Slay and Rescue

Screenplay by
Jonathan Garland

from the novel of the same name by
John Moore

NOTES:
This adaptation is unauthorised.
Everything good about the
characters and story
belongs to John Moore.
Read the book.

word_artisan@yahoo.com.au
EXT. MAGELLAN'S TOWER -- NIGHT

Lightning cracks and thunder roars around a stone tower. There is light in a single window at the top of the tower.

INT. MAGELLAN'S TOWER -- CONTINUOUS

The room is stone and lined with shelves and cabinets stacked with beakers, jars and containers. There are thick books of spellcraft and various magical-looking items lying on every available surface. There is a table of dark wood, which has restraints for a human-sized occupant. The wizard MAGELLAN bustles about. He is a creepy man of middle age.

The room's single wooden door opens, and in come two THUGS and the princess GLORIA. GLORIA wears a white shift and is struggling against her captors.

    THUG 1
    We've got her, boss.

    MAGELLAN
    Chain her to the table.

Shutting the door behind them, the thugs drag princess Gloria to the table, lie her down and chain her arms and legs.

    GLORIA
    Whatever you ask in ransom, I promise you'll get it.

    MAGELLAN
    I have no interest in ransom. (he picks up a nasty-looking knife)
    There are many uses, however, for the blood of a virgin princess drained at the midnight hour. You are a virgin, are you not?

    GLORIA
    How dare you!

    MAGELLAN
    Spirited. Good for you. (to thugs)
    Open her gown.

The thugs tear GLORIA's shift from neck to navel, leering at the flesh exposed.

    THUG 1
    Can't we play for a bit, boss?

    MAGELLAN
    It's nearly midnight, moron. Now, don't struggle, princess. It tends to make a mess.

MAGELLAN places the blade against her skin. GLORIA screws up her face in terror.
The thugs lean in for a better look.

There is a single, heavy knock at the door. Everyone in the room looks to see an axe blade protruding through the wood. It is withdrawn, a second blow destroys the lock and the door is kicked in.

A young man strides in and takes up an heroic pose. Seventeen years old, his hair cascades in ringlets to his shoulders. His white silk shirt is open, revealing a well-muscled chest. A cape hangs from broad shoulders. A sword is scabbarded at his belt.

GLORIA
Prince Charming!

THUGS
Prince Charming!

MAGELLAN
Shit.

CHARMING
Hello, Maggie.

MAGELLAN
Don't call me Maggie! I am the wizard Magellan.

CHARMING
You know, you'll never get bloodstains out of a white pine table.

MAGELLAN
It's beechwood. I paid forty shillings for it.

CHARMING draws a dagger and scrapes the table top, leaving a white line. He mouths "pine" to princess GLORIA, and winks. She giggles.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)
Never mind the bloody table!
(to Thugs)
Kill him!

The two THUGS draw their swords, take a step forward and hesitate.

THUG 1
Boss, it's... you know... Prince Charming.

MAGELLAN
He's just one man. Get him!

The THUGS yell ferociously and attack. With fluid and graceful moves, CHARMING draws his sword and engages the two in battle. He makes fools of them without breaking a sweat, clearly showing off for Princess GLORIA, who is like a groupie with a rock star.
MAGELLAN picks up a scroll and starts incanting. CHARMING cuts the paper in two.

CHARMING
No spells, Maggie. That's cheating.

MAGELLAN
Magellan! Magellan! Get it right, you little twerp!

CHARMING disarms both THUGS and casually scars them on the face. The THUGS leave at speed. CHARMING turns his attention to MAGELLAN, who realises it's time to escape.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)
You haven't seen the last of me, Charming!

CHARMING rolls his eyes. Like he hasn't heard that a thousand times.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)
I'll be back.

CHARMING mimes a chattering mouth with his free hand.

MAGELLAN (CONT'D)
Fuck it.

MAGELLAN climbs onto the window sill. As he does so, his body morphs into a raven, which caws balefully at CHARMING and then flies off.

CHARMING
Wendell!

Enter CHARMING's page, WENDELL. A boy of 11 years, he staggers under the weight of a pack and two duffel bags.

WENDELL
One hundred and eighty-one steps.

CHARMING
Complainer.

WENDELL
You carry the bags next time, then.

CHARMING
Hand me the...

WENDELL
Peregrine, right.

CHARMING moves to GLORIA and theatrically drapes his cloak over her exposed form. GLORIA is relieved and star-struck at the same time.

GLORIA
Thank you, my lord.
CHARMING
My dear princess. This will take only a moment.

WENDELL offers CHARMING a cage containing a hooded falcon. CHARMING takes the falcon to the window, removes its hood and releases it into the sky. CHARMING turns his full attention to GLORIA.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Wendell, give me the...

WENDELL hands CHARMING a mirror and brush set.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Free the...

WENDELL efficiently takes a hammer and chisel to GLORIA's chains. CHARMING surreptitiously checks his appearance in the mirror then, as soon as GLORIA's hands are free, hands her the mirror and brush. The falcon returns with a dead raven. CHARMING feeds the falcon a piece of meat, drops the raven into the bag held by WENDELL and returns the falcon to the cage. Princess GLORIA, wrapped (barely) in CHARMING's cloak, hair and face fixed, has eyes only for CHARMING.

GLORIA
Prince Charming, may I speak to you in confidence?

CHARMING
Wendell...

WENDELL
(vanishing out the door)
On my way out.

CHARMING
Dear lady.

GLORIA
Highness, you have saved my life.

CHARMING
I am only glad I arrived in time.

GLORIA
I owe you a debt I can never repay.

CHARMING
(hopefully)
Oh, I wouldn't say that.

GLORIA
My father's kingdom is poor and I cannot offer you the jewels or gold you deserve.
CHARMING
You shine more brightly than any jewel, princess.

GLORIA
Still, I have been taught since birth that bravery, honour and... virtue must be repaid.

CHARMING
Sounds good. I mean, if that's the way you feel...

GLORIA
There is but one favour I can offer you.

CHARMING
Oh, yes.

GLORIA
Honour demands that honour be sacrificed. Do you understand?

CHARMING
Yes, darling...

GLORIA
Good...

GLORIA stands on tiptoes and gives CHARMINg a peck on the cheek. Then she ducks out of his arms and runs to the door. She looks back with the beaming face of one who has just completed a noble deed. Then she blushes, giggles and exits. CHARMINg maintains a look of nobility and virtue throughout GLORIA's exit, as if he had no different expectations. Once she leaves, however, his face falls.

CHARMING
Shit!

EXT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- DAY

The castle is bright and shining, with waving pennants. Its interiors are clean and well-lit. It is surrounded by picturesque, rich green countryside.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- LIBRARY -- DAY

The library is full of books and maps. WENDELL is lounging in a chair at the table, eating an apple. A fruit basket is on the table. CHARMINg enters, tossing Endeavour to WENDELL. WENDELL starts examining the sword.

CHARMING
Shit!

WENDELL
Hey, new sword!
   (reads engraving)
   Endeavour.
CHARMING
Endeavour? The Endeavour? I've got a whole room full of these pigstickers, and now we're going to start naming them? It sounds like a battleship.

WENDELL
He didn't go for it, did he?

CHARMING
No.

WENDELL
No red-hot weekend?

CHARMING
No.

WENDELL
Did he take you off the hero mission?

CHARMING takes an apple from the bowl and shakes his head.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Oh, well. Reluctant heroes are actually the best kind. If you were trying to be heroic, people would think you were just showing off.

CHARMING
I am trying. I have to watch every word I say, dress like a costume-party warrior, keep in practice with the sword, bow and lance, and be courteous and helpful to everyone I meet. It's a pain in the ass.

WENDELL
But people pick up on that. They all know you'd prefer a quiet life, which is why they appreciate you going on all these adventures. It's the effort Prince Charming puts into being charming that makes him so... well, charming.

CHARMING
I've had enough! Slay and rescue. That's all I ever do any more. I'm sick of it! Every two-bit sorcerer, renegade knight, dragon, troll or ogre that sets himself up around here, the first thing he does is grab himself a piece of ass. And everybody says "Ooh, let's call Prince Charming, he'll save her!" And I do. But do I ever get any thanks for it?

(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
Nooooo! I mean, I'm laying my life on the line for these babes. I think I deserve a little extra.

WENDELL
I bet he didn't like hearing that.

CHARMING
He had a cow. "The son of the royal family, the symbol of virtue and purity, the epitome of everything that is noble and good in young manhood does not go around rutting like a common sailor!"

WENDELL
This is a really cool sword.

CHARMING
Too gaudy. First chance you get, pry those gems off the hilt, sell them and give the money to the poor.

WENDELL
Hey, look at the handle. All this extra stuff folds out. There's a corkscrew, nail clippers, a file, a leather punch...

CHARMING
The smith must have been Swiss.

WENDELL
What's this one?

It's a piece of springy wire, slightly curved, with a hook at the end.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Is it one of those things for taking stones out of horses' hooves?

CHARMING
No. Maybe it's for splicing rope.

Minister of Intelligence NORVILLE enters. The chief spy of the kingdom, he is middle-aged, dresses habitually in black, and is unfailingly serious. He takes some pages from a thick dossier and passes them to CHARMING.

NORVILLE
Good morning, highness. You know about the situation in Tyrovia?

CHARMING
Norville, I just got back. Can't the next mission wait for a day or so?
NORVILLE
The wicked queen Ruby treats her stepdaughter most cruelly. The queen is extremely vain and is jealous of the princess' beauty.

CHARMING
Forget it. I don't get involved in family squabbles.

NORVILLE
Our information is that the queen forces the girl to dress in rags and work as a scullery maid.

CHARMING
Good. I'm a great believer in vocational education.

NORVILLE
Prince Charming, the queen is capable of powerful magic. She poses a security risk to this kingdom. This mistreatment of her stepdaughter gives King Garrison the perfect excuse to eliminate a dangerous rival. And when the young princess inherits the throne, we gain a grateful and easily manipulated ally to the west.

CHARMING
Excuse me? I'm into political assassination now? I don't think so. I'm a hero, not a hit man.

NORVILLE
The queen has made an attempt on the girl's life.

WENDELL
Why?

NORVILLE
When the girl comes of age, there will be competition for the throne. The woodcutter who brought us this information said the queen offered him a substantial amount of money to cut out the girl's heart.

CHARMING
She has all this magical power and she has to hire a guy to stab someone?

NORVILLE
The girl's name is Ann, highness. She is reported to be very beautiful. Skin like cream, lips like cherries, that sort of thing. (MORE)
NORVILLE (CONT'D)
This is a sweet and innocent young
girl whose life is in danger.
Will you not act?

CHARMING
Oh, all right. I'll ride over and
scope out the situation. But I'm
not promising anything. As long
as this Queen Ruby keeps her nose
clean, I'm walking away.

NORVILLE
Very well, highness. I hope
hesitation does not put your life
at risk.

CHARMING
Speaking of risk, what defenses
does she have? Any dragons in the
kennel? Soldiers on the payroll?
Knights?

NORVILLE
Not according to our information.
She seems to rely on her magic for
protection.

CHARMING
Hmm. Wendell...

WENDELL
Yes, sire.

CHARMING
Pack light. Take the new sword...

WENDELL
Endeavour.

CHARMING
Yeah, yeah. Pack Endeavour, the
Nordic sword, the Sheffield sword
and the crossbow.

WENDELL
Check.

CHARMING
Take the new shield with the crest,
an axe and the oak lance with the
bronze handguard.

WENDELL
Got it.

CHARMING
(to Norville)
You say this Ann babe is a real
looker?
NORVILLE
Our information is that she is very fine, yes.

CHARMING
Wendell, bring a dozen roses, a box of candy and a bottle of wine.

WENDELL
Okay.

CHARMING
Also a large, stuffed toy animal. It never hurts to be prepared. Off you go.

WENDELL leaves.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Norville. Any progress on the slipper thing?

NORVILLE
We're working on it, highness.

CHARMING was hoping for more. He nods and exits.

