course I do.

MRS. LETHOU: Then like Pete Townsend said, "love will find away".

VERONICA and MABEL: (After a long pause) Who?

MRS. LETHOU: (After a beat) Exactly. I'll be in my room. Take care, girls.

(MRS. LETHOU exits and VERONICA sits down on MABEL's bed.)

VERONICA: Are these your pictures?

MABEL: Yeah, but they all got overexposed. They're nothing but junk.

VERONICA: So there's no way to know who was in that room with you or what they were after?

MABEL: What's more confusing to me is if the chalice was in the room.

VERONICA: What do you mean?

MABEL: Well, if the chalice disappeared weeks ago why was it suddenly back in the Embassy?

VERONICA: Good question. Wish I could ask Meier. He's the reporter.

MABEL: Yes, or Cassandra. I wish she were here. She'd know what to do. She was always the detective of our crowd. She had the right instinct for it. Me? I'm just brilliant. Doesn't make me a detective.

VERONICA: Yes, and I'm just (striking a pose) fashionable. (The girls laugh) Have you tried to email or call her?

MABEL: Not yet. Maybe later. She and Sage are living back on his family's farm and ever since she became an animal biologist she's been too busy. Plus right now I don't think she'd be too keen on traveling. (Pause) I sure do miss them.

VERONICA: Me, too. Cassandra was one of my best friends. You know what, though? I even miss Nina and Michael, and all they did was fight all the time.

MABEL: No. Nina fights. Michael's just...well, Michael. (VERONICA laughs)

VERONICA: So what are you going to do?

MABEL: Well I don't want to wait around for my other photos to come back from the developer. So, I'm going to take up that Embassy rep's offer.

VERONICA; What rep?

MABEL: Just some doofus. He offered to show me around the Embassy. I can't find my mp3 player, so I'll go back and tell him I'm looking for it, but what I'll really be looking for is what was so important about the chalice that Meier nearly got killed over it.

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Eight
The Snagovian Embassy

(AS LIGHTS UP, MABEL is back at the Embassy. A SERVANT answers the door. MABEL pokes her head inside)

SERVANT: (Speaking in a strong Euro-Hungarian accent)
Yas?

MABEL: Hi there. Um...I believe I'm expected?

SERVANT: Yas, Miss Abramson. (The SERVANT opens the door all the way) Please do come in. (MABEL enters. She is carrying a large handbag. The SERVANT closes the door behind her and begins to exit the room) Prince Tepes is expecting you. I'll go announce you to his highness.

MABEL: Thank you. (The SERVANT has exited as MABEL realizes) Wait. Prince what? (Louder) What Prince? The Prince?

(The SERVANT returns with PRINCE TEPES, now dressed with a more formal looking royal sash draped across his suit)

SERVANT: His royal highness, Prince Tepes (To PRINCE TEPES) Miss Abramson, sire. (The SERVANT exits)

TEPES: How do you do, Miss Abramson. Nice to see you again.

MABEL: Prince? You're the freakin' prince? I mean (bows) your highness.

TEPES: No need to bow. At least not to me. But if my mother were here I'd strongly recommend the bowing thing.

MABEL: Thank you for seeing me. I'm sorry, but nobody on the phone said one thing about you're being...well, who you were, uh, are.

TEPES: Yes, I know. I'm glad you returned, Miss Abramson. (Pulls an mp3 player out of breast pocket) I found your mp3 player. (Hands it to her) Here you go.

MABEL: Thank you.

TEPES: Yes. It appears to be undamaged. I hope you don't mind but I took the liberty of examining it to make sure.

MABEL: I appreciate it.

TEPES: By the way, may I ask you a question?

MABEL: Sure. What?

TEPES: What's with all the Bee Gee's music?

MABEL: (Embarrassed) Oh, nothing. (After a beat) Listen, I'm sorry how I acted at the hospital. Like I said I had no idea...

TEPES: (Laughing) It's all right. It's all right. I probably should have introduced myself, but I was having too much fun.

MABEL: Fun? With what?

TEPES: With the fact you were totally oblivious to just who I was.

MABEL: What? (Realizing) Oh, now I get it. So instead of telling me who you were you just thought you'd play head games with an injured girl, huh? I take it back. You are an arrogant jerk.

TEPES: Perhaps we should go back to the bowing.
(SERVANT returns wheeling in a large dinner cart full of food) Would you care for a bite to eat?

MABEL: Not with you, buddy. Man, prince or not, you really are a doofus. (Sees the amazing spread of food) Ooohhh!
Wieners! (MABEL goes over to the cart of food and puts down her handbag)

TEPES: So you'll stay?

MABEL: I'll stay. I'll stay. But not because of you. (MABEL's stomach growls loudly) Because I'm starving. (MABEL starts preparing an unusually large hot dog)

TEPES: Yes, well... (To the SERVANT) You may leave.

SERVANT: (Bows) Your highness. (Exits)

TEPES: This food is imported directly from my country.

MABEL: Looks great. (Looking around the cart) I see mustard, but where do you keep the ketchup?

TEPES: What?

MABEL: Ketchup?

TEPES: Ah. Catsup. We do not have any.

MABEL: That's weird. Why not? (Takes a bite of the hot dog)

TEPES: Well, there is a severe tomato shortage in my country.

MABEL: (After a beat) Excuse me? A tomato shortage? Did you say a tomato shortage?

TEPES: Yes. A blight hit my country this past year and we've since had to import tomato products from our neighbors in Romania.

MBAEL: Bummer.

TEPES: Yes, it is a "bummer". Tomatoes are our country's greatest global export so it has caused great financial stress for all of Snagovia.

MABEL: Well, not to worry. I brought my own. (Pulls out an unusual looking ketchup dispenser. PRINCE TEPES looks at MABEL curiously)

TEPES: Do you always bring your own condiments to foreign embassies, Miss Abramson? (MABEL squirts out a small amount of ketchup on her hot dog)

MABEL: It's Mabel. Have you ever had London food, Prince Teepees?

TEPES: It's pronounced "Tepesh".

MABEL: With all due respect, your highness, I don't care.

TEPES: (Laughs) You certainly are an unusual person, Miss...

MABEL: I said it's Mabel, all right? Mabel! And you'd actually be kinda cool too, if you weren't such a turkey. (Smiles at TEPES) No offense, your highness.

TEPES: (Smiling back at MABEL) No offense taken, you irksome little troll. (They BOTH laugh) What brand of ketchup is that? I've never seen a dispenser quite like that before.

MABEL: And you never will. It's one of a kind. I invented it.

TEPES: You?

MABEL: Yeah, two years ago. (She gives a look to a still bewildered TEPES) Don't look so surprised, buddy. I do have a mind, you know. The dispenser distributes a pre-selected amount of ketchup onto whatever foods I'm eating.

TEPES: (After a beat) Why?

MABEL: So you don't waste the ketchup, of course. I thought you of all people could understand that. Its battery operated so all I have to do is press a button, hold it over the food, and voila! Just enough ketchup for little ol' me.

TEPES: You say you invented this two years ago?

MABEL: Yep. And I'm even on the same battery.

TEPES: How is that possible?

MABEL: Easy. It uses a self-rechargeable solar powered battery.

TEPES: Self-recharging?

MABEL: Yeah.

TEPES: And you invented this?

MABEL: Yep.

TEPES: I see. (After a long beat) I think I will have a wiener. (Starts making himself a hot dog) For a photographer you are quite, what's the word, "diverse", Miss, eh, Mabel.

MABEL: Oh, I'm only doing the photography while I'm here on an internship program for the government. (Offering the PRINCE her dispenser) Catsup?

TEPES: Ketchup. Please. (MABEL squirts ketchup onto the PRINCE's hot dog)

MABEL: It gives me a little spending money while I'm here. I'll be heading back to the US at the end of the month.

TEPES: (Eating his hot dog) Mabel, would you consider coming to my country? I'd like you to show this amazing ketchup dispenser to my mother.

MABEL: Don't you think it's a little early in our relationship for me to meet your parents?

TEPES: Very funny. Actually my father passed away before I was born, so it has been just my mother and I. (MABEL stops and looks at the PRINCE) I'd very much like for you to meet her.

(MABEL stares at the PRINCE for a moment. She gets an uncomfortable feeling. She grabs her handbag and heads for the door)

MABEL: This was a bad idea. I've got to go.

TEPES: (Calling after MABEL, who stops short at the door) The Queen would be very interested in your invention. It could benefit our people greatly during our difficult economic time.

MABEL: (Turning to the PRINCE) Look. I'm pretty busy. I've got all I can handle right now with my internship, my job, not to mention my friend in the hospital who just lost his sight. I'm not just going to pack up and head on over to outer Mongolia. (Begins to head out the door again)

TEPES: Snagovia.

MABEL: (Turns back to the PRINCE again) Snagovia. (Slowly walks toward the PRINCE) Population one hundred thousand and twelve. Currency used is called "leu" (pronounced "lei") initiated by the Monarchy in 1918. Location ninety-eight degrees due north of Romania. Whatever. Look, I know your country, but it doesn't mean I have any interest in going there. Besides, you've probably got scientists who can look at the problem, don't you?

TEPES: We do, but they aren't you.

MABEL: What's so special about me? I mean can you give me one good reason...

TEPES: I find you brilliant.

(MABEL stares at the PRINCE for a long time as LIGHTS FADE)

MABEL: Whoa.

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Nine Sage and Cassandra's Farm

(As LIGHTS UP, we are on the Pembleton Farm located in a rural community within the United States. CASSANDRA BONHAM-PEMBLETON, an animal biologist, is seen talking on a cell phone. There are sounds of various farm animals in the background. She is wearing a lab coat and is positioned behind an examination table that has many assorted medical paraphernalia positioned on it to obstruct our view of her from the chest down.)

CASSANDRA: I can't believe you're getting married! Mabel that's wonderful! Of course I'll be your matron of honor. Hold on! (Puts her hand over the phone and calls out) Sage! Get in here! It's Mabel! She's calling long distance! Hurry up! She's getting married! (Into the phone) What? You need to go? Okay, Mabel. We'll see you in two days. Bye. (Hangs up the phone)

(SAGE PEMBLETON, CASSANDRA's husband, enters the room, frantic and panting. He is dressed in farmer's overalls and wearing long gloves which go half way up his arms. He has obviously been working with cows and is covered in what looks like mud)

SAGE: (In between panting) Couldn't make out what you said, but it sounded urgent, so I got here as quick as I could. (leaning over, almost passing out) What is it? What's wrong?

CASSANDRA: Mabel's getting married!

SAGE: (Slowly straightens himself back up and takes deep breath) Mabel's get...uh, what?

CASSANDRA: Mabel. She's getting married!

SAGE: (After a long beat, takes another deep breath and says) So?

CASSANDRA: So? Don't you think it's romantic?

SAGE: Romantic? Cassandra, look at me. I was just up to my arm pits in cow butt when you shouted for me. I thought it was time. So I came racing in here. I didn't even have time to take off these stupid gloves. Now fess up. You called me in here as some sort of practical joke, right?

CASSANDRA: No. She's really getting married and soon.

SAGE: How soon?

CASSANDRA: Well let's put it this way. Get cleaned up quick because (CASSANDRA comes around from behind the table and reveals that she is VERY pregnant) we're going to Europe!

SAGE: Europe? When?

CASSANDRA: Two days.

SAGE: Two days? Are you insane? Honey, we just bought this farm from my folks. We can't afford to go anywhere.

CASSANDRA: We don't have to. The Queen of Snagovia is paying for the flight. All expenses paid! She wants Mabel and her son the Prince to get married this weekend!

SAGE: The queen of wha? Snag-wha? Prince? (After a beat) Are you sure Mabel isn't pulling your leg?

CASSANDRA: Nope. Mrs. Lethou is there and she is going to give the bride away since Mrs. Abramson is off on a cruise in the Pacific. The Queen wants to put on this lavish ceremony since it's for her only son. Nina and Michael are going to fly in from New York to be there, too. Sage this is...

SAGE: Do *not* say this is so exciting. Cass, we've got tons of work to take care of. I can't go. You can't go. I mean, just look at you.

CASSANDRA: (Taken back, looking at herself) What?

SAGE: Well, you're hu...(Stops cold) I mean, that is, you're not supposed to fly.

CASSANDRA: (Cautioning) Watch it, cowboy. The doctor never said I couldn't fly. Just that it could cause some discomfort. I'll be perfectly fine. Besides there's no way I'm going to miss Mabel marrying into royalty.

SAGE: Royalty? Mabel? (Long beat) Are you sure you're not "punking" me?

CASSANDRA: Sage, you're going. We both are.

SAGE: Fine. I'll call my folks. See if they'll come and sit for the animals a spell. How about Veronica and Meier? Are they going, too? Did she say how they're doing, by the way?

CASSANDRA: No. Mabel said Veronica told her Meier's been so withdrawn after losing his sight. They haven't even been able to leave the London hospital because he's undergoing psychiatric care.

SAGE: Man, that sucks. I hope they'll be okay.

CASSANDRA: Me, too. (Startled) Oooh.

SAGE: (Nervous) What? What? Is it--?

CASSANDRA: (Reassuring) It's okay. Just the baby doing another back flip.

SAGE: Fine. (Starts to exit) I'll go boil some water.

CASSANDRA: Why? I said I was fine.

SAGE: (Holds out his arms) I'm not! I'm covered in cow butt, remember? I'll call my parents after. Yuk.

(SAGE exits as CASSANDRA laughs and LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE)

CASSANDRA: Oh! I've got to call Nina! (Picks up her phone again and starts dialing)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Ten
Nina and Michael's Apartment

(As LIGHTS UP, we are in a small New York City apartment. MICHAEL HANCOCK is working on a picture at a desk. He stops every couple of seconds to admire his work, although the audience never sees it. Meanwhile his wife, NINA, is on the phone. Both are dressed in casual clothing)

NINA: That's great, Cassandra. I can't wait to tell Michael. (After a beat) How is he? Oh, he's (She stops as MICHAEL giggles like a young child at his drawing) He's still (after a beat) Michael. (After a beat, then expressionless) Tell me about it. Okay. If we don't meet you at the airport we'll see you at the palace. Oooh, palace. I like saying that. (In a low voice, draws out the word) Palace. (Laughs) Okay. See you soon, "Captain Underpants" (Laughs, but then holds the phone away from here year as if she's being yelled at on the other end of the line). Jeesh, just a joke. Get over it, wouldja? Bye. (Hangs up the phone)

MICHAEL: Hey, Nina. Come here. Lemme show you something.

(NINA walks over and looks at MICHAEL's drawing for a beat, then)

NINA: Michael, what is that?

MICHAEL: Manga. I'm trying my hand at animation.

NINA: That's not animation. That's a stick drawing, and a bad one, at that. (Takes a closer look at the unseen drawing) And what's that other thing supposed to be, anyway?

MICHAEL: I call it a "parkle".

NINA: You call it a "parkle". Right. Of course you do. What, pray tell, is a parkle?

MICHAEL: It's a creature with the head of a parrot and the body of a pickle. I gave it a little mask and a cape because it fights crime. (NINA pauses and stares at MICHAEL for a long time) What? Why are you looking at me like that?

NINA: Why? (Blowing up) Because you're drawing a parkle, that's why!

MICHAEL: Nina, you've got to try and have an open mind, like me.

NINA: Your mind is only "open" because of the enormous vacuum located between your ears.

MICHAEL: Look, ideas like this got me my job at "Miraculous Comics" in the first place.

NINA: You got a job on the loading dock.

MICHAEL: Yeah, all right, all right, at first. But then I gave them my idea for my “Super-Redneck Zombie Pirate Captain” comic and now...

NINA: And now we live in a crummy run down apartment in the middle of New York City. And we’re two months behind in the rent, by the way.

MICHAEL: Things will turn around, Nina. We just need for our overseas distributor to come through with our initial publishing and my boss says this could really take off! I’ll be famous!

NINA: Famous? You’re not one of the Jonas Brothers. You’ll be the creator of a super redneck zombie pirate captain. (After a beat) And a parkle.

MICHAEL: (Showing her the picture again) So you think the cape is too much?

NINA: Michael, put down your drawing and listen for a sec. (MICHAEL puts the drawing away) Mabel is getting married.

MICHAEL: Really? Gee, never thought I’d see that.

NINA: Yep. And you’ll never believe it but she’s marrying a prince.

MICHAEL: Isn’t Prince already married?

NINA: Not “Prince” the singer. A prince. You know, Royalty?

MICHAEL: I don’t know that rapper.

(NINA whacks MICHAEL on the back of the head)

NINA: He’s not a rapper, you idiot. Royalty, as in royal family. She’s marrying a prince.

MICHAEL: Wait a minute! (After a beat) Prince Charles is divorcing again? Isn’t he kinda old for her?

NINA: (Sighs) Sure would speed things along if you got one of these right. Not THAT royal family. She’s marrying a prince from a small country, Snagovia. We’re supposed to fly out there and (Stops cold. NINA suddenly becomes extremely anxious) Oh, no! (Begins pacing furiously) Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God! Oh my God!

MICHAEL: Honey, what is it? What’s the matter?

NINA: I can’t go. That’s it. I just can’t go. I can’t fly. I’ve never been able to fly. I mean the turbulence, the shaking of the plane. I can’t handle it. I’d rather sit through another installment of (some lame movie or series of movies) than sit on a plane.

MICHAEL: Nina, stop joking around.

NINA: No-no-no. I'm not kidding, Michael. I hate to fly! Ever since I was nine years old and my family took a flight to Cleveland.

MICHAEL: What happened in Cleveland?

NINA: (Exasperated) We landed! (She sits at the desk next to MICHAEL)

MICHAEL: (Hugs her, reassuring) Nina, you're being silly. (Gets up) Look, I've got to start dinner. You stay here and relax. (NINA looks again at MICHAEL's drawing at the desk. MICHAEL exits into another room, calls from offstage) Keep talking. I'm listening.

NINA: (Unconsciously begins tearing MICHAEL's drawing into thin strips) No, I mean it. All through the flight I was sweating and panting. You'd think I was at a (name of popular rock band or act) concert. If I couldn't fly domestic how the heck am I supposed to fly all the way to the outer northern tip of Romania? (MICHAEL returns, holding a sheet pan filled with uncooked biscuits) I mean we're talking Europe here. (She stands up and faces MICHAEL) They shoot people over Europe, don't they?

MICHAEL: Not since World War Two. (Sees that NINA destroyed his drawing at his desk) My parkle!

NINA: Forget about the parkle and comfort me, you idiot! (Takes one of MICHAEL's uncooked biscuits and shoves it in his mouth. He removes it)

MICHAEL: Yuk. Still cold. Look, there's absolutely nothing to be afraid of, and besides, remember this: I'll be with you all the way there.

NINA: (Looks at MICHAEL, long pause) Nifty.

MICHAEL: That's right. Now, dinner's almost ready, sweetheart. I'm just going to put the rest of these biscuits in the oven.

NINA: Do me a favor, "sweetheart"?

MICHAEL: What's that?

NINA: Crawl in there with them!

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Eleven
London Hospital, Meier's Room

(As LIGHTS UP, we are back at the London Hospital in MEIER's room. VERONICA and PSYCHIATRIST are standing sl of MEIER, who is sitting in his bed. He no longer is bandaged but is wearing glasses. MEIER doesn't say a word)

PSYCHIATRIST: (Speaking in a mild British accent) Meier, we've had about a dozen of these sessions now.

MEIER: I know.

PSYCHIATRIST: And while I have learned a lot from your wife about the best places to shop for shoes next time I visit Manhattan, it might help us move things along if you actually communicated with me a little, too.

MEIER: What is there to say, Doctor?

PSYCHIATRIST: Anything, really. This is a major alteration for both of you. This is not as if you've been blind since birth. You need time to heal, adjust.

(MEIER says nothing. There is a long, uncomfortable silence. Then VERONICA speaks)

VERONICA: I've been trying to get him to try and get outside the hospital, Doctor, even if only for just for a little walk, but he refuses to leave his room.

PSYCHIATRIST: I know, I know. It is a problem. Well, I've got some news for both of you. Seems your newspaper has solved that issue. They've indicated to the hospital that unless Meier returns to the states to continue his treatment there they will stop paying for treatment here in London.

MEIER: (Sarcastic, depressed) Great.

PSYCHIATRIST: So, since you're going to have to leave, anyway, why not take some baby steps, Meier. How about we try standing up?

(MEIER does not respond)

VERONICA: Oh, please, Meier. Please stand up.

(MEIER again does not respond. VERONICA steps on his foot with one of her high heels)

MEIER: Ow!

PSYCHIATRIST: Mrs. --!

VERONICA: (Trying to look innocent) What? He's up.

PSYCHIATRIST: That's not a very sound approach to the matter at hand, and I would advise against such an approach in the future.

VERONICA: (Getting extremely upset) Well what the hell is a good approach because right now I have no idea!

PSYCHIATRIST: Mrs...Come with me. (Brings VERONICA downstage right as MEIER lies back down on his bed) I apologize. I realize this affects both of you. Veronica. You are a very important part of Meier's recovery but you won't get far by pushing him beyond what he's ready to accept.

VERONICA: I only want to help him.

PSYCHIATRIST: And he does need your help. He even wants your help, although right now he wouldn't ask for it. For some reason he blames himself for what's happened to him here in London. I think a change of location will be good for him.

VERONICA: We were invited to a friend's wedding, but he said he wouldn't go.

PSYCHIATRIST: Yes. As I recall you said it was in Snagovia, right? His accident took place at the Snagovian Embassy. (Considers for a moment, then advises) It might be a good thing if you do go.

VERONICA: You really think so?

PSYCHIATRIST: It might be what he needs to help him prevail over this personal impasse. Let me speak with him alone for a few minutes. I'll advise he go with you before you head back to New York.

VERONICA: Then once we're home, then what Doctor? I'm not real good at this, you know? I'm no Florence Nightingale.

PSYCHIATRIST: (laughing) But at the same time Florence Nightingale was no Veronica, either.

VERONICA; (Laughs as well, then stops and says) I don't know what that means.

PSYCHIATRIST: It means we each work with our own strengths. The same goes for Meier. Your husband will recover. He just needs to do it at his own pace with your guidance.

VERONICA: But I just...My whole life, doctor, has been about clothes, shoes, shopping and going to fancy parties.

PSYCHIATRIST: Are you saying you feel you're too shallow for what lies ahead?

VERONICA: (Nodding) I'm just not sure. I mean, I'm a good person, in all, but I've never had to deal with...I mean, how can I, you know, "guide" him? Help him?

PSYCHIATRIST: Do you love your husband?

VERONICA: Of course I do.

PSYCHIATRIST: Then perhaps realizing you have to overcome some of your own superficial tendencies in order to help him will help Meier come to terms with his disability. (VERONICA nods) Now, let me speak with him alone and let's see how things go. All right?

VERONICA: (Nodding) All right. (VERONICA approaches MEIER's bed. She reaches out to him, then decides against it. She exits as the PSYCHIATRIST sits down next to MEIER and begins to speak with him as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Twelve **Snagovian Palace, North of Romania**

(As LIGHTS UP, it is early morning and we are in the Queen's royal chambers within the Snagovian Palace. The palace walls are all made of stone. MABEL, dressed casually and the QUEEN, dressed in formal attire with crown, are seen seated at an uncomfortable distance across from one other, and together are experiencing a long, awkward silence)

MABEL: So (After a long, uncomfortable pause) here we are.