EXT. TYROVIA CASTLE -- EVENING
It's raining. A narrow road leads through groves of twisted trees to a small plateau, where a few pathetic houses mark a poor village. Behind the village is the wicked queen's castle, sinister as nightmares. The tallest tower is capped in rubble, as if the top room has exploded. On a spur of rock projecting from the mountainside, the castle is accessible only by drawbridge, which is currently raised.

WENDELL
This is the spookiest place we've ever had to attack.

CHARMING
But it's close to the shops. Location is everything.
(off his look)
Lighten up, Wendell.

There is a sudden cranking and grinding as the drawbridge starts to descend. It isn't very well maintained and moves in fits and starts. About halfway down it gets stuck, then breaks loose and falls to the ground. CHARMING dismounts and leads his horse across the bridge. WENDELL reluctantly follows.

WENDELL
Maybe we should scout the place out.

CHARMING
We already did.
WENDELL
Maybe we should do it again. From a safe distance.

CHARMING
Oh, come on, Wendell. We're a team. I need to know you've got my back.

WENDELL
I'm right behind you, sire.

As they approach the castle, a door opens and a woman appears. She is about sixteen years old, with dark hair, pale skin and deep beautiful eyes. Her simple blouse shows plenty of cleavage and the slit in her skirt goes right up her thigh. This is ANN, princess of Tyrovia.

CHARMING
Look, Wendell, a babe! And now she's going to say "Prince Charming!"

ANN
You must leave at once.

WENDELL
Good call.

CHARMING
Hey. I'm Prince Charming!

ANN
I know who you are. My stepmother has been watching you in her crystal ball for two days, planning horrible ways for you to die.

CHARMING
Say, you don't mind if we get in out of the rain, do you?

ANN
No! I mean, yes, I do mind! You can't come in!

INT. TYROVIA CASTLE -- ENTRANCE HALL -- EVENING

CHARMING and WENDELL slip past ANN into the spacious entrance hall. Although grand and richly decorated, things have gone to dust and mildew. There are several doorways and a large staircase to the next floor. CHARMING takes off his wet cloak and hands it to WENDELL.

ANN
Your highness, I appreciate your attempt to rescue me but it is no use. You cannot defeat Queen Ruby's power. Please leave now and save yourself.
CHARMING
Nice dress. Make it yourself?

ANN
(blushing)
Yes. This really isn't me. Your highness, even before my father died, I dreamed of the day some knight would carry me away from these isolated mountains to some more... cosmopolitan city. I made these clothes to appear more... um... inspiring to such a one. But this was an error in judgment. I assure you, I am sweet, pure, chaste and innocent as any princess should be.

CHARMING
Yeah, great.

There is an uneven grinding noise.

ANN
She is pulling up the drawbridge! You're trapped!

CHARMING
I guess we'll have to stay for dinner, then.

The grinding noise stops, starts, and stops again. There is a crash as the drawbridge falls back to earth.

ANN
(off CHARMING's look)
It's those round things with the teeth on them.

WENDELL
Gears.

ANN
Right. Some of them are broken. She's tried to repair them but there's only so much she can do with magic, especially to iron gears.

CHARMING
Yes. I find that magic tends to be good only for rather impractical things.

ANN
Like killing people in horrible ways.

CHARMING
Yes, like that.
There is the sound of tapping, like high heels on stone. A red glow appears at the top of the stairs.

ANN
My stepmother! Oh, Prince Charming! May you die as bravely as you have lived!

CHARMING
Thanks.

WENDELL
Uh, sire? Maybe we should just leave a business card.

CHARMING
Don't be silly. It's raining cats and dogs out there. See if there's a place to stable the horses.

WENDELL
We're a team. I'm not leaving you.

There is a flash of lightning and Queen RUBY appears at the top of the stairs. She is in her late twenties, and a beauty. She wears a black cloak trimmed in red, a black gown, red nail polish and a scowl. The red glow comes from a large ruby clenched in her fist.

RUBY
Prince Charming! So, you dare to take away my stepdaughter!

CHARMING
Stepdaughter? I would have sworn the two of you were sisters.

CHARMING smiles dazzlingly. ANN can't believe it. Even WENDELL has never seen the prince try this one before. There is dead silence. Then...

RUBY
(grooming her hair)
Do you really think so?

CHARMING
Absolutely. I really like your outfit, too. Black goes so well with your eyes.

RUBY
(descending stairs)
Why, thank you, Prince Charming. You don't think the spiked heel boots are a bit too dressy?

CHARMING
No, they're perfect.

ANN
Good grief.
RUBY
Well, I try to stay in shape, you know. Eat a proper diet, stay out of the sun. But the magic mirror says she is more beautiful than I!

RUBY waves her hand at an alcove containing an ornate silver mirror.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who is the fairest of them all?

The mirror surface ripples and displays an image of ANN.

CHARMING
Oh, I wouldn't trust that thing. Magic mirrors lose calibration so quickly. And the light in here is so bad.

RUBY
Well, that's true. Perhaps it would see better in the morning sun. I've been meaning to move it, but it's so heavy.

CHARMING
It would be an honour to assist you with it.

RUBY
I was thinking it would be much more suitable in the master bedroom.

CHARMING
(taking down the mirror)
I couldn't think of a better place for it. Wendell, don't wait up.

ANN
I don't believe this!

RUBY
Ann, dear, why don't you get that nice young page some milk and cookies. Then you can amuse yourself until bedtime.

ANN
Why don't you jump...

RUBY
(leading Charming away)
She's such a darling child. You don't think this red nail polish is too much, do you?
CHARMING
No, of course not. Very classy.
It really suits your theatrical style.

ANN looks at WENDELL. WENDELL shrugs.

WENDELL
They don't call him Prince Charming for nothing.

INT. TYROVIA CASTLE -- BEDROOM -- EVENING

The bedroom is dominated by a four-poster bed. Paintings hang on the walls. There is a doorway to another room off one side.

CHARMING
Nice. Very you. I'll just set this up here...

RUBY
Silly boy. No woman wants to lie in bed looking at her own hips. Put it on this wall. I'll be back in a moment.

RUBY goes into the side room. CHARMING puts the mirror on the floor and turns it over.

CHARMING
Now let's see...

On the back of the mirror, among the carvings, are four screws marked "HOR", "VERT", "BRIT" and "CON". CHARMING examines them, then makes adjustments with the blade of his dagger. He takes down a painting and hangs the mirror.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Mirror, mirror, on the wall. Who's the fairest of them all?

The mirror surface ripples and displays an image of CHARMING.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Thought so.

RUBY (O.S.)
Is the mirror working?

CHARMING
Works perfectly.

RUBY reenters. She is dressed (just) in a creation of black leather and red silk. With the high-heeled boots and the mesh stockings, she's got a dominatrix sex-pot thing going on.

RUBY
Glad to hear it.
CHARMING
(almost swallowing his tongue)
Nice stockings.

RUBY moves to the bed.

RUBY
Do you like what you see?

CHARMING
Oh, yeah.

RUBY
Then why don't you join me?

CHARMING suddenly moves into high gear. He tears at his clothes and hops about as he removes his boots.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Are you nervous, darling?

CHARMING
Who me? Of course not.

RUBY
Your hands are shaking.

CHARMING
It's chilly.

RUBY
But you're sweating.

CHARMING
Must be those peppers I had for lunch.

CHARMING finally gets his pants off and launches himself next to RUBY on the bed. She turns to meet him with open arms, sucking him into a deep kiss while his hands cover as much territory as they can.

RUBY
Easy, lover. I'm not going anywhere. You don't have to act like it's your first time.

CHARMING
Who's acting?

RUBY shoves CHARMING roughly off the bed and he lands in a tangle of arms and legs. He looks up, confused, to find her towering over him.

RUBY
Say that again.

CHARMING
Um... who's acting?
RUBY
You are pure?

CHARMING
I wouldn't say that. I was having some very impure thoughts just a second ago.

RUBY
Are you a virgin?

CHARMING
Yes, I'm a virgin! Tell the world, why don't you? Does that bother you? Do you want a certificate of prowess or something?

RUBY sits on the edge of the bed, deep in thought. CHARMING realises that, once again, he's not getting laid.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
I knew it. I knew I should have gone after the stepdaughter.

RUBY tosses CHARMING his pants.

RUBY
Get dressed. I have a proposition for you.

INT. TYROVIA CASTLE -- KITCHEN -- MORNING

ANN is cooking oatmeal. WENDELL sits at the table.

ANN
All I'm saying is that a girl has dreams, you know? A handsome prince rescuing you from some terrible danger, or just a mediocre danger, or just living in a piddling little castle in the middle of nowhere. The danger isn't even really necessary. Just being carried off by a prince would be enough. But how many princes do you ever see passing through Tyrovia? Now the most famous prince in the world is in the castle and what am I doing? Cooking oatmeal.

WENDELL
I was the same. Youngest son of a duke, no chance of inheritance. I'd wind up serving my brothers like a serf. Then one day Prince Charming rescued me.

ANN
How?
WENDELL
Well, he was rescuing someone else, actually. A little girl fell down a well. The prince jumped in and I threw him a rope. He said he could use a quick thinker like me. I've been riding with him ever since.

ANN
You're so lucky.

WENDELL
That's Prince Charming. He's my hero.

CHARMING enters.

CHARMING
Is your stepmother up yet?

ANN
She didn't go back to bed. After you finished fighting she went to her laboratory.

CHARMING
Great. Any idea what she was doing?

ANN
Probably either laying more curses on you or lifting the ones she already laid.

CHARMING
Fabulous.

ANN
You didn't have to sleep down here. We've got lots of empty rooms. I would have made up a bed for you.

CHARMING
I thought you were asleep. I didn't want to trouble you.

WENDELL
Who could sleep with all that yelling?

CHARMING
Sorry. What do you think, Wendell?

WENDELL
I think you had a serious disagreement.

CHARMING
I mean about the mission.
WENDELL
Well, the queen obviously isn't doing a good job. The countryside, the castle... It's falling to pieces. The only thing in good shape is the library. It's packed to the max with books and scrolls and old maps. Mandelbaum would flip over this place.

CHARMING
At least we know what she's spending her money on. It sure isn't maintenance. What kind of books has she got?

WENDELL
Magic books. All sorts of them. Here, I grabbed one.

WENDELL hands CHARMING a well-thumbed old volume.

CHARMING
"Modern Organic Alchemy" by Morrison and Boyd. This woman has really studied it.

WENDELL
How can you tell?

CHARMING
All the important formulas are highlighted in yellow ink. Okay, Ann. I came, I saw, I slept on the couch. Now I'm leaving. The Queen seems kind of bitchy but, frankly, I really don't see any problem here that couldn't be solved by a cold bath.

WENDELL
What have cold baths got to do with anything?

CHARMING
I'll tell you later.

RUBY enters. She is all business. She wears a tight black sweater, still with scarlet lips and nails. ANN begins serving the oatmeal.

RUBY
To breakfast, boys. We have business to discuss.

WENDELL
What business?

CHARMING
She wants me to go on a quest.
WENDELL
Did you tell her we don't do quests?

CHARMING
She thinks I'll change my mind.

WENDELL
Oh, come on. You're Prince Charming, heir to the wealthiest and most powerful throne in the twenty kingdoms. What does she think she could possibly offer you that you... (noticing CHARMING staring at RUBY's bosom) Never mind. What's the job?

CHARMING
It's a grail quest.

WENDELL
Oh, not again. Every knight who ever lived has quested for the Holy Grail.

RUBY
The Holy Grail is just a fantasy.

ANN
There's another one?

CHARMING
Dozens of them. Ancient fertility cults were very big on grails. There are grail legends all over the place and knights have been searching for them since forever. None of them came up with spit.

RUBY
I have studied these legends and found a commonality that hints at a basis in fact. After years of work, I have finally deduced the location of the Fisher King's castle.

ANN
Who is the Fisher King?

CHARMING
The mythical Fisher King had a grail that made his land fertile and his people prosperous. According to the legend, the Fisher King gets mortally wounded, and the land becomes barren as a result. The knight who survives the dangers of the Chapel Perilous gets the grail and becomes the new Fisher (MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
King. It's not much of a legend, but at least it's to the point.

RUBY
It's an excellent legend. The full text contains all the clues needed to locate the Grail Castle.

CHARMING
Yeah, sure. And nobody has ever figured them out except you, right?

RUBY
Many have located the Grail Castle, I am certain. I am equally certain none have recovered the grail. The ancient texts make it clear - only one who is pure can survive the Chapel Perilous.

ANN
Pure?

RUBY
Chaste. Virtuous.

WENDELL
Doesn't sound like anyone I know.

RUBY
Must I spell everything out? Only a virgin can brave the Chapel Perilous.

CHARMING
All right, you don't have to make such a big deal out of it.

ANN
You've never...

CHARMING
I've been saving myself for the right girl.

WENDELL chokes on his oatmeal.

ANN
Well, I think that's very nice. I don't know why you think it's something to be embarrassed about.

CHARMING
That's because you're a girl.

RUBY
Could we return to the subject at hand?
CHARMING
Look, I told you last night. Slay and rescue, that's my line. Quests are not in the job description. Find someone else. In fact, I can refer you to some knights who do good quests. Grails, the True Cross, enchanted swords, magic rings, a breakfast cereal that tastes good yet is good for you - if it's out there, they'll look for it. I bet there's a couple of virgins among them, too. Some of them are pretty ugly.

RUBY
You are young, strong and brave. Your swordsmanship is without equal. You are too rich and highborn to be bought off. And, of course, you are Prince Charming. You may even be able to talk your way to the grail.

CHARMING
Flattery is not enough to convince me to undertake this futile exercise.

RUBY
You will do it because you are Prince Charming. You've seen this land. The forests are dying and the game is disappearing. The rain is washing the topsoil away. The corn grows shorter every year and the cattle are barren. The people need a fertility grail. They need you to bring it to them.

WENDELL
It is pretty bad.

CHARMING
They're not my people. I've got my own kingdom.

ANN
If this land is dying, it's because of you and your sorcery. The evil influence of your dark magics and toxic potions spread from this place like a poisonous cloud.

RUBY
Shut up. You are not qualified to make judgments about the complex art of sorcery. The spells I cast on this land were for the good of its people, to raise them from squalor and poverty.
ANN
Under daddy's rule, there was no squalor and poverty. Not until you took over.

WENDELL
Have you got any sugar for this oatmeal?

RUBY
No! ANN
No!

CHARMING
All right. Here's the deal. I'll check it out, okay? I'm not making any promises. I'm not saying I'll get the grail. But I'll take a look around.

RUBY
Very well. I'm sure we can come to an arrangement after you've assessed the situation.

ANN
You don't have to do this.

RUBY
Be quiet!

CHARMING
One thing. If this grail is so valuable, what makes you so sure I'll bring it back to you?

RUBY
The integrity of Prince Charming is known throughout the twenty kingdoms.

CHARMING
Good point.

RUBY
Furthermore, Ann is going with you.

EXT. ALACIA -- DAY
The horses are traveling at a walk as CHARMING, WENDELL and ANN follow a road through picturesque countryside.

ANN
Alacia certainly is pretty. My own kingdom used to look like this.

CHARMING
It will again, Ann. Don't worry. If this grail exists we'll find it.
ANN
Are you sure this is the right way? You haven't looked at the map since we set out yesterday.

WENDELL
This road goes to Briar Rose Village, which is right near the spot your stepmother marked on the map. It's a good-sized village.

CHARMING
Nice tavern.

ANN
If there's a village nearby, surely someone would have found the grail chapel by now.

WENDELL
Maybe the map's wrong.

CHARMING
Let's stop for a bit.

ANN
If we keep stopping we'll never get there.

CHARMING
Quests are supposed to be long and difficult. You can't just nip out and back, like you're going to the market.

They dismount and sit among a grove of trees.

ANN
Why don't you do quests?

CHARMING
Effort versus reward. Dad has me on the slay and rescue gig because it's quick and scores major points with the people and the neighbouring kingdoms. Quests take too long for good PR.

ANN
You've rescued a lot of maidens, haven't you?

CHARMING
Somebody's got to do it.

ANN
Don't you like doing it?

CHARMING
It beats working for a living.
ANN
I think you're amazingly brave.
Even the dragons must tremble when they see you coming.

CHARMING
Dragons fear nothing.

WENDELL
I hate dragons.

CHARMING
Nasty, vicious creatures. Tough, too. With that scaly armour all over, they're practically indestructible.

WENDELL
And they're fast. Over rocky ground they can outrun a horse.

CHARMING
They can get up on their hind legs and run like blazes. Not the big ones, of course. After they get over about... oh, fifteen feet, they stay down on all fours. Still, fifteen feet of dragon towering over you, claws extended, smoke and flame spewing from its nostrils, is plenty enough dragon for me.

ANN
Then how do you slay them?

WENDELL
(excited)
You charge straight at them. A fast, brave horse and a sharp lance is what you need. Then, when he opens his jaw to roast you, you put the lance through the roof of his mouth and through his brain.

ANN
But that means you charge right into the flames!

CHARMING
Well, if it was easy, everybody would be doing it.

ANN
Good heavens!

WENDELL
See, the great thing is, if he opens his mouth, he's vulnerable. If he doesn't open his mouth, you've got no problem. Basically, it just takes a steady nerve.

(MORE)
WENDELL (CONT'D)
And you have to get him on a flat, open stretch of ground, where your horse can build up some speed. It's not really that big a deal.

ANN
What if you're attacked and you're not on a horse and you don't have a lance and you're not on open ground?

CHARMING
Then it's a big deal.

WENDELL
Then you have to go for the eyes.

CHARMING throws a sword and WENDELL smoothly catches it, demonstrating the moves as he makes them. He's pretty good.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Pierce the eye socket with your sword. Zounds! Right through the eye and into the brain! Swish!

ANN
(amused)
Ah. You've killed a dragon, I see.

WENDELL
No. I could, though. I know I could. But his highness thinks I'm too little.

CHARMING
I didn't say that. I said you weren't ready yet.

WENDELL
You go at him from the side, see, 'cause a dragon's eyes are on the side, just like a horse's. That way, you can keep out of the flames. You have to keep moving fast, though, to stay to the side of his mouth. Yah! Tchah! I drive in my mighty sword Challenger to the hilt! Take that! Gotcha!

CHARMING
So perish all our enemies.

WENDELL
Then I offer my arm to the beautiful princess I've just rescued. She takes it, and I swing her onto the back of my horse...
CHARMING
You don't have a horse, remember?

WENDELL
I leap onto the back of her horse, then sweep her up and take her back to her kingdom, where she is so grateful... that...

CHARMING
Yes?

ANN
Yes?

WENDELL
She throws an enormous banquet in my honour. And the food is all dessert. Cakes and pies and whipped cream and ices and pudding and candy. So there.

CHARMING and ANN applaud.

ANN
Brave Sir Knight.

CHARMING
A noble spectacle, good sir.

ANN
It does seem as if dragons are always carrying off maidens young and fair. I shall have to be careful.

CHARMING
Everybody carries off young maidens around here. And then the call goes out for some dumb sap to risk his life rescuing them. Why a dragon should prefer to eat young girls instead of a goat or a cow is beyond me. Or why they carry them back to their lairs instead of devouring them on the spot.

ANN
Oh, but it's so romantic. A beautiful girl in the delicate flower of youth snatched away from the arms of her loving family by a hideous, snarling monster. A monster no doubt drawn to her by her aura of innocence, as a moth to a flame. Then...

WENDELL
Also dogs.

ANN
What?
CHARMING
Dragons love dogs. Beautiful maidens and dogs, that's their two favourite meals.

ANN
Dogs.

WENDELL
We used to have a dog that hunted with us. But a dragon got him.

CHARMING
Scooped him up with his tail and popped him right into his mouth. Two bites and he was gone. Damn good hunting dog, too.

ANN
Girls and dogs. Great. Centuries of romantic epics told, hundreds of ballads sung, scores of tapestries woven, dozens of murals painted, all inspired only by the fact that there weren't any dogs around that day.

CHARMING
Oh, I wouldn't say that. Dogs are a lot harder to catch than girls.

ANN
You are such a jerk!

ANN stomps off to her horse, mounts and begins riding away.

CHARMING
What's her problem?

WENDELL shrugs.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Oh, well. We'd better catch up. There aren't any dogs around. She's a sitting duck.

EXT. BRIAR ROSE INN -- EVENING

Briar Rose Village is a thriving place. CHARming, ANN and WENDELL ride up to the inn and dismount. WENDELL takes the horses to the stable. CHARming and ANN enter the inn.

INT. BRIAR ROSE INN -- EVENING

The inn is full. CHARming surveys the crowd.

CHARMING
I don't believe it.

CHARMing leads ANN through the crowd to a table near the back, where a man stands up to greet them. This is MANDELBAUM.
He is a vigorous man of 50 years, with a full beard and head of salt-and-pepper hair. His simple clothes are well made and he wears a black cloak lined with red. He smokes a long-stemmed pipe.

MANDELBAUM
Prince Charming.

CHARMING
Mandelbaum. What are you doing here?

MANDELBAUM
I saw that you'd need me, highness. I've ordered us a meal. Please sit, little princess.

ANN
But how did he know we'd be here? We didn't even know until two days ago.

CHARMING
Mandelbaum is Illyria's court magician. Not much gets past him. He probably saw us in his magic mirror.

ANN
You have a magic mirror too?

MANDELBAUM
Saw it in the marketplace and couldn't resist. Only thirteen hundred royals. Actually, I paid a little more, but it was worth it to get downward compatibility with my crystal ball.

CHARMING
And they always want to charge you for the cable, too.

WENDELL arrives. At the same time, the innkeeper brings their meal. Four bowls of soup, with bread and fruit.

WENDELL
Hi, Mandelbaum.

MANDELBAUM
Hello, Wendell.

CHARMING
Well, now that you're here, what do you know about this grail thing?

MANDELBAUM
Grail rituals were an important aspect of ancient fertility cults. (MORE)
MANDELBAUM (CONT'D)
And some of the ancient priests commanded an impressive power, although in those days it could be used only crudely. But sire, even should one of these relics still exist, it would contain but a faded trace of its magical power.

ANN
You mean, if we found it, it would be useless?

MANDELBAUM
Perhaps not. You couldn't make a wasteland bloom but the cumulative effects, over the long term, could be beneficial. Providing the grail was carefully used, and by the right man.

ANN
Or woman.

MANDELBAUM
I'm afraid not, little princess. There are symbolic connotations to a grail that are specifically female. Thus, only a male, the Fisher King, can master the grail and release its power. A magic wand, now, or a staff of power - that would be a male symbol that would be wielded by a woman.

ANN
Why?

MANDELBAUM
These are fertility symbols. The cup is the female. It requires a male to release its power. The staff is the male, and requires a female.

ANN
Why can't it be the other way around?

MANDELBAUM
Uh... well, the cup is female because it represents the... uh... that is, it holds the man's... uh... The staff symbolises the man's... uh... Oh, for goodness' sake! Wendell, you know what I'm talking about, don't you?

WENDELL
No, but if you say it's true, I believe you.
MANDELBAUM
Prince Charming, surely you understand why a cup symbolises a woman and a staff symbolises a man?

They are interrupted by a thunderous bellow from a bearded, muscular man. He wears a short sword at his belt and a crossbow protrudes above his shoulder. This is BEAR.

BEAR
Prince Charming!

The crowd parts, sensing a fight. CHARMING sighs.

CHARMING
Looks like it's time to sign a few autographs.

BEAR
So you're the great Prince Charming. Well, you don't look so great to me.

WENDELL
He must have forgotten his autograph book.

CHARMING
Just as well. I don't have a quill.

CHARMING rises to face BEAR, relaxed and unthreatening.

ANN
Wendell, they're not going to fight, are they?

WENDELL
I hope not. I hate it when the prince kills someone just before dinner.

BEAR
Do you know who I am, princeling?

CHARMING
Bear McAllister.

BEAR
Ah, so you've heard of me?

CHARMING
I saw you in the tournaments last year. You were pretty good with that crossbow, as I recall.

BEAR
I'm the best there is. I can defeat any man alive in single combat, armed or unarmed.