QUEEN: (Speaking in a strong Euro-Hungarian accent) Yes. Here we are. (After a beat) Here. (After a beat) Together. (After a beat) Alone. (After a beat) Yes.

MABEL: I was...

QUEEN: (Interrupting abruptly) Yes?

MABEL: (Startled) I was hoping we'd have a chance to chat like this.

QUEEN: Like this? Oh, yes. (Long pause, then half-heartedly) Me, too.

MABEL: Yeah. You know, because I was hoping that you and I...well, that we'd really get to know one another.

QUEEN: Yes. (Long pause) Why?

MABEL: Well, because we might find we have a lot in common. (After a beat) Right?

QUEEN: (After a beat) Yes. (Another long pause) Like what, exactly, dear?

MABEL: Well, you know you (Stops, stumped at what to say next), we're both (Stumped again)

QUEEN: Women?

MABEL: (Points at the Queen) Good! Yeah! Yeah! (Realizes she's pointing at the QUEEN and stops) Women. Right. (Then there's another long period of silence between the two women)

QUEEN: Yes. (After a beat) What else?

MABEL: (Thinks, then) I suppose saying we both love Tepes would be too obvious an answer, huh?

QUEEN: (After a long pause) Yes. (Another beat) It would. (Another beat) What else?

MABEL: (Thinks) Do you...(Thinks again) Do you like (Comes up with something) World Cup Soccer?

QUEEN: (Smiles) Yes! Why yes, I do. I absolutely adore it. Do you?

MABEL: (After a long, uncomfortable pause) No. No, I don't. (The QUEEN stops smiling as TEPES enters)

TEPES: Sorry to have kept you ladies waiting. Have you had a chance to chat?

MABEL and QUEEN: No...Yes. (They look at each other then) Yes...No.

QUEEN: Yes. She's a delightful girl, Tepes. She loves you and you love her and your happiness is all that matters to me.

MABEL: (Smiling) Thank you.

QUEEN: His happiness, dear.

MABEL: (Stops smiling) Yes. Right. Got it.

TEPES: Was she informed of the Royal Bridal Shower?

MABEL: What do you mean?

QUEEN: You mean you didn't tell her?

TEPES: I thought you'd tell her.

QUEEN: Dear, I'm Queen. I normally would have other people to do that. (Picks up an extremely fancy looking cellular phone)

MABEL: You have a cell phone?

QUEEN: Yes. Why?

MABEL: No reason. I've just never pictured royalty using a cell phone.

TEPES: (Chuckling) Why? What did you think we use? A royal messenger service?

MABEL: (After a beat) Well, kinda, sorta, yeah.

QUEEN: (Into the cell phone) Please have the Minister bring me his wife the Mistress of Etiquette. Have them report to my royal chamber at once.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (Enters wearing appropriate royal attire, speaks in a strong Euro-Hungarian accent) Here I am, your majesty.

QUEEN: Please give the girl the book.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: Yes, your majesty.

MABEL: Wait. Book? What book?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: It is called a Vade Mecum.

TEPES: Think of it as a kind of manual.

QUEEN: It reviews all the things one expects from a commoner marrying into royalty. Now I must take my leave of you. Darling, don't stay too long. The Mistress and Mabel have a lot of material to cover and very little time. Good day, my dear.

(ALL bow as the QUEEN exits)

MABEL: Commoner? Is that what she thinks of me?

TEPES: No-no-no. Of course not. (After a beat) Yes. A little bit.

MABEL: And what about you?

TEPES: My darling, I have found there is nothing "common" about you, but this book *will* help you. It references specific information about anything to do with Snagovia. Our customs. This castle. It will answer many of your questions.

MABEL: (Hugging TEPES) The only question is where are we honeymooning? Where does one go to honeymoon when one lives in a palace?

TEPES: How about Las Vegas?

MABEL: How about Hawaii?

TEPES: Wherever you want, my darling. Now, I must go. I have business to attend to. I shall see you at dinner?

MABEL: Oh, well my friends will be arriving soon and I wanted to spend a little time with them.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: Unheard of! The bride must see no one until the ceremony. It is a Snagovian tradition.

MABEL: Yes, but remember the bride is still American.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (After a beat, unimpressed) Quite. But there are still rules to be obeyed, my lady and you will follow our traditions.

MABEL: Fine. What else?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: There is an obligatory royal bridal shower this evening at seven thirty sharp. You and your matron of honor shall be escorted by security.

MABEL: (Under her breath, to TEPES) Now security shows up? Where the hell were they when the embassy got broken into? (To the MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE) How long will this “obligatory function” take?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: About five hours.

MABEL: Five hours? To open gifts and gossip?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: There are no gifts.

MABEL: (Disappointed) No gifts?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: No. Merely offerings given as a sign of respect for the royal family. And conversation is limited to wedding plans and royal events.

MABEL: Royal events. Such as?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: Next year’s World Cup, of course.

MABEL: Terrific. (To TEPES) Help me. Help me. Help me. (Pushes TEPES to the side) Tepes, I’ll give you a hundred bucks and my Tube pass not to make me do this.

TEPES: Sorry, my love, but it is mandatory.

MABEL: Sounds about as much fun as a when they cancelled “Odyssey 5”. (Looks at TEPES who has no idea what she is referring to) Never mind. All right I’ll go. But just for that, I’m making you wear a grass skirt with your crown in Hawaii.

TEPES: I’d look silly.

MABEL: Exactly.

(The MINISTER enters wearing appropriate royal attire Speaks with a strong Euro-Hungarian accent)

MINISTER: (Bows) Miss Abramson, your parties have just arrived. They have been escorted to their rooms. They asked if you would favor them with your presence at the earliest opportunity. Also, this package arrived for you this morning. I took the liberty of bringing it to you personally. (Hands MABEL the package)

MABEL: Oh, my film. Finally. (Taking the package) Thank you, Mister...uh, Mister Minister.

MINISTER: (To TEPES) Your highness, we are late for our meeting.

TEPES: Yes, yes. Thank you Minister. You and your wife may leave us, now. I would speak with Mabel alone. I shall meet you momentarily.

MINISTER and MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: Yes, your highness. (BOTH the MINISTER and MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE bow and exit)

TEPES: (Uneasy) Mabel, there is something I want to say, but I'm not sure I can find the words.

MABEL: What is it?

TEPES: You believe that I love you, right? (MABEL nods) And that I would never do anything to make you unhappy, right?

MABEL: Yes. Tepes, what is it?

TEPES: I (After a long beat) If you do not want to go to the bridal shower, I won't force you.

MABEL: (Finds his question curious, but then responds) No. Don't worry, Tepes. If it's the custom then I've got to adapt, and I will. It's my responsibility and I want to make you proud of me.

TEPES: Good. Good. (He kisses her gently then) Farewell, my love. (Starts to exit off right. MABEL calls after him)

MABEL: Can I bring my...

TEPES: (Turns back to MABEL) No you cannot bring your mp3 player. (TEPES exits)

MABEL: (Softly) Damn.

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Thirteen
Snagovian Palace, Michael and Mabel's Room

(As LIGHTS UP, we are in a luxurious suite at the palace, about ten minutes later. MICHAEL and NINA enter through a door sr. They have changed clothes and wear coats. MICHAEL is carrying several suitcases. NINA especially looks exhausted)

NINA: Man, what a long flight. I'm so glad the palace driver who met us at the airport was on time. I'm beat. (Flops on the bed) It's "pillow time" for me.

MICHAEL: (Plops down the suitcases, but is surprisingly invigorated) Not me. I'm ready to hit the clubs and party like a wild man!

NINA: (Sits up on the bed) Party like a wild man? Hit what clubs, Tarzan? It's 10:30 in the morning.

MICHAEL: Ah, but this is Europe and I hear they party round the clock.

NINA: (Incredulous) They do? Where? We're in Snagovia for a wedding, hubby, not France for the Cannes Film Festival!

MICHAEL: France, Snagovia, whatever. It's all the same. Just remember, Nina. When Michael Hancock is in the mood to have a wild and crazy time, anything can happen.

NINA: With the obvious exception of a wild and crazy time, of course.

MICHAEL: Well, do what you want. I'm heading out.

NINA: (Stands up) Heading out? Wait a minute, Michael. Hold on a second. Don't you think whatever we do we should do together?

MICHAEL: Huh? What are you talking about?

NINA: We're married now. Don't you think that whatever there is to do we should be doing it together, y'know, like a married couple?

MICHAEL: Oh, you mean like carrying luggage, cooking, cleaning, laundry? Things like that? Right now I don't see you wanting to do those things together, "wifey".

NINA: That's not what I'm talking about.

MICHAEL: I had a feeling.

NINA: First chance in a year we get away from the city and immediately you want to take off on your own. You don't want to spend time with me anymore and I know why.

MICHAEL: You do?

NINA: Yes. It's because we've become complacent with one another, Michael. We're in a rut. We don't communicate anymore.

MICHAEL: We don't communicate because you keep telling me to shut up all the time.

NINA: (Sits back down on the bed) That is not true. It's just that even now, I still sometimes feel as if I don't really know you. I mean the real Michael. So, starting right now, this very minute, I want us to share everything with one another.

MICHAEL: (Depressed) Great. (Sits down on the bed next to NINA)

NINA: I want to find out more about you, Michael. I want to know more about you than any other human being on the planet.

MICHAEL: Um, okay, I guess. What do you wanna know?

NINA: Tell me something about yourself you've never told anybody else before.

(MICHAEL thinks for a moment then says)

MICHAEL: Okay. Here's one. Y'know, back in elementary school? I used to love taking those sealed bags of brand new elastics, open them up and take a big long whiff of them for long periods of time. (Demonstrates)

(NINA looks at MICHAEL for a long moment, then says)

NINA: Another piece of the puzzle, Michael.

MICHAEL: Then, in middle school...

NINA: Shut up, Michael.

MICHAEL: See? Toldja. (MICHAEL begins to walk away)

NINA: Now where are you...?

MICHAEL: I'm just going to walk off the castle roof, now. Bye. (Opens the door and CASSANDRA and SAGE are there, also dressed in coats sans luggage) Cassandra! Sage! Jeesh, it's so good to see you guys!

(NINA and MICHAEL both shake hands and welcome their friends into their room, leaving the door wide open)

NINA: So how have you guys been? How was your flight?

SAGE: Couldn't have been better. No turbulence at all.

CASSANDRA: How would you know? You slept all the way here.

SAGE: (Pats her stomach) Like a baby.

CASSANDRA: (To SAGE) Very funny. (To NINA and MICHAEL) I hate him.

SAGE: How about you guys? The flight from New York okay?

MICHAEL: Well, let's just say the flight crew won't forget Nina anytime soon.

CASSANDRA: How come?

MICHAEL: Well, you know those window shutter thingies they've got on the plane next to the seats?

SAGE: Uh-huh. Oh, no. What did she do?

NINA; Don't you dare tell--

MICHAEL: She kept telling the flight crew they needed to check the engines because she thought she saw a bird fly into it.

NINA: What? It's been known to happen.

MICHAEL: Eighteen times on an eight hour flight?

NINA: We were over the Atlantic Ocean! (To CASSANDRA and SAGE who are laughing hysterically now) I hate him.

CASSANDRA: (Holding onto her belly) Oh, please stop. I can't laugh too hard or my water will burst. Which reminds me, where's the bathroom?

MICHAEL: (Pointing to a door off left) That-a-way.

CASSANDRA: Thanks.

MICHAEL: (Nudging SAGE) Hey Sage, on the flight over, how many times did she have to go to—

SAGE: I don't know. I was asleep through most of it. But just in the terminal she had to go about six times. (Flushing sound)

MICHAEL: Six times? (MICHAEL and NINA start laughing)

CASSANDRA: (Offstage from the bathroom) I hate you! (CASSANDRA re-enters the room) Jerk.