(MORE)
BEAR (CONT'D)
I've kicked ass in every kingdom, from Illyria to Arondel. And yet, people still refuse to give me the respect I deserve. Even here in my home village, I have to constantly beat up people for not getting out of my way. Do you know why?

ANN
Because you're a jerk?

BEAR
Because I haven't got a reputation. Because I don't have a bunch of namby-pamby scribes running around pushing my name in every corner of the kingdom, or a hired bard to sing tales of my exploits.

CHARMING
Life is tough.

BEAR
On the other hand, suppose I was to run into one of these puffed-up, papier-mâché heroes? And suppose I was to defeat him in single combat? Now that would be a tale that would be told and retold.

CHARMING
Have you got an apple?

BEAR
...what?

CHARMING
Have you got an apple?

BEAR
No.

CHARMING
Wendell?

WENDELL takes an apple off the fruit platter and tosses it to CHARMING. CHARMING walks across the room, leans casually against the wall, and puts the apple on his head. His thumbs are tucked into his belt at the buckle, and he is the image of casual unconcern.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Okay, Bear. Let's see how good you really are.

BEAR
(unslinging the crossbow)
This?
CHARMING
Should be an easy shot for you.

BEAR
You want me to shoot the apple off your head with this crossbow?

CHARMING
Well, if you don't think you're up to it...

BEAR knows CHARMING is playing some kind of trick, but he can't figure the angle. Every eye in the room is on him as he puts a bolt into the crossbow and cranks it back.

BEAR
Awfully cocky, aren't you, punk?

CHARMING
Oh, I wouldn't say that. At the tournament, I saw you nail copper coins at four times this distance.

ANN
Mandelbaum, he's going to kill him!

MANDELBAUM
He can't. If McAllister hits Charming, he'll appear to have missed an easy shot. He'll get his reputation, all right. A reputation for killing a prince by accident. It's the last thing he wants. But he can't draw his sword and attack, either. It will look like he refused the prince's challenge.

ANN
But what if he tries for the apple and really misses?

MANDELBAUM
He won't miss. Probably.

ANN
But the light is so poor.

WENDELL
He's Prince Charming. He knows what he's doing.

BEAR puts the crossbow to his shoulder, sights, hesitates, and shoots. CHARMING's muscles bunch and his sword blurs, hitting the bolt in mid-flight. There is a thud as the two halves of the crossbow bolt punch through the apple a quarter-inch apart and slam into the wall.

ANN
I don't believe it.
CHARMING allows his shoulders to relax, takes the apple from the wall and tosses it to BEAR. CHARIMG sheaths his sword, and the audience begins to applaud. CHARIMG acknowledges the applause as he crosses to BEAR, holding out his hand. BEAR shakes his hand nervously.

CHARMING
You were saying?

BEAR
Huh?

CHARMING
You were talking about reputations, as I recall. Something about my reputation being made by hired bards.

BEAR
Bards. Yes. Great for a man's reputation. Uh... you don't happen to know where I can hire some, do you?

No.

BEAR
Right. Well, then. I'll just be off.

CHARMING
No, no, stay and have a drink with us. As a matter of fact, I was just looking for a man who could fill me in on some of the local folklore.

CHARMING signals for another round and steers BEAR to the table.

BEAR
Uh... well, as long as you're buying, I guess I can't refuse. That's a pretty nice piece of steel, Charming. Did your own armourer make it?

CHARMING hands over Endeavour for inspection.

CHARMING
No, it was a gift.

BEAR
Very nice. Swiss made, I see. What's this curvy thing? Some kind of nut pick?

CHARMING
I think it's for splicing rope. What do you know about a grail in the castle in the woods?
BEAR
I've never heard of a grail, but the castle is supposed to belong to Princess Aurora.

CHARMING
Never heard of her.

BEAR
Strange story. See, King Stephen built his castle in the middle of that fairy wood and he never got along with the fairy who controlled it. Bitchy little thing called Esmerelda. Twenty years ago, on the day of Princess Aurora's wedding, she put a curse on the whole castle and cast the princess into a deep sleep. According to legend, she can only be awakened by the kiss of a prince.

ANN
That's terrible!

CHARMING
The sleep or the kiss?

ANN
She missed her own wedding. Do realise how much work goes into one of those?

CHARMING
Think of her poor fiancé. He missed his wedding night.

ANN
Shut up.

BEAR
Then these thorn bushes grew up around the castle. Huge wall of them. And that's the last anyone saw of the king, the princess and, strangely enough, Esmerelda, too.

ANN
Think of her, sleeping year after year while the seasons change, dreaming of the day her prince will come and awaken her.

CHARMING
I wouldn't put too much stock in that story. A fairy's magic isn't that powerful. There are plenty of guys around who could break a spell like that. Mandelbaum, for instance.
MANDELBAUM
In all modesty, I am compelled to say there are not many sorcerers who are my equal. Nonetheless, Prince Charming's assessment is correct. A grail may be too esoteric and obscure to waste much time on, but that thorn hedge should have been breached within hours.

BEAR
Don't forget, all the nobility was at the wedding, as well as the leading tradesmen, merchants and moneylenders. That damn fairy wiped out the entire leadership of this kingdom in one hit. There were only peasants outside. Nobody had the cash to hire a first-rate magician, or the leadership to take action.

CHARMING
Sounds like a pretty substantial power vacuum. Why didn't the neighbouring kingdoms try to take over?

BEAR
(surprised)
They did, highness. Your grandfather, King Charming, declared Alacia a protectorate.

CHARMING
Illyria owns Alacia?

ANN
You didn't know that?

CHARMING
I don't keep up with the political end. I deal more with tactical matters.

WENDELL
But didn't the people stay loyal to their own king?

BEAR
Well, they could pay taxes to their king, and more taxes to the nobles who held the land. Or they could just pay taxes to a new king. Figure it out.

CHARMING
Mandelbaum, what do you think? Is there a princess in there?
MANDELBAUM
On the one hand, your highness, local folklore is a very unreliable source of information. On the other hand, throwing up a hedge big enough to hide a castle is not a piece of cake. I dare say there's something important behind there.

CHARMING
All right, then. I was ready to blow off this grail thing, but if there's a princess to rescue, then my duty is clear. I'm going in tomorrow.

MANDELBAUM
Very well, sire. I will make preparations tonight and be ready at dawn.

WENDELL
I'll help you, Mandelbaum!

CHARMING
Get some rest, too, Wendell. We don't know what's on the other side of that hedge.

MANDELBAUM
If you will excuse us, sire, we'll get to work. Good-night, little princess.

MANDELBAUM and WENDELL leave.

ANN
What a nice man.

BEAR
I guess I'll be heading off, too. Thanks for the drink, Charming. You're a right good sort.

BEAR exits. The innkeeper approaches.

INNKEEPER
Prince Charming, I can't tell you what an honour it is to have you stay in my humble establishment.

CHARMING
Why, it's not humble at all. I find it to be excellent.

INNKEEPER
Thank you, highness. I have put you in the largest and finest room, with your retinue next door. Your maid can sleep in the kitchen with the other girls.
CHARMING
My maid? Oh, yes. Er... actually, I'd like her close at hand in case... er... I need something... mended.

INNKEEPER
(shocked)
Highness, you're not suggesting I house an unmarried woman in the same wing as the men?

CHARMING
No, of course not. No. Never. Totally unsuitable. She'll be fine in the kitchen. Feel free to beat her if she gives you trouble.

INNKEEPER
Yes, sire. Excuse me, I must attend to my other guests.

ANN
And I must see to my place in the kitchen.

CHARMING
Ann, wait. Ann... Girls!

INT. BRIAR ROSE INN -- BEDROOM -- NIGHT

CHARMING is lying on the bed, awake. There is a quiet knock at the door and ANN enters, wearing a white cotton nightshirt.

ANN
Hi.

CHARMING
Hi.

ANN sits on the bed.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Why didn't you tell the innkeeper who you were?

ANN
He couldn't put a woman in the same wing as the men, so he would have kicked the girls out of the back room to free it up for me.

CHARMING
Where would they sleep then?

ANN
In the stables.

CHARMING
I see. That was pretty nice of you.
ANN
We don't have staff at home. I'm used to the working girl's viewpoint.

CHARMING
Kindness and beauty. I see why your stepmother is worried. You really are the fairest in the land.

ANN
That's very sweet of you. You know, we have a lot in common.

CHARMING
(putting his arm around her)
We do?

ANN
We both have parents who envy our youth and popularity.

CHARMING
I guess.

ANN
We both feel a strong sense of duty to our people.

CHARMING
Yeah. We do, absolutely.

CHARMING is moving in for the kiss.

ANN
Both our mothers died in childbirth.

CHARMING
What?

ANN
When I was a little girl, I thought of her all the time. Do you ever think of your mother?

CHARMING
Not at a time like this, no.

ANN
It's odd growing up without a mother, especially knowing she died as a result of your birth.

CHARMING
Now, wait a minute...

ANN
It's almost like we're responsible for their deaths, in a way.
CHARMING
Hey!

ANN
Not that I feel guilty, exactly. Did you ever think about things like this, growing up?

CHARMING
No! No, I never thought about things like that. And I don't especially want to think about them now. Jeez, you know how to kill a romantic mood.

ANN
Romantic...? Oh, no. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... Surely you didn't think that I... I... I have to go now. Well. Um. See you in the morning, I guess.

CHARMING
Is it cold outside?

ANN
A little.

CHARMING
Good. I'm going for a walk.

CHARMING stomps out angrily.

EXT. ALACIA CASTLE -- THORN WALLS -- DAY

The thorn walls are enormous and impenetrable. The thorns vary in size, from small sharp barbs to long, stiletto-like spikes. The thorns grow on cane-like vines that curl and interlock.

MANDELBAUM
My goodness.

WENDELL
Wow.

MANDELBAUM takes out a small pair of silver scissors and cuts off a piece of vine. Vine snatches at the wizard like a living thing.

CHARMING
Look out.

MANDELBAUM
My word!

CHARMING draws his sword and hacks at the hedge, freeing MANDELBAUM. The hedge almost immediately grows back where it's been cut away.
MANDELBAUM (CONT'D)

Amazing! I must study this in my laboratory. Well, to work.

MANDELBAUM puts away his snippet of vine. WENDELL helps him open two large duffel bags and begin sorting equipment. ANN has sat down under a tree. CHARMING sits nearby, whittling. They're terse with each other.

ANN
What are you going to do?

CHARMING
Ah, it speaks at last. Not that I haven't enjoyed the quiet this morning.

ANN
Shut up. What are you going to do?

CHARMING
Just watch.

MANDELBAUM and WENDELL are hammering wooden stakes into the ground in a circular pattern at carefully measured intervals. Various powders and liquids are poured on the ground and the stakes. Spikes of silver, gold and copper are added to various stakes.

ANN
Aren't you going to do something?

CHARMING
I am doing something. I've made a whistle. See?

ANN
I mean, aren't you going to help them?

CHARMING
I'd only be in the way.

ANN
Oh. Look, I'm sorry. I'm being silly, I suppose. I guess I should thank you for last night.

CHARMING
What for?

ANN
For not... taking advantage of me last night. I guess I got carried away. I was all ready to... kiss you... and things. If not for your strength of character, I might have done something we'd both regret.
CHARMING
Oh. Well. Actually, I may as well be perfectly honest here. I didn't walk out because I'm armoured in virtue. I walked out because that mother thing got me upset. I mean, I was really attracted to you.

ANN
Really?

CHARMING
Really. I think you're beautiful. And not just beautiful. You're wonderful.

ANN
Thank you. That makes me very happy.

CHARMING
You're welcome. You can tell me how handsome you think I am now.

ANN
You look all right.

CHARMING sticks his tongue out at her and ANN giggles.

ANN (CONT'D)
Now tell me how we're going to get through the thorns.

CHARMING
Just wait. They're almost done.

WENDELL is moving the gear a safe distance away. MANDELBAUM gives some last taps with a mallet, then retreats. The ground between the stakes begins to smoke. A small blue flame appears in the center of the circle. Then a sheet of flame covers the ground. Then a huge pillar of fire roars into the air, scattering soot and ash. In a few seconds it vanishes and all that is left is a charred circle of ground.

ANN
That's it? How does that get us through the thorns?

CHARMING
Watch.

A faint rumbling begins. The ground begins to shake.

ANN
What is it?

CHARMING
Stand back.
WENDELL
Here it comes!

A column of water erupts high into the air. They are drenched.

ANN
Oh, no! I'm soaked!

CHARMING
(seeing Ann's clinging clothes)
Yeah.

WENDELL is cavorting around happily. MANDELBAUM is waving his arms, trying to get control of the fountain. The column of water eventually settles into an arch over the thorn wall.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Nice job, Mandelbaum.

ANN
But we can't ride on that! We'll be killed!

CHARMING
He's not finished. This is the really good bit.

The roaring of water dies away and ANN starts shivering. WENDELL hands ANN a towel.

ANN
You've... you've turned it into ice!

CHARMING
Don't touch it. Your skin will stick to it. Wendell, get some...

WENDELL hands ANN some gloves.

WENDELL
Put these on.

MANDELBAUM
It should retain structural integrity long enough for you to find the princess, kiss her and get out.

ANN
Oh, come on. You're not really going to kiss this Aurora person, are you? Assuming she exists at all.

CHARMING
Why shouldn't I?
ANN
Prince Charming! You don't even know her!

CHARMING
How can I get to know her? She's asleep!

ANN
That's exactly what I mean. You can't just go into a girl's bedroom and kiss her. She can't give consent. It's like rape!

CHARMING
If rescuing her means kissing her, I'll have to kiss her. That's my job. I'm a prince.

ANN
It's perverse.

CHARMING
You're just jealous.

ANN
Jealous? Ha!

MANDELBAUM
In the interests of expediency, why don't you continue this pointless conversation while you're climbing?

CHARMING
Right. Wendell, get the ice axes.

CHARMING holds out his hand and is momentarily startled to find WENDELL hasn't anticipated his request.

WENDELL
Mandelbaum told me not to bring them.

MANDELBAUM
I've refined the spell since you saw it last. Watch this.

MANDELBAUM produces a small silver teaspoon, polishes it lovingly on his cloak and gives the ice the most delicate of taps. There is a soft "ting" sound, like a tuning fork, which grows louder. Then particles of ice begin raining down around them, as an ornate staircase takes shape in the ice column.

WENDELL
Awesome!

CHARMING
All right!
ANN
Very nice, indeed.

MANDELBAUM
Got me two nominations for the
Magician's Golden Pentaflex. Best
New Spell and Best Special Effect.

CHARMING
Right. Well, I'd better get over
there and kiss this babe. It's a
tough job, but somebody has to do
it.

CHARMING starts climbing, closely followed by WENDELL.
ANN brings up the rear. MANDELBAUM takes out his pipe and
settles down to wait.

WENDELL
Look at the size of that hedge!

Looking down on the thorn wall from above, we can see it's
at least 30 meters thick. CHARMING stops at the peak of
the arch. WENDELL and ANN join him in staring at the
castle. Alacia Castle has several towers and a moat. It
has lots of high-arched windows and carved shutters.
Although the stone is stained, the paint has faded and the
exposed wood has rotted, it isn't hard to see that this
was once a beautiful place. A double line of carriages is
parked in front of the castle.

ANN
Oh, my.

CHARMING
Not bad.

WENDELL
I like ours better.

CHARMING
So much for the grail quest. This
place can't be more than thirty
years old.

ANN
I like it anyway. What a perfect
spot for a wedding.

CHARMING
Dragon.

ANN
What?

CHARMING
Wendell, the carriages.

WENDELL
I see them.
ANN

See what?

CHARMING

See those two carriages at the far end?

There are long, parallel grooves scored into the woodwork, and the roofs have been torn off by force.

ANN

Oh, dear. What do we do now?

CHARMING

Keep our eyes open.

ANN

You're going on?

CHARMING

You can go back if you like.

ANN

If you're going, I'm going.

CHARMING

Fine. Wendell, stay close.

EXT. ALACIA CASTLE -- DAY

CHARMING, WENDELL and ANN approach the castle.

ANN

But what about the dragon?

CHARMING

Probably inside. If he was outside, we'd have seen him.

ANN

But are you really going to try and slay him without a horse and a lance?

CHARMING

One step at a time. Let's take a look around first.

CHARMING pushes on what remains of the front door. The hinge squeals. Putting his finger to his lips, he leads WENDELL and ANN inside.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- FRONT HALL -- DAY

The front hall is dusty but otherwise in good condition.

ANN

Pretty good shape.

CHARMING nods and moves quietly to a window. There are several dead flies. CHARMING pokes at the dead insects.
CHARMING
Dead.

WENDELL
Not sleeping?

CHARMING
Dead. Some spell.

ANN
Where are the people?

CHARMING
Gathered for the wedding. Let's look for the chapel.

CHARMING, WENDELL and ANN walk quietly deeper into the castle. They pick their way down a hall and look through a charred hole in a broken door to what is clearly the dining hall. Tables are set up for a feast that was never eaten. The bones of the wedding guests have been gathered into a pile in the center of the hall. On top of the pile is a sleeping dragon. CHARMING motions with his head and WENDELL and ANN follow him back down the hall to a small library.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- LIBRARY -- DAY

The walls are lined with bookshelves and there is one window high up in the wall.

CHARMING
Friendly looking little tyke, isn't he?

ANN
I've never seen one before. It's so ugly. And it stinks, too.

CHARMING
The smell of carrion. I make him about twelve feet long. What do you think, Wendell?

WENDELL
Fourteen, counting the spikes on the tail.

CHARMING
Did you see the missing scales on the back and sides?

WENDELL
Yes, sire. They get awfully mean when they're molting.

CHARMING
Okay. We've got a fourteen-foot, green-spiked dragon, male, possibly in molt, chipped upper-left fang, missing one claw on the right hind (MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
foot, three claws each on the other feet, crested head, dorsal ridge, apparently healthy, certainly vicious. Presently asleep in a confined space.

WENDELL
Figure a six-foot range for the flame. The hall is about forty feet by one hundred feet. Double-door main entrance on the south end, two doors on each side leading to hallways, two small swinging doors in the back, probably to the kitchen.

ANN
Um... that's how I see it, too.

CHARMING
Twelve windows, evenly spaced, eight feet high and starting four feet from the floor. Lots of broken furniture and debris.

WENDELL
Footwork will be treacherous.

CHARMING
Right.

CHARMING unbuckles his sword and hands it to WENDELL.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Go for it.

Sire?

CHARMING
You said you wanted to slay a dragon. Now's your chance.

ANN
Charming!

WENDELL
No, I can do it.

WENDELL uncertainly draws Endeavour. He holds the naked blade upright. CHARMING looks at him impassively. ANN is horrified.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
All right. Okay. Back in a minute.

CHARMING
Wendell, wait. Give me the sword. I was just kidding.
ANN
That's not funny.

WENDELL
I knew it. You never let me do anything.

CHARMING
Sorry, Wendell. Maybe next time, huh?

WENDELL
You always say that.

CHARMING
(sotto)
Wendell, I'm only doing this one because there's a babe to impress. Otherwise, I'd let you slay him. Really. I mean it.

WENDELL
Well, I guess so. I'll carry your sword up the hall.

CHARMING
You stay here.

WENDELL
You're leaving me back with the girls?

ANN
Well, excuse me!

CHARMING
It's just one girl, and I want you here to protect her. You know how dragons are around maidens.

WENDELL
Oh, yeah. Well, okay.

CHARMING
Fine. You hold the fort here, I nip out and slay the beast, then we can break for lunch.

WENDELL
All right.

CHARMING winks at ANN, slaps WENDELL on the back and makes for the hall. ANN rushes over and hugs him.

ANN
Be careful.

CHARMING
(surprised)
I will.
WENDELL
Sheesh.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- DINING HALL -- DAY
CHARMING tiptoes toward the dragon.

   (sotto)
   Eye socket. Piece of cake.

The dragon wakes.

   CHARMING (CONT'D)
   Oh, nuts.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- DAY
CHARMING runs down the hallway with the dragon in pursuit. He ducks into a handy room and prepares to kill the dragon as it sticks its head in.

   CHARMING
   Come on...

The room is full of tapestries. The dragon roars and blasts fire through the doorway. All the tapestries catch fire. CHARMING, coughing smoke, pushes over a table and prepares to make his last stand.

   CHARMING (CONT'D)
   Come on, then!

The dragon's tail disappears from view as it goes back down the hall.

   CHARMING (CONT'D)
   Oh, bloody hell.

CHARMING drags a tapestry over his head and charges through the flame to the hallway. Tossing the smoking cloth aside, he sees the dragon moving slowly down the hall, sniffing.

   CHARMING (CONT'D)
   Dragons and maidens. Hey! HEY!

The dragon breaks into a run, CHARMING in pursuit. The dragon reaches the library door and, with a roar, smashes it open.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- LIBRARY -- DAY
ANN is perched on top of a bookcase, trying to open the window. WENDELL is pushing her from below. As the door crashes down, WENDELL jumps for one of the extra swords. ANN loses her balance and falls on top of WENDELL. A few books fall on them, then the whole bookcase falls. The dragon roars again and prepares a blast of fire.
INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- DAY

CHARMING reaches the dragon and hacks at its tail. A thin geyser of blood spurts and the dragon backs out of the library, roaring and furious.

CHARMING

Where's the eye... where's...

CHARMING stabs for the eye as the dragon's head emerges. He barely misses, hitting the armoured forehead instead.

CHARMING (CONT'D)

Shit!

Head bleeding, the dragon charges. CHARMING dodges. The dragon hits the wall and masonry dust flies everywhere. CHARMING flees down the hall, just out of range of the blast of fire that follows him. Rounding a corner, CHARMING starts trying doors. They're all locked. CHARMING takes special note of a small door, set so flush with the wall that it's almost disguised. This small door is scored with dragon scratches. CHARMING puts his shoulder to the next door along and takes refuge inside.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- SERVANTS STAIR -- DAY

CHARMING is in a narrow, curving wooden staircase. He moves to a position just out of sight and waits, sword at the ready. The sound of the dragon's clawed feet gets nearer. The dragon is moving stealthily, sniffing out CHARMING. Its head appears at the doorway. It sniffs again, and jams its head and shoulders into the narrow passageway. It draws breath. CHARMING flees as it breathes fire.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- UPPER HALL -- DAY

CHARMING escapes the staircase as flame erupts from the doorway. The dragon's head appears and CHARMING stabs Endeavour through the eye.

The dragon goes berserk, spraying fire in all directions and ripping the sword from CHARMING's grip. CHARMING flees down the hall and takes the main staircase to the front hall.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- DAY

The fire has spread and the lower floor is now filled with smoke. CHARMING bumps into WENDELL, knocking him down. ANN hugs CHARMING with relief. WENDELL gets up and does the same.

ANN

Charming!

WENDELL

Sire!
CHARMING
Wendell, you know all those stories
we heard about killing a dragon by
stabbing it through the eye?

WENDELL
Yes?

CHARMING
They're all rubbish.

The dragon roars, furious.

ANN
Can we go now?

CHARMING
(leading)
This way.

ANN
The exit is that way!

CHARMING
I know.

ANN
Where are we going?

CHARMING
Princess Aurora. The sleeping
babe, remember?

ANN
Are you crazy?

They arrive at the small door CHARMING noticed earlier.

CHARMING
Wendell, find me something to...

WENDELL hands him a metal poker. CHARMING looks at him
strangely.

WENDELL
Fireplace in the library.

CHARMING
Right. Give me a hand.

CHARMING wedges the poker into the door frame. He and
WENDELL throw their weight onto it.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Dragons and maidens. Look at the
claw marks. He wanted to get in
here badly.

ANN
Maidens and dogs. You'd better
hope this doesn't lead to the
kennels.
The door gives. Behind it is an even narrower wooden staircase.

CHARMING
Tower stairs. Let's go.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- AURORA'S BEDROOM -- DAY

CHARMING, WENDELL and ANN emerge from the staircase, wreathed in smoke, shutting the door behind them.