NINA: Aw, Cass. It's okay.

CASSANDRA: The heck it is. You try to be comfortable cramming your pregnant butt into a three by two seat at high altitudes and see how you like it.

NINA: No thanks. We just got married. No kids for at least another two years thank you very much.

CASSANDRA: Two years? I don't know Nina. Sometimes things just happen, you know?

(MICHAEL pulls out another “parkle” drawing and shows it to SAGE)

NINA: Trust me, Cassandra--

MICHAEL: (Proudly, to SAGE) Look! It’s a parkle!

NINA: He is his own best birth control. (To MICHAEL) Michael, you left the door open. Go close it.

MICHAEL: Okay. (MICHAEL goes over to the door and closes it just as MABEL comes up to it. He accidentally closes it into her face as he says) Say, anyone seen Mabel yet?

(There is a loud crash behind the door)

NINA, SAGE and CASSANDRA: There she is. (MICHAEL re-opens the door and MABEL is there, holding her nose, still carrying the package and book in her hands) Mabel!

MICHAEL: I’m sorry, Mabel. Come on in.

(ALL go hug MABEL. MICHAEL leaves door open again)

MABEL: Gee, it’s great to see you guys. I’ve missed you all so much. And Cassandra! Just look at you! You’re so hu—

SAGE: Careful, Mabel.

MABEL: So...radiant!

CASSANDRA: Nice save, Mabel. But I do sometimes feel like one of our cows in drag.

NINA: Honey, sit down. (NINA and MICHAEL sit on the bed next to MABEL as CASSANDRA and SAGE sit in large chairs near the bed) We’ve all been so curious about your prince. Is he handsome?

MABEL: Well, as far as princes go I *guess* he’s kind cute. Just kidding. He’s very handsome!

CASSANDRA: We’ve got so many questions, Mabel, but first: How’s Meier?

MABEL: Oh, didn’t I tell you guys? No, I guess there’s no way I could have, is there?

NINA: What?

MABEL: Veronica and Meier arrived last night. They flew in from London.

CASSANDRA: Really?

MABEL: Yeah, but don’t ask me how they are. I’ve been real busy and they haven’t come out of their room.

MICHAEL: Maybe that’s a good thing. (NINA punches him in the arm) Ow! What’d I say?

MABEL: Listen guys, there's so much I want to tell you, about Tepes, the wedding, and all, but first I really need your help.

CASSANDRA: What's the matter, Mabel?

MABEL: Look at these. (Hands the pouch to CASSANDRA, who opens it up and pulls out some photos and begins looking at them)

CASSANDRA: Are these photos taken from your camera the night of Meier's accident?

MABEL: They should be.

CASSANDRA: Should be? What do you--? (Upon closer examination) they're all overexposed.

MABEL: Just like every photograph I took that night. And these are the ones taken in that room. Only two came out. Here is one. (Pulls out a photo and hands it to CASSANDRA)

CASSANDRA: Looks like a cup of some sort.

MABEL: Not just any cup. It's the chalice that was already broken before I entered the room.

CASSANDRA: (Curious) How could you have taken the photo of something that was broken before you got there?

MABEL: I couldn't. That's my point. That's not the same chalice.

NINA: Whoa. I'm lost.

SAGE: You and me both. How could it not be the same one?

CASSANDRA: Yes. Didn't you say it was one of a kind?

MABEL: That's right. I did. Cassandra, take another look behind that chalice.

CASSANDRA: (Upon further examination) It's a flag. Snagovian?

MABEL: Right. But not from the embassy. That picture is from this palace. Look at the walls. They're the same as these walls in this room. The same as the walls in this whole castle. Fourteenth century workmanship is very distinct. That picture was taken here and recently.

MICHAEL: Recently? You mean as in before the cup got broken?

MABEL: No. I mean as in after the cup got broken.

MICHAEL: I'm getting a headache.

MABEL: I use an older film camera. There's a certain timestamp that gets imprinted from it onto the images I take. That picture was taken with my camera two days after the embassy break-in.

SAGE: I am wicked confused. Meier gets injured, you get injured, a cup, a one of a kind cup, gets broken. Then, 48 hours later, the cup is magically reassembled and brought back to Snagovia?

MABEL: And I didn't take the picture. I couldn't have.

CASSANDRA: Then who did? A ghost?

MABEL: I don't know. I looked all over the castle and haven't found any room that looks like that one in the picture. But they gave me this book (opens it up) and in it is shown an eastern wing of the castle which is currently closed off for repairs.

CASSANDRA: What sort of repairs?

MABEL: I don't know. Tepes wouldn't tell me when I asked him.

MICHAEL: Do you think he's on this somehow?

MABEL: Oh, Michael. I don't think so, but honestly I'm not sure of anything right now.

CASSANDRA: You said there was another photo that came out. What was it a shot of?

MABEL: Here. (Hands CASSANDRA the other photo)

CASSANDRA: Three's a lot of distortion. Looks like mist. Is that a woman?

MABEL: (Nodding) Yes. The flash was going off like crazy. That's the distortion. (After a beat) Can you guys help?

NINA: How?

CASSANDRA: Hey guys, what if Meier wasn't really in London to cover the ball? What if he was actually on assignment for something else? Something having to do with this chalice?

MABEL: And he got too close to finding something out?

CASSANDRA: Right, explaining why someone tried to kill him.

NINA: Uh-oh, Michael. Cassandra's got that look in her eye.

(NINA and MICHAEL get up from the bed and collect up the suitcases)

MICHAEL: Well, Mabel, it's been nice seeing you again.

NINA: Right. If you're ever in the Big Apple, look us up.

CASSANDRA: Hold it, you two. Meier nearly got killed. Veronica's probably in a lot of emotional distress, too, right now, I'm sure. If this room is in the castle we've got to find it. This could hold the answer to a lot of questions.

(NINA and MICHAEL drop the suitcases)

MICHAEL: Fine. Where do we start? (MICHAEL closes the door and there is the sound of someone hurt on the other side. Then there is a knock at the door. MICHAEL answers it) Maybe this is Meier and Veronica. (Opens the door and the MISTRESS of ETIQUETTE is standing there carrying several gowns) Nope. Not even close.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (To MABEL) My Lady, I went to your room and you weren't there. I thought I might find you here with your...(Looks at everyone with disdain) your friends.

MABEL: Yes. I wanted to see them. (Presenting CASSANDRA) Here is my matron of honor, Cassandra. This is the Mistress of Etiquette. She's running the bridal shower we have to attend tonight.

CASSANDRA: Oh, is that tonight? Wow. Things are moving so fast.

MABEL: Yes. And it's mandatory.

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CASSANDRA: Mandatory?

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (Stunned at the sight of CASSANDRA) My God. You are preg—with child.

CASSANDRA: (Smiles) Yes.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (Still stunned) Yes. I wasn't informed the matron would be with child. (After a beat and a quick glance of disapproval toward MABEL) Very well. The gowns you and your matron of honor must wear tonight are almost ready, although I'll see to the matron's, um, alterations. We'll need much more fabric. Please make sure to be prompt.

MABEL: (Pulling a quiet albeit angry CASSANDRA back) I'll see to it. Thank you.

(MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE bows and exits)

MICHAEL: Charming old battleaxe. (MICHAEL closes the door) Okay, so now what do we do?

SAGE: I guess Michael and I can look around in that east wing area while you girls go to this thing.

CASSANDRA: No, no, no. We'll move a lot quicker if just Mabel and I go.

SAGE: Well then what are Nina, Michael and I supposed to do?

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CASSANDRA: (Comes up with an idea then smiles) Go to the bridal shower.

SAGE: Well that's fine for Nina, but what about me and Mi---
(Stops dead and realizes) Now wait just a damn minute...

CASSANDRA: It's the only way, Sage. They're expecting three women to show at this thing and if we don't show up there's going to be a royal catastrophe.

MICHAEL: But you can't be two places at the—(also stops dead then realizes) Oh, no. No way! Not me!

NINA: Ha! I love it! Yeah, I'll stick with the boys. This I've got to see.

MICHAEL: Don't you think somebody will notice that neither of us looks nothing like Mabel?

CASSANDRA: I guess we'll have to take that chance.

SAGE: This is insane, Cassandra. Your hormones must be out of whack because you're not thinking straight. Why can't Michael and I search around? Why does it have to be you and Mabel?

CASSANDRA: Okay, here's why. (Points to MABEL) Grade point average?

MABEL: Four point one.

CASSANDRA: (Pointing to herself) Three point nine. Sage?

SAGE: (Shrugs) Two point seven.

CASSANDRA: Michael?

MICHAEL: (Throwing his arms up in defeat) Fine! I'll do it!
But I won't like it!

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Fourteen
Snagovian Palace, Restricted Area, Secluded Room

(As LIGHTS UP, we are in a room in the restricted east wing of the palace. CASSANDRA enters through the door sl. She is hunched over as she enters quietly. MABEL is huddled up right behind CASSANDRA)

CASSANDRA: See anything?

MABEL: I can't even see past your butt.

CASSANDRA: Now? Fat jokes now? I'm helping you and you want to do fat jokes now? Thanks a lot.

MABEL: Sorry. (Shivers) Brrr. Sure is cold in here. Hey, Cassandra. There's something else about the embassy.

CASSANDRA: What?

MABEL: The woman in the other photo. Well, just before I passed out, I thought I saw, well. I thought she was...(Stops and sees something) Wait. What's that over there?

(At a window sl, a handsome young thief, MARCO appears from behind the drapes. He is dressed casual wearing a jacket and carries the chalice)

CASSANDRA: Hold it! Who are you?

MABEL: (MABEL is shocked) Oh, my God! He's gorgeous! (CASSANDRA looks at MABEL surprised) I mean, yeah! Who are you?

MARCO: Marco.

MABEL: Polo! (CASSANDRA looks at MABEL again) Sorry. Force of habit.

MARCO: I mean Marco is my name. Please! Don't try to stop me.

MABEL: The chalice. It's—

MARCO: It is mine.

MABEL: Look at it, Cass. It's identical to the one that got broken in London.

CASSANDRA: Yes. What do you mean yours?

MARCO: This chalice belongs to my family. It was given to us by Vlad the Impaler in the Fourteenth century and was stolen.

MABEL: (After a beat) Are you telling us somebody you're your Dracula cup?

MARCO: Yes. It is a replica of a solid gold chalice kept with Vlad's remains in a small Romanian monastery near here.

CASSANDRA: Look, Marco...

MABEL: Polo!

CASSANDRA: (To MABEL) Would you stop that, please?

MABEL: Sorry.

CASSANDRA: Look, we're not the royal guard. We won't hurt you. But what do mean this is yours?

MARCO: (Sitting down) Vlad married twice. His first marriage ended tragically with his wife's death. There were no children.

MABEL: (To CASSANDRA) That's right. But his second wife gave him two sons.

MARCO: Yes. The elder son, Vlad the Fourth, died at an early age and his descendants married into Hungarian nobility. But the younger son, Janes (note: pronounced "Janesh"), was rumored to be living with a Bishop in Transylvania until he fell ill.

MABEL: That's right. He supposedly died in Budapest.

MARCO: Ah, but Janesh, in fact, did not die. He merely chose to live his life in anonymity. My family is actually his 500 years old descendents.

CASSANDRA: Amazing.

MARCO: This chalice was given to my family as a gift from Vlad Dracula. The chalice remained in our village square throughout Vlad's reign as a symbol of his absolute power. But these Snagovian thieves stole it years ago. Now they try to sell it on the black market but I will stop them.

MABEL: But that's impossible. The chalice was destroyed at the Snagovian embassy. I saw it I pieces on the floor.