WENDELL
The stair is acting like five flights of chimney, sire. We won't get out that way.

The room fills the entire tower. CHARMING opens a window to clear the smoke. On a table next to the bed is a framed portrait of a young man, with a desiccated bunch of flowers next to it. On the bed is a skeletal corpse in a rotted wedding dress. The face has remnants of skin stretched across the skull, dried lips, and seemingly untouched long blonde hair.

ANN
Look. She was wearing her wedding dress.

WENDELL
That's really gross.

ANN
Shut up, Wendell. This is the saddest thing I've ever seen.
(re: the portrait)
Her prince. I wonder if he ever came for her.

CHARMING
Probably downstairs in that pile of bones.

WENDELL
He looks like you.

CHARMING
I'm better looking.

CHARMING is staring at the corpse. WENDELL opens the door. Smoke and cinders blow into the room before he shuts it again.

WENDELL
Sire, I think we'd better get out of here.

CHARMING
I'm not going to do it.

WENDELL
What?
CHARMING
Kiss the girl. I'm not going to do it.

ANN
Of course not. What are you talking about?

CHARMING
Kiss the girl. Break the spell.

ANN
Oh, for goodness sake! She's dead, Charming. She's not sleeping. Whatever spell was cast on her is long past breaking.

CHARMING
Right. She's dead. A lifeless bag of bones. A dried-out husk. No way she's going to be revived. Right, Wendell?

WENDELL
Well, Mandelbaum did say...

ANN
I don't believe you two. You have to be really sick even to think about kissing this... thing.

CHARMING
Yeah, right. Stupid idea. Well, I guess we should be getting out of here.

CHARMING doesn't move. Neither does WENDELL.

ANN
Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go!

CHARMING
But... it's my duty.

ANN
Don't be stupid.

CHARMING
You never wanted me to kiss her anyway, did you? You were jealous.

ANN
Oh, for goodness sake! I assure you I'm not jealous now. Go ahead and kiss the darn thing. This is too disgusting to argue about.

CHARMING kneels by the bed and gently pushes the hair back from what remains of Aurora's face.
CHARMING
I'm here, princess.

He purses his lips and lowers his head.

WENDELL
What if it really wakes up?

ANN
This is really grotesque!

CHARMING
This is my job! You're not making it any easier! Suppose it was you on this bed? Would you want me to give up before I'd examined every possible recourse?

ANN
I'm not going to watch this.

ANN stares out the window. CHARMING takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and presses his lips to the corpse. The bony arms instantly wrap around his neck.

CHARMING
Mmmmp! Mmmmmmp!

CHARMING flails his arms desperately, trying to get free.

ANN
Oh, you're getting off on this, are you? I knew from the moment I met you that you were some kind of pervert.

The skeleton has wrapped its legs around CHARMING now, pulling him onto the bed. WENDELL is trying to pry the skeletal fingers apart. CHARMING puts his hands to the skeleton's face, trying to push it off him.

ANN (CONT'D)
I suppose when you're not engaging in necrophilia you're off fondling farm animals.

The combatants roll off the bed, landing with WENDELL on the bottom, CHARMING on top of him, and the fully restored Princess AURORA on top of the pile. Her long, blonde hair is in disarray. Her rotted wedding dress exposes a significant amount of curvaceous body. If ANN is the exemplar of girl-next-door wholesomeness, AURORA is aristocratic class personified. AURORA looks confused, then screams and jumps back into bed, burrowing under the coverlet. ANN jumps a mile.

AURORA
Who are you? What are you doing in my bedroom? Get out, or I'll scream.
WENDELL
You already did that.

CHARMING turns on the smile.

CHARMING
Highness...

ANN
Oh, put a sock in it, Charming. We're covered in soot. How do you think she feels?

CHARMING
Uh... there's a fire, ma'am. King's orders - we have to evacuate.

AURORA
Fire?

CHARMING
Don't worry, everything's under control. Step up on the sill, here.

AURORA
Did it start in the kitchen? We can move the reception out to the garden...

CHARMING shoves AURORA out the window. AURORA screams as she falls, cut off by a splash as she hits the moat.

ANN
Great, a screamer. You probably like that kind, too, don't you?

CHARMING
Don't get catty. You're next.

ANN
You don't have to push me. I can jump.
   (looking at the drop)
On second thoughts, maybe you'd better push me.

CHARMING does. WENDELL goes next, executing a stylish half-somersault on the way down.

CHARMING
Showoff.

CHARMING jumps.

EXT. ALACIA CASTLE -- DAY

CHARMING swims to the edge of the moat, where ANN and WENDELL are helping AURORA out.
AURORA
There's a fire! The castle's on fire! My prince is in there! My papa is in there! Why isn't anyone doing anything?

CHARMING
Time to go.
(dragging Aurora)
Sorry, princess, but you're going to have to trust us for a while.

AURORA
Let me go! We've got to help them!

CHARMING
We'll get help from the village. For now, you're coming with us.

AURORA drags CHARMING around and punches him in the nose. More startled than hurt, CHARMING lets her go. AURORA runs toward the castle.

AURORA
Help! Fire! Help!

The dragon appears at the castle gates, CHARMING's sword still stuck in its eye. AURORA stops dead, turns and flees past CHARMING, WENDELL and ANN, screaming her head off. CHARMING ushers them all up the ice bridge, which is now starting to melt. The dragon reaches the ice and blasts fire at them, but the group is too far up. The dragon roars and starts dragging itself up the arch in pursuit.

CHARMING
Determined sucker. Let's move.

Moving as fast as they can, the group struggles up the arch with the dragon roaring and breathing flame behind them. Water is now flowing past their feet as the arch melts. AT the top, CHARMING inches past them to the front.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Once that dragon reaches the top, all he has to do is let go and he'll land on top of us. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to sit down like we're on a toboggan and slide.

WENDELL
It's a steep drop. We'll be moving pretty fast.

CHARMING
I'll go in front and try to break our fall. Wendell, you're next. Protect the women. Let's go.

As the dragon crests the top of the arch, the group slide down the melting ice staircase. They move at impressive speed.
WENDELL
This is great!

The ground is by now mostly mud. Impact is messy. MANDELBAUM regards them curiously.

MANDELBAUM
What was that lunatic stunt for?

WENDELL
Dragon.

MANDELBAUM
Ah.

The dragon bellows furiously and begins to slide toward them. MANDELBAUM calmly taps the ice with the stem of his pipe. The ice instantly dissolves into a fine spray of mist. The dragon falls into the thorn walls and vanishes. All is silent. ANN helps CHARMING stand.

ANN
Well, that takes care of him.

There is a bellow from the depths of the thorns, accompanied by much crashing about. CHARMING groans.

CHARMING
That has got to be the toughest dragon I've ever faced. Wendell, fetch...

WENDELL hands CHARMING a lance and the reins to his horse.

ANN
You really think he'll get out of there?

CHARMING
Depends how smashed up he is.

The sounds of struggling dragon die away and all is silent again.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
I hope that's the end of him. I really hate dragons.

WENDELL
I'm hungry.

MANDELBAUM
I think someone should be paying attention to the newest member of our group. This, I take it, is the long-lost Princess Aurora?

AURORA is leaning against a tree, holding her stomach and looking very forlorn.

WENDELL
Is she okay?
AURORA throws up.

CHARMING
I guess not. Poor kid. She's had a hell of a shock.

ANN
She's pregnant.

EXT. ILLYRIA -- DAY

The group rides silently through the countryside. WENDELL and MANDELBAUM are up front, ANN and CHARMING behind them and AURORA bringing up the rear. All are cleaned up and in fresh clothes. ANN falls back next to AURORA.

ANN
Try to look on the bright side.

AURORA
Oh, yes? Just what bright side is that? Everybody I know is dead. My home is destroyed, my kingdom has been annexed, and all my shoes are out of fashion.

ANN
Sorry. But you're alive, aren't you?

AURORA
I can tell you're the life of the party wherever you go.

ANN
Listen, before we get to the castle, we'll stop off and buy some clothes. That always makes me feel better.

AURORA
I don't have any money.

ANN
Actually, neither do I. Oh, dear. I had hoped to make a better impression than this when we arrived at Illyria Castle.

AURORA
You've never been there?

ANN
Oh, no. The prince and I traveled straight from my castle to yours. We were questing for a fertility grail that my stepmother traced to the site of your castle.

AURORA
(bitterly)
Fertility grail.

(MORE)
AURORA (CONT'D)
That would explain a lot. We're a fertile bunch, all right. The girls in my kingdom can hardly pop their cherries without getting knocked up.

ANN
Uh... well...

AURORA
You were wasting your time, though. I never heard any mention of a grail. Daddy wasn't into cults and things, or even collecting antiques.

ANN
Well, my stepmother has been wrong before. When it comes to the black arts, her reach often exceeds her grasp.

AURORA
Your real mother is dead, then?

ANN
In childbirth. My father died a few years ago.

AURORA
My mother died in childbirth, also.

ANN
So did Charming's. He's kind of sensitive about it.

AURORA
Is childbirth as dangerous as all that?

ANN
Mandelbaum says it's because royal families can afford physicians and the very best medical care. Consequently, they die like flies.

AURORA
Ah.
   (then)
So. What's with you and this Charming fellow?

ANN
What do you mean?

AURORA
I mean, you like him, right?

ANN
No! Of course not. (MORE)
ANN (CONT'D)
I don't like him. I mean, of course I like him. But I don't like him.

AURORA
Sure. What's there to like? Just because he's cute, smart, brave, famous and rich is no reason to fall for a boy. I don't know what you could see in him.

ANN
I'll thank you not to put words in my mouth. And he's not so much.

AURORA
So you don't have the hots for him?

ANN
I've never had the hots for anyone. That's not something that happens to nice girls. Charming and I were simply thrown together for the duration of the quest by special circumstances, that's all.

AURORA
I see. Hmm.

ANN doesn't much like that "Hmm". Meanwhile, WENDELL moves his horse next to CHARMING.

WENDELL
Princess Aurora sure is pretty, huh?

CHARMING
Yeah. Nice boobs.

WENDELL
I knew it! I knew you couldn't make it all the way back to the castle without saying something about her breasts. Well, you always wanted to meet a bad girl and now you've got one. I bet you're happy.

CHARMING
Aurora is a nice girl, Wendell.

WENDELL
But she's pregnant.

CHARMING
Which means she's a mother, and all mothers are saints. Even unwed ones. They are always treated with deference and respect, except by other women. That's just the way it is.
WENDELL
You just said she had nice boobs.
That's not respectful.

CHARMING
So? She wasn't listening.

MANDELBbaum joins them.

MANDELBbaum
Highness, it occurs to me that we
should slow our pace. At this
rate, we will reach the castle
well before nightfall.

CHARMING
So?

MANDELBbaum
Well, highness, with all respect,
you have not considered the
ramifications of riding into the
castle with a pregnant companion.

CHARMING
Hey! That's not my doing. Anyway,
you were around from the first
time I even heard about Aurora.
And Wendell and Ann were with me
the whole time.

MANDELBbaum
It is not I who needs to be
convinced of the purity of your
intent, it is your constituency.
And I am afraid they will not
consider a page and a sixteen-year-
old girl to be adequate chaperones.

CHARMING
How about you?

MANDELBbaum
Wizards are viewed with suspicion
even at the best of times. The
only credible chaperones are middle
aged couples or overweight women.

CHARMING
This is crazy. I've rescued
beautiful babes all over the twenty
kingdoms and escorted them home.
I never laid a hand on them.

WENDELL
They wouldn't let you.

MANDELBbaum
Those women did not arrive home
pregnant.

(MORE)
MANDELBAUM (CONT'D)
The gossipmongers will look for a cause, and I fear they will find a living prince makes a much better scandal than one who has been dead for twenty years.

CHARMING
Even supposing your fears are right, wouldn't it be better to arrive boldly in broad daylight than skulk in after dark?

WENDELL
It wouldn't make any difference. All the maids and servants and guards in the castle will talk about it anyway.

CHARMING
That's right. I really don't think Dad's going to lock her away in a tower. We'll just have to brazen it out.

ANN and AURORA join them.

ANN
Brazen what out?

CHARMING
We were trying to decide whether to sneak Aurora into the castle after dark or not. Do you think people will really know you're pregnant? You don't look pregnant.

ANN
Women always know.

AURORA
I am Princess of Alacia. I will not skulk about like a thief.

CHARMING
Okay, that decides it. We'll walk tall.

ANN
Wait a minute. Why don't we just pretend she's married?

CHARMING
What?

AURORA
What?

ANN
Look, nobody really knows what happened. (MORE)
ANN (CONT'D)
It was twenty years ago. And the castle is a smoking ruin. If we say the spell didn't kick in until a few hours after the ceremony, leaving plenty of time for the eager newlyweds to run upstairs and consummate their marriage, who's to say any different?

AURORA
(unsure)
It'll never fly.

CHARMING
Why not? It's believable. I know the first thing I'll do after I'm married is to...
(off the girls' look)
...check to see if my wife is okay.

WENDELL
I don't like it. If something like this came out, it would make the prince look bad.

CHARMING
It's my job to save girls, Wendell, reputations and all. We don't need a marriage certificate because of the fire, and everyone who was there is dead except Aurora. We ought to be able to slip you a ring, coordinate our stories and bluff this one out.

MANDELBAUM
(coughing discreetly)
Prince Charming, may I have a word with you?

CHARMING
Um, sure.

CHARMING and MANDELBAUM fall back behind the group.

MANDELBAUM
Highness, it disturbs me to see a young man who has been well schooled in the practice of honesty and virtue agree so readily to this subterfuge. But that's not my main concern. As a member of the royal court, who accepts the king's coin, my first loyalty is to your father. Do you intend to lie to him as well? And if so, do you expect me to withhold information from him?
CHARMING
Mandelbaum, I'm just trying to protect the girl. So I fib a little. I'm not committing high treason. Besides, a minute ago you were concerned about my reputation. This gets me off the hook as well.

MANDELBAUM
Presenting an elaborate charade to the court is not what I had in mind. There are several nunneries within a day's ride that would provide her with food and shelter, as well as providing an opportunity to serve penance for her moral turpitude.

CHARMING
Moral turpitude? Come on, Mandelbaum. I'm not sending her to a nunnery and she wouldn't go along with it if I tried. She's just a girl who made a mistake.

MANDELBAUM
How do you know she made a mistake? Have you discussed it with her?

CHARMING
Of course not. You can't talk about these things with a girl.

MANDELBAUM
Exactly. So there's no way of telling what deviant behaviours she's been practicing.

CHARMING
This is absurd. Look, Mandelbaum, I'll do you a deal. As soon as we get back, I'll arrange for Aurora to have an audience with Dad. We'll let him decide what to do. Until then, you play along with us. Okay?

MANDELBAUM
Oh, very well. But if his majesty asks me anything, I'm telling him the truth.

CHARMING
Deal.

CHARMING and MANDELBAUM rejoin the group.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Okay, ladies, the game is on. Aurora, from now on, you're a widow.
ANN
We should stop and get her some black clothes, then.

WENDELL
Figures. No matter what you do, girls always fit shopping into it somehow.

AURORA
The clothes don't matter. I just want to start rebuilding my life. Prince Charming, I can't thank you enough for all you're doing for me.

AURORA puts her hand on CHARMING's arm and gives him a megawatt smile. ANN doesn't like this at all.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- EVENING

ANN and CHARMING are walking together.

ANN
You have a lovely castle.

CHARMING
Thanks. Did you find your room comfortable?

ANN
Oh, yes. It was very comfortable. Luxurious, even. Very nice. Yes, indeed.

CHARMING
Well, that's good. I'm glad you like your room. I mean, all the rooms are pretty nice, but if you prefer another room you can have one. Or you can just stay where you are. Whatever you want.

ANN
No, it's fine.

CHARMING
Well, good.
(at his room)
Well, here I am. I'll see you in the morning, I guess.

ANN
I guess. Well, pleasant dreams.

CHARMING
You, too. I'd invite you in, but of course it wouldn't look right, having a girl in my room.
ANN
Oh, no. That night at the inn was an exceptional case. I couldn't possibly enter a man's bedroom.

CHARMING
No. There would be a terrible row.

ANN
Even if we weren't doing anything.

CHARMING
Right.

CHARMING pushes open the door and ANN follows him in.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- CHARMING'S BEDROOM -- EVENING

CHARMING
I guess it's okay as long as we leave the door open.

ANN
Good idea. We don't want anyone to see us together like this, but we don't want to be together where nobody can see us.

CHARMING
Just what I was thinking.

CHARMING gently kicks the door shut with his heel.

ANN
Nice room.

CHARMING
I like it. There's a little balcony over there where you can see the stars.

ANN
That's nice. Do you look at the stars often?

CHARMING
Never. But if I want to, the balcony is there.

ANN
Well, I guess I'd better be going back to my room. I don't even know why I came in here.

CHARMING
Yeah, it's probably best if you don't stay any longer.

CHARMING has his arms around ANN. She closes her eyes and tilts her face as he bends towards her. There is a knock at the door. They jump away from each other.
CHARMING (CONT'D)
Er... come in.

AURORA enters. She is wearing a nightdress with the top buttons undone, showing generous amounts of cleavage. AURORA and ANN glare at each other.

AURORA
What are you doing here?

ANN
What are you doing here?

AURORA
What are you doing here?

ANN
I just came in to say good night to Prince Charming.

AURORA
Why, that's what I came to do.

AURORA slips her arm through CHARMING's arm.

AURORA (CONT'D)
My room is very pleasant, Prince Charming. You have a lovely castle.

ANN
That's a silly thing to say. He didn't decorate it.

AURORA
I'm sure he didn't tailor his own clothes, either, but I may still tell him he looks very handsome in them.

CHARMING
Um... thanks. I'll get you in to see Dad in the morning. Oh, and here. I found a gold band for you.

CHARMING produces a ring. AURORA smiles and holds out her hand. CHARMING is about to slip the ring on her finger when he notices ANN's expression. He pushes the ring into her palm instead.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Here you go. Don't worry about returning it. We've got a million trinkets like that.

AURORA
Well, I appreciate it all the same. Just as I appreciate all your kind words and friendship, Ann.
ANN
Why, it was a pleasure to be of help, Aurora.

AURORA
I suppose that, now your quest is over, you'll be returning to your own kingdom.

ANN
I suppose so.

AURORA
I'm sorry you can't stay longer, but there's really no reason for you to stick around, is there?

ANN
I guess.

CHARMING
Oh, hey, what's the big hurry? Hang around for a bit. Take a holiday. There's plenty to do in Illyria, all sorts of parties and balls and banquets. What's a few days?

ANN
No, really, I should be going...

AURORA
She probably misses her boyfriend.

ANN
But if you insist, I suppose I might stay a few days.

CHARMING
Great. Terrific. Well, I guess I'll see you both in the morning. Good night.

ANN
Good night.

AURORA
Good night.

Nobody moves.

CHARMING
Good night. I guess you'll both be getting back to your rooms now.

WENDELL bursts in.

WENDELL
ANN
Hello, Wendell.

AURORA
Wendell.

WENDELL
I got one of the cooks to make us a snack. There's toast and eggs and kippers and bacon and sausage. Fresh gingerbread, too.

CHARMING
Sounds good, Wendell. I'll be down in a minute.

AURORA
I don't think I'm hungry. I believe I'll turn in now.

WENDELL
But there's gingerbread!

AURORA
Not tonight, thank you. Good night.

AURORA exits.

ANN
I'll join you downstairs.

ANN exits.

WENDELL
What's eating those two? Girls! Oh, I almost forgot. Norville wants to see you first thing tomorrow.

CHARMING
Tell him I'm not back yet.

WENDELL
He already knows you're back.

CHARMING
Tell him I'm sick.

WENDELL
He says it's real important.

CHARMING
It always is. Let's eat.

WENDELL
Okay.
INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- EVENING

WENDELL
Mandelbaum is going to mix some new potions tonight for keeping starlings away from wheat fields and he said I could help him. It has something to do with live bats. He has them flying into his tower. Won't that be neat?

CHARMING
Sounds great. You've been spending a lot of time with Mandelbaum lately, Wendell. Thinking of going into sorcery instead of becoming a knight?

WENDELL
Oh, no. I just think magic is really neat. Mandelbaum said he'd consider me for an apprentice, but I said no. Magic is pretty cool, but it's not as good as riding across the kingdoms and fighting with swords and slaying things, and you don't get to wear armour and you don't get a title. And it's years and years of studying out of books and practicing self-discipline and mind exercises. Besides, when I told him how much you depended on me, he knew that you needed me to be your squire.

CHARMING
Right. But you won't be my squire forever, Wendell.

WENDELL
No, one day you'll be king and I'll be your knight and keep the kingdom safe while you're doing kingly stuff.

CHARMING
Of course.

WENDELL
Maybe I could be a knight and a wizard. Hey, that would be wild. A knight who could also work magic. I'd be the most famous knight in the twenty kingdoms.

CHARMING
Just remember that there are more important things in life than fame and glory, Wendell.

WENDELL
You mean truth, justice and family?
CHARMING
Actually, I meant like getting laid. But those, too.

ANN joins them as they approach the dining room.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Did you just change your hair?

ANN
I just wanted to tidy it up a bit, that's all.

WENDELL
Why? It's fine.

ANN
Let's just have dinner, Wendell.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- DINING ROOM -- EVENING

RUBY is sitting at the table, buttering a scone. ANN turns pale. WENDELL's mouth drops open. CHARMING is surprised.

CHARMING
Queen Ruby. How good to see you again. What pleasant circumstance brings you to Illyria?

RUBY
Cut the chatter, Charming. I want that grail.

ANN
What are you doing here?

RUBY
What are you doing here is more the question, young lady. I don't recall any sleepovers in Illyria being on your itinerary. I knew from the start you wouldn't keep your side of the bargain, Charming. I knew you'd try to keep that grail for yourself. That is, if little Ann here hasn't managed to weasel it out of you.

WENDELL
Hey! You can't talk to the prince like that!

CHARMING
Nobody has done any weaseling that I'm aware of.

RUBY
I'll try it again. Which one of you has the grail?
ANN
Nobody has the grail. There was no grail. The site is occupied by a castle of fairly recent construction. Whatever was there before must have gotten destroyed.

RUBY
Don't try to lie to me, young lady. You'll get your punishment when we get home. Charming, I've already requested an audience with your father, where I intend to demand the return of my rightful property.

CHARMING
The whole place was riddled with magic. Dragons, sleeping spells, enchanted woods. Send in a team of archeological magicians and there's no telling what you might find. But if there was ever a grail there, it's nowhere to be found now.

RUBY draws herself up menacingly and is about to speak again when MANDELBAUM enters.

MANDELBAUM
Ah, there you are, Wendell. I heard that there was food prepared and I thought I'd find you here. Oho, kippers - very nice.
(noticing RUBY)
Oh. Excuse me. Have we met?

CHARMING
Mandelbaum, this is Queen Ruby of Alacia, Ann's stepmother.

RUBY haughtily offers her hand. MANDELBAUM kisses it.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Queen Ruby, this is Mandelbaum, Royal Sorcerer to the Court of Illyria.

All trace of haughtiness leaves RUBY.

RUBY
Oh, reeeeeealy? You must be a very powerful sorcerer.

MANDELBAUM
At your service, madam. I do what I can to lend my humble abilities to the service of my king and country.

RUBY
I just loooove magicians.
(MORE)
RUBY (CONT'D)
They have such power, such inner
strength. I'd just love to learn
their deepest secrets.

MANDELBAUM
The pursuit of knowledge can indeed
be very... uh... gratifying. I
take it you have some interest in
the black arts yourself?

RUBY
Oh, yes. I have long immersed
myself in the science of magic.
But I fear that, studying by myself,
without an experienced magician to
guide me, I have gained but a dim
and incoherent grasp of the subject.

ANN
No kidding.

MANDELBAUM
These things take time. Would you
be interested in a tour of my
laboratory?