MARCO: No. That was a fake. This is the real one.

CASSANDRA: But how could you know that? (Deducing) You were at the embassy. You were trying to steal it back.

MARCO: Yes. I knew they had brought it there, so I had my sister, an artist, make this copy and was going to switch them up, returning the original to my people. But I could not find it in the room.

MABEL: So what happened?

CASSANDRA: The guards came in on you, didn't they?

MARCO: Yes, the entered the room with a man. They were trying to kill him, struggling in a fight.

MABEL: He's a friend of ours. A reporter.

MARCO: Well your friend must have stumbled onto their smuggling plot. I meant to hit them over the head but instead I—(brief hesitation) I struck him by mistake.

CASSANDRA: With the chalice. The cup broke and smashed to the floor in pieces.

MARCO: (Nodding) The guards then chased after me and my...anyway, I'm sorry about your friend. (After a beat) Please. Help me?

(CASSANDRA and MABEL look at one another)

MABEL: So? What do we do?

CASSANDRA: I have an idea. Follow me and bring the chalice.

MABEL: We're going to steal it?

CASSANDRA: (Looks at MARCO then MABEL) Borrow it.

MABEL: Great. I think Mary Queen of Scots and I will have something in common. (Draws a line across her throat)

(ALL exit as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Fifteen **Snagovian Palace, Michael and Nina's Room**

(As LIGHTS UP, we are back in Michael and Nina's room. MICHAEL and SAGE are trying on their disguises)

MICHAEL (Offstage): Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!

NINA: What is it?

MICHAEL: (Offstage) Never try to iron the pleats in a skirt while you're wearing the thing. (Enters wearing a dress with a floral print design. His backside is obscured)

NINA: (After a beat) You have issues.

(SAGE enters wearing a dress. Pieces of toilet paper cover various cuts on his legs)

SAGE: I can't believe I'm doing this. Well? How do we look, Nina?

NINA: Oh...my...God. What did you use on your legs, Sage? A rototiller?

SAGE: (Sarcastic) Well I'm sorry. I've never used a lady's razor before. I'll take the paper off the cuts before we get there. But what do you think? Will we pass ourselves off as women?

NINA: I don't think you'll even pass yourselves off as human, Sage.

SAGE: Constructive criticism, Nina, constructive. We don't have a lot of time.

NINA: All right. Fine. Let me take a good look. (NINA circles the two men then starts giggling standing behind MICHAEL) Michael, you've tucked your skirt into your underwear again.

MICHAEL: Sorry. (Fixes his dress)

SAGE: (Laughs then stops) Wait. "Again"?

MICHAEL: (Embarrassed) Nina, quiet. (MICHAEL shows the backs of his legs to SAGE) Sage, are my lines straight in the back?

SAGE: Wait a minute, Michael. I thought we only had to shave our legs. Nobody said anything about having to put on panty hose.

MICHAEL: I--

SAGE: Nina, I am NOT putting on panty hose.

NINA: Sage, trust me, you both need to wear something on your legs. Especially with all those cuts on your legs and Michael's varicose veins.

MICHAEL: I--Hey!

SAGE: Then what about those things, what are they called, support hose?

NINA: "Support hose"? You mean knee highs? You've got to be kidding.

SAGE: Look, its bad enough we've got to go through with this. I am not wearing panty hose! Not now. Not ever!

NINA: Fine! Fine! There's a shop in village square. We've got to get you some wigs, anyway. (Grabs her pocket book) Mrs. Lethou has her rental car. She and I will go and find each of you a pair of "support hose". Okay? We'll also get some make-up for your eyes.

SAGE: What? Aw, man!

NINA: Well, if you're wearing wigs trust me you'll need to wear make-up. (Finds a set of keys) Ah. Good. Here are my keys.

SAGE: You know my Uncle Tanner got arrested for doing this type of thing once.

MICHAEL: (Adjusting the waistline of his dress) Guess rural America's not quite caught up with twenty-first century alternative lifestyles yet, huh? Darn girdle.

SAGE: (To MICHAEL) Don't stand so close to me.

NINA: Okay, I'm heading out. Oh, and don't forget to check out my jewelry box.

SAGE: Jewelry? Aw, man!

NINA: Stop whining, Sage. Man up. (Looks at SAGE again) Well, do the best you can. Michael will show you where my jewelry box is.

SAGE: Great. Thanks, Nina. (After a beat) Wait. What? How does Michael know...

(NINA exits. SAGE looks at MICHAEL who is carrying the jewelry box. After a long beat, SAGE asks MICHAEL)

SAGE: By the way, why did you put the panty hose on so soon? We don't have to be there for another hour or so.

MICHAEL: (Expressionless) I haven't yet.

SAGE: (Nervous) Oh.

(Blackout)

Act One, Scene Sixteen A Small Snagovian Cafe

(AS LIGHTS UP, we are in a small Snagovian café. There are several PATRONS. MRS. LETHOU and NINA enter the café wearing jackets and carrying several shopping bags)

MRS. LETHOU: Do you think we found everything the boys will need, Nina?

NINA: Lord, I hope so, Mrs. L. I'm starved.

MRS. LETHOU: Let's see if we can get some food. (Walks up to the counter and is greeted by a very happy looking WAITRESS)

WAITRESS: (Speaks in a strong Euro-Hungarian accent. Nods and smiles) Good morning.

MRS. LETHOU: Oh thank God! You speak English! With the exception of the royal family everyone we've met in Snagovia speaks this language which sounds a lot like a cross between Romanian and Hungarian. Hardly anybody speaks English. So you can imagine...

WAITRESS: (Nods and smiles) Good morning.

MRS. LETHOU: Oh God. Not again!

NINA: It's like we're back in Saska-whatchamacallit.

MRS. LETHOU: (To NINA) I hope the food is better, at least. (To the WAITRESS) Deux hamburgers. (To NINA) I don't speak Romanian so hopefully she understands a little French.

WAITRESS: (Nods and smiles) Good morning. (Exits)

NINA: Think she'll be back?

MRS. LETHOU: I'm never sure in these situations.

NINA: Well I hope you get those burgers to go. We've got to meet the boys and get them ready for this bridal shower.

MRS. LETHOU: I know. How did you ever convince them to try and pull off a stunt like this, anyhow?

NINA: Oddly enough, it wasn't that difficult.

(A SECOND WAITRESS, who had been standing at a table taking TWO CUSTOMERS orders with her back to MRS. LETHOU and NINA, turns around and begins cleaning a dirty table. MRS. LETHOU sees her is stunned at the sight of the girl)

MRS. LETHOU: Oh, my Lord. It can't be. It's a ghost. Jazz. She's alive!

NINA: What do you mean alive?

MRS. LETHOU: Look, Nina. Over there! It's my daughter!

(NINA looks over at the SECOND WAITRESS)

NINA: But...it can't be Jazz. We saw her die.

(MRS. LETHOU faints. Several PATRONS come to her aid, but NINA, still in shock at the sight of JAZZ, does not notice. The FIRST WAITRESS returns with the food)

WAITRESS: (Smiling) Deux hamburgers. Good morning. (Exits)

(Still looking at the SEOND WAITRESS in shock, and still unaware that MRS. LETHOU has fainted, NINA slowly picks up a burger off the tray and bites into it. She chews as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

END OF ACT ONE

Act Two

Act Two, Scene One A Small Snagovian Cafe

(As LIGHTS UP, it is moments later at the café. NINA and MRS. LETHOU are seated at a table sl. The SECOND WAITRESS is sitting with them. NINA stands up, crosses sr while talking on her cell phone)

NINA: (Into her cell phone) No, she seems all right now, but Cassandra you won't believe the resemblance. (After a beat) You took the cup? Cassandra, are you nuts? How did you sneak it out of the palace? (After a beat) Man, you pregnant women can hide just about anything in there, huh? (After a beat) The park? You'll be at the park. With who? (After a beat) Polo. (After another beat) Sorry. Force of habit. (After a beat) Got it. Just stay out of sight, okay? Call me later. (NINA comes back and sits next to MRS. LETHOU and ILONA)

MRS. LETHOU: I'm sorry to have caused such a fuss.

ILONA: (Speaking with a mild Euro-Hungarian accent) It is all right. My name is Ilona.

MRS. LETHOU: Ilona. It's a very pretty name.

ILONA: Your friend here says I look like your daughter?

MRS. LETHOU: Yes. It's true. Her name was Jazidua Lethou. My husband and I adopted her. She liked to be called "Jazz". (Looks again at ILONA then says to NINA) It's an uncanny resemblance.

ILONA: You are Americans, no?

NINA: That's right. I went to college with Jazz. Have you always lived here?

ILONA: No. I, too, was adopted. My parents traveled a lot. I was born in Honduras.

MRS. LETHOU: Honduras? (After a beat) Oh, my.

NINA: Mrs. L, didn't you say that's where

MRS. LETHOU: My daughter Jazidua was also born there.

NINA: This is too much of a coincidence. They have to be...I mean, don't they? I mean, they just have to be.

MRS. LETHOU: (To ILONA) Did your parents know your exact birth date? Many Honduran adoptees didn't know.

ILONA: Yes. It was...

MRS. LETHOU: Wait. Wait. Ilona, I'm so nervous. I want to know, but I don't want to know. (Thinks) Do you have a piece of paper? (ILONA nods) Would you mind if I guess your birthday? I'll write my guess down on a piece of paper. You write your birth date down and then we'll compare.

(ILONA pulls out her waitress order pad and pulls off two pieces of paper, handing one to MRS. LETHOU)

NINA: Mrs. Lethou, you're really starting to weird me out.

MRS. LETHOU: Please, Nina. Just humor me, okay?

(MRS. LETHOU and ILONA both write out dates on the pieces of paper, fold them up then gently slide them across the table to each other. They slowly open them up and then slowly begin to smile at one another)

NINA: Well? Do we have a sister for Jazz or what?

MRS. LETHOU: (Still smiling at ILONA) We do.

ILONA: I'm very happy, yet very sad at the same time. I learn I had a sister yet she has passed away. At least I can rest assured from your demeanor that she was well loved.

NINA: Oh, yeah. She was. The Lethous adored her. We all liked Jazz.

MRS. LETHOU: Ilona, we weren't given a lot of details about Jazz when we adopted so we never knew she was a twin. If we had known, we—

ILONA: Oh, please, Mrs. Lethou. Do not worry. I never want for anything. My parents were elderly couple, no child of their own, so they took me in. They die a few years ago. They were good people. You have nothing to feel ashamed for.

(NINA's cell phone goes off. She looks at a text message then speaks to MRS. LETHOU)

NINA: Dang. Look, Mrs. Lethou, this is real interesting and I'm sure you two have a lot to discuss, but I've got to get this stuff back to the boys so they can get to the bridal shower.

ILONA: What? The boys?

NINA: (Embarrassed) Uh, long story. So, can I borrow your car? I'll come back in about an hour and pick you up.

MRS. LETHOU: Okay, Nina. (Hands her the keys) Here you go. (NINA takes the keys and heads for the door, just as a six year old child, BASARAB, enters carrying a comic book)

NINA: Easy there, tiger. You nearly knocked me over.

ILONA: (Calling to BASARAB) Basarab! (Speaking in Snagovian) Mashnantey. Come here.

(BASARAB runs up and hugs his mother, ILONA as MRS. LETHOU stands and NINA watches, astonished)

BASARAB: Mama! (Speaking in Snagovian) Venashotan. Macom banar goodran.

MRS. LETHOU: This is your child? (ILONA nods. MRS. LETHOU slowly sits back down) Oh, my.

NINA: (Welling up) Oh, man. This is so beautiful! Now I'm gonna cry. (Frustrated) Dammit! I gotta go! (Exits)

BASARAB: (Shows ILONA the comic book) Vishtan es "Super-Redneck Zombie Pirate Captain"! Wicked cool! (LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Two A Park Bench

(LIGHTS UP on a park bench with CASSANDRA, MABEL and MARCO. It is a few hours later. MABEL is starting to feel a stronger attraction to MARCO. Yet she also looks slightly guilty, presumably because of her feelings for Tepes)

MABEL: Is it still safe, Cassandra?

CASSANDRA: (Pulling out the chalice from under her maternity blouse) Not the most comfortable way of carrying something like this, but it worked. (Hands the cup back to MARCO) Here. You hold onto this.

MARCO: (Taking the cup, slightly disgusted) It is all sticky and sweaty.

CASSANDRA: (Looking around) I've got to find a ladies room.

MABEL: Again?

CASSANDRA: Listen, you two complainers: You try lugging around a (pointing to her stomach) "baby on board" in your stomach and a priceless artifact under your shirt and see how you feel after an hour.

MABEL: Sorry. I'll wait here (after a beat) with him.

CASSANDRA: Good. When I get back we'll figure out something. (Exits)

MABEL: So (After a long, uncomfortable pause) here we are.

MARCO: Yes. Here we are. (After a beat) Here. (After a beat) Together. (After a beat) Alone. (After a beat) Yes.

MABEL: I was...

MARCO: (Interrupting abruptly) Yes?

MABEL: (Startled) I was hoping we'd have a chance to chat like this.

MARCO: Like this? Oh, yes. (Long pause, then) Me, too.

MABEL: Man, I'm feeling a major case of déjà vu. (Looks at MARCO) But it's a little bit different this time.

MARCO: You and your friend are taking a great risk by helping me.

MABEL: Maybe we think you're worth the risk. (Stands closer to MARCO) I know I do.

MARCO: You are too kind.

MABEL: So, tell me more about your family. Is it a big one?

MARCO: No. It is only my sister and I now. My parents died in an earthquake six years ago.

MABEL: How horrible.

MARCO: Yes. That is why my sister and I became determined to get back what rightfully belongs to us, to them. It is a symbol of our family heritage and must be returned.

MABEL: I still don't understand why the royal family would want to steal the chalice from you.

MARCO: Because of money and because this dictator prefers "thuggery" to democracy.

MABEL: (Laughing) I can't believe it.

MARCO: What? The greed? The subjugation?

MABEL: No, that you used "thuggery" in a sentence. Nobody uses the word "thuggery" anymore. (MARCO starts to laugh)

MARCO: You are a funny woman, Miss Mabel. (Begins to take a longing look into MABEL's eyes, then) I know we have just met, but I—(He advances toward her, but MABEL anxiously moves away)

MABEL: I can't.

MARCO: What is it? Have I offended you?

MABEL: Oh no. (Looks back at MARCO) You couldn't. But I'm engaged to someone. (Turns away from MARCO) Someone you know.

MARCO: (Realizing) Tepes. You and Tepes. You are his fiancé, yes?

MABEL: (Nodding) Yes.

MARCO: But how can you be so blind? Tepes is unscrupulous. He and the Queen are involved crimes against the realm. (They do not see as two PALACE SECURITY GUARDS approach. They see MARCO and MABEL together)

MABEL: No. I don't believe that. Whatever else that's going on here, Marco, I'm sure Tepes isn't involved.

MARCO: I shall run him through if we ever meet again.

MABEL: Again? What...(CASSANDRA comes back from the bathroom and sees the PALACE GUARDS)

CASSANDRA: Mabel! Watch out!

(The PALACE GUARDS advance on the trio and take the chalice out of MARCO's hands. They grab MARCO. CASSANDRA and MABEL run off as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Three Snagovian Palace, Tepes's Room

(LIGHTS UP back at the Snagovian palace, in the Prince's royal chambers. The PALACE GUARDS are reporting to TEPES)

TEPES: Where is the prisoner now?

PALACE GUARD: (In a mild Euro-Hungarian accent) Locked in the east wing. Two men guard his room. He cannot escape.

TEPES: The woman you saw with him. Are you assured it was my fiancé?

PALACE GUARD: It looked like her. We could not hear them, so we do not know for sure.

TEPES: Impossible. Why right now my fiancé is attending her royal bridal shower with her matron of honor.

PALACE GUARD: Yes sir. (Insincere) I might have been mistaken. This thief, you know him, do you not?

TEPES: (Nodding) Marco and I were boyhood friends. Before the earthquake, his parents and sister would visit us here at the palace and we would play. Such joyous days. We'd take part in all sorts of sports such as archery, rugby, fencing. He was very competitive. Seemed to have something to prove.

PALACE GUARD: What happened?

TEPES: Things changed. He changed, became obsessed with the politics of the realm. And then the chalice.

PALACE GUARD: (Suggesting to TEPES) Do you think he was the one from the embassy?

TEPES: (Unsure) Marco's thuggery is well known. He has tried to steal the chalice before. (Becoming more assured) I suppose now we have no choice. We must make an example of anyone who goes against the monarchy.

PALACE GUARD: Absolutely, your highness.

TEPES: (After a beat, TEPES makes a decision) Find the Minister. He is to charge Marco for the embassy robbery, the destruction of the chalice, and then, beheaded.

PALACE GUARD: (Happy, as if he has just scored a goal) Yes! (Then acting surprised) I mean, beheaded? No one has been beheaded in two hundred years, your highness.

TEPES: Because there has not been an act of treason like this in as many years. Tell no one of this. We do not want word leaking out to the people, especially...our guests. Understand?

PALACE GUARD: Yes, your highness. (Bows and exits as LIGHTS FADE - Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Four Snagovian Royal Suite

(LIGHTS UP on a Royal Suite where the bridal shower is taking place. The MINISTER stands behind the MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE who is seated in a large royal chair to the rear center stage where one might normally expect to see the bride. She is accepting "offerings" from all those in attendance. As each offering is presented, the MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE announces what the item is and who it is from and the GUESTS applaud. ALL GUESTS are women gathered around wearing royal attire along with "veils" to conceal their faces. NINA stands next to the disguised SAGE and MICHAEL.)

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (Accepting an offering from a GUEST) A quart of lavender perfume from the country of Ulana. Her ladyship accepts your offering with gratitude. (MINISTER takes the item) Next! (ANOTHER GUEST hands over an offering) A blanket made from the finest silk in Romania. Her ladyship accepts your offering with gratitude. (MINISTER takes the item) Next!

MICHAEL: (To SAGE) How much longer is this going to take? We've been here for hours.

SAGE: I know. These shoes aren't the most comfortable things to be standing around in. And I could do without the veils. I thought veils were more of an Arabic thing.

MICHAEL: (Batting his eyes at SAGE) How do my eyes look? Is my eyeliner okay? It feels smudgy.

SAGE: (Expressionless) You know, keep this up and I'm going to iron palm you right into a wall after this.

MICHAEL: Oooh. Touchy. (Looks over at the MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE, then asks SAGE) Why does that old geezer's battleaxe of a wife get to sit in the big chair? Why not Mabel?

NINA: Shhh. Would you two keep it down? Be grateful for small favors. So far this has worked out perfectly. (TWO GUESTS approach the trio) Nobody even suspects...

TWO GUESTS: (Bowling to MICHAEL) Your ladyship. (NINA, MICHAEL and SAGE all bow, uncomfortably and nervous)

NINA: Yes, yes. Thank you. (The TWO GUESTS leave)

MICHAEL: Me? I'm Mabel? I don't look anything like Mabel!

SAGE: Shh. It's the outfit. Apparently the colors indicate who everybody is.

MICHAEL: Well thank you, Mr. two point seven.

NINA: (Whispering) Stop bickering! Man. I'll be glad when this is over. (Looks at MICHAEL) Although, I've got to admit it, Michael, you actually do pull that outfit off okay.

MICHAEL: Aw shucks. And thanks for the last minute alterations. Where'd you find the fabric to match?

NINA: Just be careful using the shower when we get back to our room.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: (As the MINISTER accepts a gift from a GUEST) A ball gown from the Elton John collection from the estate of George Michael. Her ladyship accepts your offering with gratitude. Next!

SAGE: How does she know what's inside each gift?

NINA: "Offering". Dunno. Guess when they do the bridal registry for royalty they really enforce it.

MICHAEL: (Excited) George Michael's here? (Looks around) Where?

NINA: (Exasperated) Oh, good God.

(TWO MORE GUESTS pass by NINA and MICHAEL speaking in Snagovian)

GUEST: Ah, Vishtan es "Super-Redneck Zombie Pirate Captain"! Wicked cool! (The GUESTS exit. MICHAEL pulls his veil away from NINA briefly to shoot her a big smile)

MICHAEL: (Whispering, almost singing) We're gonna be rich. We're gonna be rich. (He covers himself back up with the veil)

NINA: I think I'm gonna be ill. (Considers for a moment) But now that I think of it...(Slowly smiles, whispering, almost singing to MICHAEL) We're gonna be rich. We're gonna be rich. (PALACE GUARDS enter sr and cross up to the MINISTER . One whispers to him and then the MINISTER begins to whisper to the MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE)

SAGE: Uh-oh. This can't be good.

NINA: What?

SAGE: Look at the Minister. Something's up.

MISTRESS OF ETIQUETTE: What? (The MINISTER whispers again) What? (The MINISTER whispers a little louder) I can't hear you. Speak up. Who is in the east wing?

MINISTER: Marco! Marco-Marco-Marco!

MICHAEL: Polo!

SAGE and NINA: (To MICHAEL) Shhhhh!!!

(ALL look at MICHAEL)

MICHAEL: (Softly) Oops. I mean, (Clears his throat and then speaks in a high pitched voice) Polo! (LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Five

Snagovian Palace, Meier and Veronica's Room

(LIGHTS UP on VERONICA and MEIER's room at the Snagovian palace. MABEL and CASSANDRA are speaking to VERONICA. MEIER is sitting at a table, his back to them)

MABEL: Do you think he can help us?

VERONICA: I don't know. He's still so withdrawn. I haven't been able to reach him. Cassandra, you and he have always been a lot alike. Would you try talking to him?

(CASSANDRA nods. VERONICA brings CASSANDRA over to MEIER)

VERONICA: (Loudly) Meier, its Cassandra.

MEIER: I know that, Veronica. I'm blind, not deaf. I heard the whole thing. I'm sorry, but I can't help.

CASSANDRA: Look, I know you've been through a lot, Meier, but this Marco guy is in trouble. Is there anything you can tell us about what you found out that night?

(MEIER doesn't respond. VERONICA angrily approaches him from the other side)

VERONICA: Dammit, Meier. Help them! Say something! A man's life is at stake!

MEIER: (Slowly turning around, still sitting) All right. (To MABEL and CASSANDRA) The monarchy is broke.

MABEL: That's impossible. This palace, everything we've seen, the wedding.

MEIER: All financed through bad money. The monarchy has been fencing precious world treasures, getting them across multiple country borders without detection, including the chalice which they stashed at their embassy in London to be filtered through.

MABEL: Tepes? Is he...?

MEIER: Involved? I don't know. But he had to at least be aware this was going on. That's what I was trying to find out that... well, that night.

MABEL: So you weren't at the embassy to cover the reception. You were there to uncover the plot for your newspaper.

MEIER: (Nodding) I got a tip the chalice was there and was going to be smuggled out, so I wanted to catch them in the act. The only way to do that was to go undercover and attend the wedding reception. Catch them in the act and I would have had the story of my career.

VERONICA: Story of...Meier, you could have been...you were almost killed. And for what? An article for a newspaper?

MEIER: (Stands up defiantly) Veronica, it's what I do! (After a long beat) Did.

VERONICA: (Slowly walks over to MEIER and gently strokes his face) No, you're right. It's what you do. (Kisses him on the cheek, smiling) And there's the man I fell in love with.

MEIER (Slowly stands and approaches VERONICA) Yes. I'm sorry, honey. (To MABEL and CASSANDRA) There's more, girls, but I need to get to a computer.

MABEL: You can use the lap top in my room.

MEIER: Are you linked to the internet?

MABEL: (Scoffs) Please.

MEIER: Sorry. Forgot who I was talking to.

CASSANDRA: But how will you...

VERONICA: We'll both go. I'll be his eyes. (To MEIER) Always.

MEIER: (Smiling) I was hoping you'd say that.

MABEL: Let's go and see how Marco is doing.

CASSANDRA: Will they let you in?

MABEL: Don't know. Let's see if being an almost-Princess buys me any cred around here.

CASSANDRA: (To MEIER and VERONICA) We'll meet you guys back at Mabel's room in an hour. Okay?

VERONICA: Okay, Cass.

CASSANDRA: Let's go. (They ALL exit the room as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Six
Snagovian Palace, East Wing Room

(LIGHTS UP on a locked room in the east wing of the Snagovian palace. MABEL and CASSANDRA approach and find an unconscious GUARD lying at the door which has been left ajar. MABEL leans over and examines the GUARD as CASSANDRA looks in the room)

CASSANDRA: The room is empty. The guard, is he...?

MABEL: He's unconscious, but he'll be okay. We've got to find Marco. He's got to be going after Tepes.

CASSANDRA: You mean after the chalice, don't you?

MABEL: No, I think I mean Tepes. Come on. (They exit as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Seven
Snagovian Palace, Parapet Tower Room

(LIGHTS UP on the palace parapet tower room, the highest point in the palace. Hung on the wall is a pair of crossed swords. The MINISTER and a PALACE GUARD are seen climbing a staircase sl, trying to smuggle out the chalice as TEPES enters sr)

TEPES: Minister! Where are you going?

MINISTER: Your highness. We were just...we were moving the chalice to a room here in the parapet for safe keeping.

TEPES: So, it was you all along. You who has been smuggling artifacts out of the country. You and my guards.

MINISTER: Not all of them. Just a few. We would move the artifacts to the embassy and a certain "business associate" would transport them to other countries.

TEPES: And you'd collect a fee, I presume?

MINISTER: (Defensive) Your highness, my intent was to keep the monarchy afloat during troubled economic times.

TEPES: Are you saying your motive was totally altruistic? I find that hard to believe. (MARCO enters)

MARCO: Tepes! Give me the chalice. Now!

TEPES: The chalice belongs to the kingdom, Marco, and you know it.

MARCO: No. It belongs to my family, the true Vlad descendents, and we will have it back.

TEPES: You have never proved your claims of heritage, boy, and you will certainly not take this chalice while I am alive.

MARCO: (Grabs one of the crossed swords from the wall) Then I hope your fencing skills have improved since our youth. (TEPES steps toward MARCO and grabs the other foil)

MINISTER: Your highness, don't.

TEPES: Now you worry about my safety? Oh, good timing, Minister. After I run this boy through, I'm coming for you.

(TEPES and MARCO bow to each other, bring their foils vertically to their faces then assume proper fencing stance. As they begin to fence, MABEL and CASSANDRA enter sr)

MABEL: Oh, my God! We've entered into an Errol Flynn picture! (The fighting continues as MABEL and CASSANDRA move to the side)

MABEL: Marco! Tepes! Don't fight! Not over me!

(TEPES and MARCO stop fighting for a split second)

MARCO and TEPES: We're not!

MABEL: (After a beat, almost insulted) Oh.

(The fighting continues. The MINISTER and GUARD slowly make their way toward an open area stage right when they are stopped by the QUEEN who enters with MEIER, VERONICA and two other GUARDS. TEPES and MARCO advance up a long staircase toward the top where there is a thousand foot drop. MEIER speaks to the QUEEN)

MEIER: Your majesty, no matter what happens here, no matter who wins the fight, I will expose the royal family for all crimes. It's over. Stop this.

(Before the QUEEN can speak, CASSANDRA's water breaks where she and MABEL have been standing. Coming back down the staircase and passing by CASSANDRA both MARCO and TEPES lose their balance and fall down)

MABEL: What happened?

CASSANDRA: (Holding her stomach) My water just broke.

MABEL: Now?

CASSANDRA: It's not like I planned it, you know!

(MARCO cannot find his foil. TEPES rises first and brings his foil to MARCO's throat. He looks at MABEL)

MABEL: (To TEPES) Tepes, don't! If you truly love me, don't!

(TEPES looks at MARCO, then back at MABEL. He realizes the emotional bond between the two. He angrily presses the point of his sword at MARCO's throat when the QUEEN shouts)

QUEEN: Tepes! Don't! He is your brother!

(ALL stop. Everyone is in shock. TEPES looks at the QUEEN who nods that what she has just said is true. TEPES looks at MARCO, takes a step back, dropping his foil. MARCO stands up slowly and approaches the QUEEN)

MABEL: Ho-lee crap.

QUEEN: It is true. I had an affair with the boy's father and we had a child. (To MARCO) You, Marco. My husband the king felt the shame would be too great for our realm, so we kept the family close to us. Your parents promised to keep their silence.

MARCO: That's why all my visits here as a boy.

QUEEN: Yes. I was in love with your father, but he was a poor commoner and we...I...I could not afford the scandal. For years you and Tepes were so much like the brothers I had hoped you could be. There did not seem to be a need to tell you the truth.

TEPES: You did not...(Astounded) did not see the need?

QUEEN: Tepes, Marco, I am so sorry, my sons.

TEPES: And you never—

QUEEN: When his parents died, things changed. Marco became more involved in Snagovian politics, ultimately choosing to side against the royal family.

MARCO: I sided with my own family. The one which raised me. The only family I ever knew. Then you stole what was rightfully ours.

CASSANDRA: (Sits down on the initial step of the staircase) Hello. Just a reminder here. Water broke.

TEPES: (In disbelief) Mother, all this? You knew? How could you? I do not even recognize you.

MINISTER: (Pleading) The Queen was given few options, Tepes. The goods being moved out of the country were valuable and helped our struggling economy, but the chalice of Dracula, which really does belong to Marco's adopted family, was worth millions to the Russian mafia.

MARCO: I knew it. (To the QUEEN) And you...

MINISTER: No. It was not her idea to steal it. It was not even mine.

TEPES: Then who?

MINISTER: (Looking ashamed) My wife.

MABEL: The Mistress of Etiquette?

VERONICA: (Sarcastic) Whoa. No irony there.

MINISTER: Yes. (To himself) Stupid battleaxe. She should never have fallen in with her sister.

MABEL: Her sister?

MEIER: Ilyana Moravek, aka "The Black Widow" from the Russian mob.

MABEL: I read somewhere that she was out of prison.

MEIER: (Nodding) Diplomatic immunity. Moravek has some powerful friends. Seems the Minister and his wife not only have been smuggling priceless artifacts but military secrets.

MABEL: (To the MINISTER) My camera. You sabotaged my camera. You tried to ruin all my film. (The MINISTER nods, ashamed)

MINISTER: To protect her majesty and his highness from being implicated. By the time the Queen found out it was too late. The die had been cast.

(TEPES takes the chalice from the MINISTER and hands it back over to MARCO)

TEPES: I am sorry...brother. (BOTH men look at each other, smile, but then shoot an uncomfortable look to MABEL, who has a look of uncertainty, not knowing which man she loves more. Then TEPES and MARCO look back at each other and MARCO walks past TEPES not saying a word)

MEIER: Wait a minute. Marco--

MARCO: Polo. Wait. (Turns back) How did he know I was leaving?

MEIER: Let's just say my hearing is much more acute these days. (To ALL) Tepes may not have known about the chalice, but he's not totally without blame here.

CASSANDRA: (To HERSELF) Oh, no. It's like a royal soap opera. (To ALL) Hello. Water just broke. Get on with it!

VERONICA: Hold on, Cassandra. (CASSANDRA shoots a nasty look to VERONICA) Tell them what you found out, Meier.

MEIER: No. (To TEPES) I think you better tell them the whole story, Tepes.

(MABEL looks at a lightly panting CASSANDRA)

MABEL: Sorry. Can you hang in there another minute?

CASSANDRA: (Sarcastic) Well, my water just broke and I can pop out a kid at thirty miles an hour any second, but yeah. I'm good. Go ahead.

MABEL: Thanks. (CASSANDRA shrugs, tilts her head back as MABEL talks to TEPES) What story?

TEPES: Yes. It is true. I'm sorry. After we met I told my mother about you. She had me bring you here under a false pretense.

MABEL: False--? What's that supposed to mean?

TEPES: I told her about your ketchup dispenser.

MABEL: Yeah? So?

CASSANDRA: (Tilts head back up. Panting, sounding as sarcastic as NINA) Oh, no! Not that stupid battery-operated ketchup bottle thingy. You still have that?

VERONICA: Quiet, Nina. Wait a minute. That was Cassandra. Wow, that was weird. Meier, what's going on?

MEIER: You see, Tepes, Mabel told us that you brought her here because you thought her ketchup dispenser might be an answer for your tomato shortage. But I learned there is no such shortage. So there could only be one other explanation.

MABEL: You mean because he loved me, Meier, right? (After a beat, to TEPES) Right?

MEIER: (Shaking his head) Sorry, Mabel. He may love you, I don't know, but that's not the real reason he wanted you here. If you were married to Tepes, under Snagovian law whatever is yours becomes his in title, including the patent for the ketchup dispenser.

MARCO: So what? What is so special about a battery-operated ketchup dispenser?

MEIER: Nothing. Except the battery. (To the QUEEN) Right, your highness?

QUEEN: Yes. It was the battery we wanted all along.

CASSANDRA: (Now panting harder, to MEIER) Speed it up, there, Sherlock.

MEIER: I don't know whether you realized this or not, Mabel, but up until your ketchup dispenser invention, there essentially has been no such thing as a self-regenerating solar powered battery.

MABEL: There hasn't? (To HERSELF) Well how about that? (To the QUEEN) So you never wanted my ketchup bottle at all.

QUEEN: (Scoffing) Please. It's ketchup.

MABEL: (To TEPES) And with my being married to you, the patent which included the battery would belong to my husband.

MEIER: That's right. And even in the event of a divorce it would remain his.

QUEEN: We would have made millions. But soon after you arrived something happened which I hadn't expected.

MABEL: What?

TEPES: I fell in love with you.

MABEL: I can't believe this. If you loved me, really loved me, wouldn't it occur to you that I might willingly share my invention with you and all the benefits that came with it?

TEPES: I, well I--

MABEL: You know that book you gave me? The Vade Mecum? Well I knew the name sounded familiar. In Latin vademecum means "Take me with you or go with me".

MEIER: Good advice. (Takes VERONICA's hand) Real good advice.

MABEL: You should have trusted me, Tepes.

TEPES: (Ashamed) I am sorry, my love.

MABEL: (After a beat) I think you better stop talking now.

CASSANDRA: How about we *all* stop talking? I'm in labor! Hello! Some help here! (In pain) Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!
(Breathing and panting, then says to the GUARD) Give me your hand. (Crushes the GUARD's hand)

GUARD: Ow!Ow!Ow!Ow!

VERONICA: (Rushing to CASSANDRA's side) Try to focus on something, Cassandra. Oh, look. There's a spider. You like spiders. Why not just (CASSANDRA stomps on the spider and squishes it) Quick! (To MARCO and TEPES) You two. Help Cassandra out. We've got to get her to a hospital!
(EVERYBODY just looks at VERONICA) Well, move!

(The GROUP exits with MARCO and TEPES leading CASSANDRA out. The QUEEN follows after. MABEL speaks to MEIER as VERONICA brings up the rear)

MABEL: Wow. Who would have thought that in a crisis situation Veronica would be the one in charge?

MEIER: (Smiling) Yeah. Who would have thought it? (Holds onto VERONICA's arm and she leads MEIER out)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Eight **Snagovian Hospital, Emergency Room**

(LIGHTS UP on a Snagovian hospital emergency room. There is a NURSE standing behind the admitting desk reading a copy of the "Super-Redneck Zombie Pirate Captain" comic book. MEIER sits over sr talking on his cell phone. VERONICA and MABEL are sl with MRS. LETHOU, ILONA and BASARAB. MABEL and VERONICA are astounded at ILONA's resemblance to their deceased friend Jazz)

MRS. LETHOU: Thank you for calling me, Veronica.

VERONICA: (Staring at ILONA) No problem.

MRS. LETHOU: And thank you for bringing me here, Ilona.

ILONA: It was my pleasure. (To MABEL) I hope your friend is better.

MABEL: (Staring at ILONA) Yeah, me too.

MRS. LETHOU: Give it time, girls. She seems to be a wonderful person.

MABEL: It's just uncanny. Just curious: Have you been to London recently? (ILONA looks anxious at MABEL as VERONICA chimes in)

VERONICA: Say, where's Nina?

MRS. LETHOU: I called her. She was going to tell Sage and Michael. I wonder what's keeping them?

(SAGE and MICHAEL burst in with NINA right behind them. The boys are still dressed in drag with veils still across their faces as they approach the NURSE)

SAGE and MICHAEL: We're having a baby!

MRS. LETHOU: There they are.

(SAGE tries to speak, but is so out of breath, he instead bends over and MICHAEL has to speak for him quickly)

MICHAEL: My friend's baby is having a wife. I mean my wife is having a baby.

NINA: (Quickly) Wha--? Uh-uh.

MICHAEL: I mean...his baby. She's having his baby.

NINA: (Quickly) Wha--? Uh-uh.

MICHAEL: I mean...

NURSE: (Speaking in Snagovian, holds up her hand as if to say "Stop") Vinshtan. Who is the...father?

(Both MICHAEL and SAGE raise their hands)

MICHAEL and SAGE: I am.

MICHAEL: (Pointing to SAGE) I mean she is. He, he, he is.

SAGE: Pembleton. Mrs. Pembleton. I'm her husband.

NURSE: Ah, I see. Mr. Pembleton. Lovely gown. Please follow me. (SAGE and the NURSE exit)

VERONICA: Michael! Nina! Over here!

NINA: (Approaching VERONICA) Veronica. How is she?

VERONICA: She's fine. They took her in right away.

MEIER: (Approaches the group) I just got off the phone with my newspaper.

VERONICA: Did you tell them about the Minister assuming the blame for everything?

MEIER: Yeah. Can you believe it? The Queen knew about everything, but he still took the fall to protect the monarchy.

MICHAEL: (Removing his veil) Talk about taking one for the team. Wait. What? What are we talking about?

VERONICA: Michael, your eyeliner's smudged.

MICHAEL: I knew it. (Cleans his make-up with the veil)

BASARAB – (To ILONA) Mama, quinton bellagag. Why is the strange man wearing grandmere’s dress?

(MICHAEL takes off his wig)

MICHAEL – Bug off, kid. (BASARAB slowly backs away as MICHAEL speaks to ALL) Would someone please tell me just what the heck has been going here tonight?

(TEPES and MARCO return with the QUEEN. ILONA sees MARCO)

ILONA: Marco! (She runs up and hugs MARCO. MABEL, VERONICA, MICHAEL and NINA are all stunned)

TEPES: (Recognizing ILONA, is pleasantly surprised) Ilona?

NINA: Whoa. Didn’t see that one coming. (Looks at MEIER) Whoops. Sorry, Meier.

MEIER: Sorry about what? What’s happened?

MRS. LETHOU: Ilona, you know this boy?

ILONA: Marco is my brother.

MABEL: Your brother? (Smiles) Your brother? Really? (After a long beat, MABEL hugs ILONA) Ilona!

MEIER: Whoa. Didn’t see that one coming. (NINA looks at MEIER) Just wanted to make sure you were paying attention.

TEPES: Ilona. I haven’t seen you in years. My how you have grown. All those days playing in the pool together.

NINA: I can guess what game.

MICHAEL: (Laughing) Marco.

NINA: (Also laughing) Polo!

MEIER: Actually, Tepes, if you had made it into the Embassy room earlier that night you would have seen Ilona hit me over the head with the chalice.

ALL: What?

MEIER: I saw you. You were actually the last thing I saw. I remember you looked like my wife’s friend, Jazz. Then after you hit me and I went down, I heard Marco call your name.

(MABEL pulls out the photo)

MABEL: (To ILONA) So this is a picture of you. (To ALL) Just before I passed out, I thought I had this vision of Jazz. I thought it was a ghost. (To ILONA) But it was you.

ILONA: (Nodding) It is true, yes. I am truly sorry.

MARCO: (Anxiously, to MEIER) It was an accident, sir. She thought you were with the guards and was only trying to protect me.

MEIER: I gathered as much. While I'll never get my sight back, I've gained other things. (VERONICA comes up and holds MEIER's hand) Other things which are as precious to me as your chalice of Vlad.

MARCO: (To TEPES) Trying to steal the replica of the golden chalice of Dracula? The minister must have been insane. If this had been the real chalice do you realize what the real "Vlad the Impaler" would have done?

TEPES: (Shrugging shoulders) Well, considering he had the word "impaler" in his name, I have a pretty good idea, yes. (The brothers laugh. TEPES says to ALL) I am completely at fault for my own actions and I beg forgiveness from everyone. (He then slowly approaches MABEL) But most of from you, my beloved. (He gently touches her hair as MABEL takes his hand and smiles back at TEPES)

MEIER: (To ALL) Tepes and the Queen have vowed to help the authorities reclaim and return all stolen property to their rightful countries.

TEPES: Yes, and to restore order to my family's house.

MEIER: That includes the birthright of his newfound brother.

TEPES: (Approaching MARCO) Yes, Marco will share in the title of Prince of Snagovia.

MABEL: That's wonderful!

VERONICA: Wait a minute. Hold the royal phone a sec. (Pulls MABEL to one side) Mabel, does this mean you've actually got *two* princes interested in you?

MABEL: (Smiles) Hey, what can I say, Veronica? When you're hot, you're hot. (To ILONA) But there's still something I don't understand. Ilona. (ILONA approaches MABEL) Why did you tell me to "Find them." Find who?

ILONA: (Curious) I'm sorry?

MABEL: That night, at the embassy. I heard you say "Find them." What did you mean?

ILONA: (Shaking her head) I'm sorry. I didn't say anything. I was too afraid to speak.

(MABEL and VERONICA look at each other, frightened)

VERONICA: No. It can't be. Your camera? (After a beat) Jazz?

MABEL: (Cold, scared) Oh, snap. (Steps aside, looks at her watch and talks into it) Okay look, if you're gonna spook me, from now on do it on, from, your own watch. Okay? Not through my dad's camera. (Looks at ILONA and BASARAB together with MRS. LETHOU, then smiles) But I found them.

(SAGE enters holding a blanketed baby in his arms)

MRS. LETHOU: Oh, Sage!

(ALL gather around SAGE and the baby)

VERONICA: How is Cassandra?

SAGE: Out cold. How long did it take you guys to get here, anyway? She kept muttering something about a "royal soap opera".

NINA: Later Sage. Right now, this is more important.

MICHAEL: Yeah. What a beautiful baby. (Puts his arm around NINA, smiling at the baby and making NINA uncomfortable)

NINA: Hands off, hands off, hands off. (MICHAEL removes his hands)

MRS LETHOU: She's adorable. What's her name?

SAGE: (To MRS. LETHOU) Jazz.

MRS. LETHOU – (Shocked) What? Jazidua? (Begins to well up, then hugs SAGE)

SAGE: Well, no. We decided on Jazz. Just Jazz. "Jazz Pembleton" just sounds like a really cool name. "Jazidua Pembleton" sounds like you're mumbling or something. I hope you don't mind.

MRS. LETHOU: (Smiling, almost crying) Mind? Are you kidding? Sage, I'm just so...so (Wells up and hugs SAGE again)

SAGE: Great. Now my eyeliner is smudging. (THEY laugh)

MICHAEL: Here. Lemme see that kid. (MICHAEL begins to make stupid noises and faces into the baby's face)

NINA: Michael, stop scaring the baby.

MICHAEL: Ah, don't worry, Nina. Babies love me. (Continues to make stupid noises at the baby)

NINA: That's because you operate at similar levels.

(TEPES and MARCO bring MABEL down right, away from everyone else)

TEPES: Mabel, we need to know which of us you prefer. I know you have feelings for him, but I still love you very much. So who will it be? Marco or me?

MABEL: Oh, geez. I'm really torn here, guys. I love you both. I'm sure of it. But I can only marry one of you. (Looks at the QUEEN and MRS. LETHOU) Right? (The QUEEN and MRS. LETHOU both nod) Right. Damn. Cassandra's out cold otherwise I'd ask her. (Looks over at VERONICA and NINA) Veronica, Nina, what should I do?

NINA: Choosing between two princes? Look at what *I* married, Mabel. (Points to MICHAEL who is playing with the baby and then gets peed on) Perhaps I'm not the best person to ask.

VERONICA: If you had asked me a month ago in a heartbeat I would have said marry Tepes and just enjoy becoming a princess. But after what Meier and I have gone through, I know now that superficial stuff like that isn't what really matters. So no matter how you decide, Mabel, just make sure you're following your heart.

MRS. LETHOU: Why don't we leave them alone and go spend time with...with Jazz. (ALL exit leaving MARCO, TEPES and MABEL alone. MABEL thinks for a moment)

MARCO: Well?

MABEL: I'm thinking, Marco. (Turning away from BOTH men) This is very difficult for me, guys. I always thought I'd know the man I'd marry and now I've been through so much and I'm just so confused that I—wait a minute. (After a beat, approaches TEPES) Tepes, what's your favorite group?

TEPES: Group?

MABEL: You know, band. Music. Rock group.

TEPES: Oh, I don't know. Green Day, perhaps?

MABEL: (Impressed) Hey. Not bad. Not bad. (Approaching MARCO) Marco?

(MARCO slowly smiles as LIGHTS FADE)

(Blackout)

Act Two, Scene Ten
Snagovian Palace

(LIGHTS UP. It is two weeks later and we are at a lavish royal wedding as a Bee Gees song begins to play. Each of the couples enters onto the stage after being announced by an OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER. ALL enter wearing appropriate formal/semi-formal wedding attire)

OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, assembled guests, introducing the wedding party: First, her Royal Majesty, Queen of Snagovia and her representatives (The QUEEN enters with her ROYAL GUARD, taking her position seated on a throne at the far back of the stage. A MAN stands next to her, in formal attire, his back to the audience) Representing the mother of the bride, Mrs. Genevieve Lethou (MRS. LETHOU enters dancing, crosses to sr) Mr. and Mrs. Meier Fievel (VERONICA and MEIER enter walking happily over to far sr, then MEIER dips VERONICA). Mr. and Mrs. Michael Hancock (MICHAEL and NINA enter dancing and wind up far sl). The Matron of Honor and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Sage Pembleton (SAGE and CASSANDRA enter dancing sans baby and cross far sr). And now presenting, for the first time, the Royal Prince and Princess of Snagovia. (ALL applaud as MABEL enters joined by her Prince, MARCO. The MAN standing next to the QUEEN turns around and we see that it is TEPES who smiles at the proceedings. Standing next to TEPES is ILONA and BASARAB. MABEL and MARCO dance to center stage, face one another smiling as LIGHTS FADE)

The End