RUBY
I would love one. Ann, I will
want to speak to you in the morning.
Uh... not too early.

WENDELL
Mandelbaum, what about the bats?

MANDELBAUM
Another time, Wendell.

WENDELL
But...

MANDELBAUM
Another time, Wendell!

RUBY and MANDELBAUM exit.

WENDELL
What's got into him all of a sudden?

CHARMING
Cut him some slack, Wendell. You'll
understand in a few years.

ANN
What a bitch! I just hate her. I
can't believe Mandelbaum is such a
pushover. Can't he see she's just
using him?
CHARMING
A guy's brain sort of fogs up when he's going to get... when he's with a woman. He does things he wouldn't do otherwise. Stupid things.

ANN
Like slaying dragons single-handedly?

CHARMING
I meant like sending flowers and writing poetry. But that, too.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- WAITING ROOM -- MORNING

ANN and AURORA are sitting a few seats apart, waiting. AURORA is dressed in finery that befits meeting a king. ANN wears clothing that is neat and functional. CHARMING enters and AURORA immediately rises and hugs him.

AURORA
Prince Charming, thank you so much for arranging this audience with your father so quickly. I am in your debt.

ANN
Hi.

CHARMING
Hello, Aurora. Hi, Ann. We're pretty lucky, actually. He cleared his calendar this morning to meet with you. Not many people get in with so little notice.

ANN
Has my stepmother got an appointment yet?

CHARMING
She hasn't even gotten in to see his executive secretary.

ANN
That's probably a good thing. If I can get in to see your father first, I might be able to defuse the explosion she'll undoubtedly create.

RUBY enters. She has foregone the usual boots and wears flat slippers instead. While she is still wearing black, she has pink lipstick and a pink ribbon in her hair.

RUBY
Ann, my darling, there you are. How are you this morning? Did you sleep well? You look lovely.
ANN
What?

RUBY
You know, as long as we're in Illyria, we should really get you some new clothes. They have the most wonderful shops here. You really should take more care in the way you dress, my dear.

ANN
What?

RUBY
(kissing ANN's cheek)
While we're about it, we can have our hair done. But not today, I'm afraid. Mandelbaum is taking me on a picnic. Oh, and this must be your friend Aurora. My dear, I'm so sorry to hear about your tragic circumstances. If there's anything I can do, please don't hesitate to call on me. Prince Charming, please convey my warmest regards to your father. Well, I must be off. I don't want to keep dear Mandelbaum waiting.

RUBY breezes out again. CHARMING, ANN and AURORA are stunned.

AURORA
Your stepmother sure is nice.

ANN
What?

CHARMING
Wow. I underestimated old Mandelbaum.

WENDELL darts into the room.

WENDELL
Good morning, sire. Good morning, Princess Aurora. Good morning, Princess Ann. Sire, Count Norville is...

NORVILLE enters.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
...here.

CHARMING
Norville, come on. Can't I rest for even a single day?

NORVILLE
Your highness, I have found her.
With a flourish, NORVILLE produces a glass slipper. CHARMING's attitude changes completely.

CHARMING
Really? That's fantastic! Are you sure she's the one?

NORVILLE
Absolutely. Both the description and the slipper fit perfectly.

ANN
Excuse me. You're trying to match up a girl with a shoe?

CHARMING
Er... a girl lost her shoe at a ball. I'm trying to get it back to her. It's not that big a deal.

AURORA
Pretty. But there must be lots of girls who can wear it.

NORVILLE
One would think so, highness, but that is not the case. We have tried this slipper on the majority of young women in this city and not a single other woman could fit into it.

ANN
May I try it?

NORVILLE, with a knowing look, hands over the slipper. ANN slips out of her shoe and attempts to put the slipper on. She is surprised when it doesn't fit and keeps trying harder. AURORA looks on with increasing condescension.

ANN (CONT'D)
It isn't that the shoe is small. It's sort of narrow in the toes in a strange kind of way.

AURORA
Obviously this shoe was designed for a girl with slim feet. Naturally somebody with chunky feet can't wear it.

ANN
Chunky feet?

AURORA
I just meant that the owner of the shoe probably has a slim rather than a matronly figure.

ANN
Okay, Miss Smartypants. You try it on.
While AURORA attempts to put the shoe on, CHARMING draws NORVILLE aside.

CHARMING
Did you see her?

NORVILLE
Indeed I did, highness.

CHARMING
Pretty hot, huh?

NORVILLE
Prince Charming, please believe me when I say I have made a serious effort to understand this obsession you have with carnal gratification. Still, I fail to understand how you can be attracted to such a... trollop.

CHARMING
Noville, this babe was incredible. The moment we started dancing, she shoved her boobs right up against me. And the whole time, she never missed an opportunity to grind her pelvis into my hip. I thought I was going to explode. And she hardly said a word to me!

NORVILLE
Clearly she relies on body language.

CHARMING
Yeah! I have to see this girl again, Norville. I tell you, she's hot for me. If I can just get her alone, I know she's waiting for me to put the moves on her. You invited her to dinner, right?

NORVILLE
I will alert the public relations staff to prepare for damage control. And, while I hate to disappoint you, sire, the young lady will not be coming alone. Her godmother will be with her.

CHARMING
Her godmother? Don't tell me - her real mother is dead.

NORVILLE
The father is also dead. Perhaps the lack of family structure accounts for her promiscuous behaviour.
CHARMING
I'm going to have to ask Mandelbaum if there is any correlation between good looks and dead parents.

NORVILLE
Apparently there is some friction between the girl and her stepmother and stepsisters. They hid the girl from us, which accounts for the delay in locating her.

AURORA is now using a spoon as a shoehorn.

AURORA
This shoe is smaller than it looks. I think the glass has a magnifying effect.

ANN
Yeah, right.

AURORA
There!

ANN
It's not all the way in.

AURORA
Yes it is!

ANN
No, it isn't. Your heel isn't touching the glass. You won't be able to stand on it.

AURORA
Of course I... aargh! This is the most uncomfortable shoe I've ever tried on. It must be very expensive.

ANN
I know what you mean. There's a shoemaker in my kingdom who makes dress shoes that are superb. They're hideously painful.

AURORA
I had shoes made for my coming-out party that were beautiful. I couldn't walk for two days afterwards. The shoemaker quit a year later to become chief torturer for King Bruno of Omnia.

A palace functionary enters.

FUNCTIONARY
Princess Ann and Princess Aurora?
CHARMING
Let's not stand on protocol today, Eddie. I'll announce them myself.

FUNCTIONARY
Very good, sire.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- THRONE ROOM -- MORNING

AURORA enters on CHARMING's arm. ANN enters on WENDELL's arm. KING GARRISON is in conversation with his lords. He looks up at AURORA.

CHARMING
Sire, I have the pleasure to introduce Princess...

GARRISON
Aurora!

AURORA
Goopy!

AURORA runs to GARRISON and throws herself into his arms.

CHARMING
Goopy?

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- HALLWAY -- DAY

ANN and WENDELL walk with CHARMING in the hall.

CHARMING
I can't believe this! All this nonsense he's been giving me about remaining pure and celibate, about morals and virtue, about protecting my image and respecting the chastity of the girls, and now I find out that twenty years ago he was boffing blondes in the bushes!

ANN
But why wasn't he caught in the spell?

CHARMING
He and the boys went into town for a final celebration. They didn't stagger back until the next day, when it was too late.

ANN
Are you okay?

CHARMING
I'm just shocked, that's all. It's a bit of a surprise, Dad getting married all of a sudden to a girl younger than me.
ANN
Well, he's still engaged, after all.

WENDELL
Not to add to your burdens, sire, but there's someone here to see you.

CHARMING
I'm not really in the mood.

WENDELL
You might as well see what he wants. He's got nerve showing up here, at least.

EXT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- COURTYARD -- DAY

BEAR is sitting on a bench, waiting. He carries a long package wrapped in cloth.

CHARMING
Bear. I'm surprised to see you here.

BEAR
Highness. I just happened to be in the neighborhood, so I'd thought you might want this back.

WENDELL
I know - it's Endeavour! This is such a great sword. It's my favourite of all your swords.

BEAR
A couple of the boys found it sticking out of a dragon skull in the woods. I sort of commandeered it back for you.

CHARMING
I appreciate that. Thank you.

WENDELL
Yeah, thanks!

CHARMING
There will be a reward, of course.

BEAR
Thanks, highness, but that's not what I really came to see you about. See, we've been looking over that castle.

ANN
You got through the hedge?
BEAR
I guess when you burned down the castle you broke the spell. The thorn hedge started drying up and dying. We were able to hack a path through with no problems. We were going to... er... look for stuff.

CHARMING
Loot it.

BEAR
Uh, yeah, I guess. It's a good thing we did, though, because we actually found a couple of survivors. Two stewards, down in the wine cellar. I guess the dragon and the fire couldn't get to them down there. They were pretty confused, so we took them back to town. Then we went down into the well-house.

CHARMING
What well-house?

BEAR
See, that moat is spring fed. And where the spring comes out of the ground, there's this old well-house. The foundations of the castle are sort of built out of it.

ANN
How old?

BEAR

CHARMING
Interesting. Go on.

BEAR
There's all sorts of passages and rooms and the like. It was all choked up with debris and stuff. But you could tell it was real old, much older than the rest of the castle.

CHARMING
You don't say.

BEAR
But here's the really good bit. On the wall there's all these pictures carved with crosses and stuff. And in about ten different places, there's a picture of a grail!
ANN
Are you sure?

BEAR
Pretty sure. It's some kind of drinking goblet, at least. Anyway, I remembered you said you were looking for a grail there, so I thought I'd pass on the information.

ANN
It makes sense. A well-house as a chapel. The grail was a fertility symbol. Water symbolises life... birth.

CHARMING
Well, I appreciate it, Bear but, to tell the truth, that quest has been pretty much wrapped up.

BEAR
Oh. So you won't be coming back our way soon?

CHARMING
Probably not. Why don't you go after the grail yourself? It might be worth something.

BEAR
I thought about it. But I'm not that interested in relics. And I don't like to mess with magic stuff.

CHARMING
Very wise.

BEAR
Thing is, though, the village is on edge, see? We had a nice, stable situation until you broke the spell. Now folks want to know just what happened and what the situation is going to be between Alacia and Illyria.

CHARMING
I'm really not into the political end of things.

BEAR
Well, you stirred things up. You ought to see it through.
(off CHARMING's expression)
Not that I'd presume to tell you what to do, highness.

CHARMING
No, you may have a point, Bear.
(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
Let me discuss it with the Minister of Intelligence and see what happens.

BEAR
Fair enough, highness.

CHARMING
For a tough guy, Bear, you're pretty darned diplomatic. And it looks like you've developed some village loyalty, too.

BEAR
Well, your highness, I guess I just figured that, sooner or later, a man ought to make some friends.

CHARMING
Good thinking. Thanks for the news, Bear.

WENDELL
And for the sword.

BEAR
You're welcome.

CHARMING
Don't forget to stop by the exchequer for your reward.

BEAR
I won't.

BEAR exits.

ANN
Well, he certainly changed his tone.

CHARMING
He's a smart man. He found out he couldn't intimidate us, so he stopped trying to be intimidating.

WENDELL
Are we going after the grail again?

CHARMING
I'll think it over later. I've got other things to do tonight.

ANN
Good grief! After all that's happened today, are you still thinking about that girl who lost a shoe? Why don't you just have a messenger deliver it?
CHARMING
Er... it's good publicity to have her over. It wasn't even my idea. Norville came up with it. Her godmother's coming, too. Makes for a nice, family scene.

ANN
I forgot how much you have to be concerned with your image. After all, you're Prince Charming.

CHARMING
Darn right.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- DINING ROOM -- EVENING

Servants with trays of food bustle about. CHARMING, ANN and WENDELL loiter along with the other guests. GARRISON and AURORA arrive.

FUNCTIONARY
King Garrison of Illyria, and Princess Aurora of Alacia.

CHARMING
Your majesty. Your highness.

GARRISON

WENDELL
Hi, sire.

ANN
Your majesty.

CHARMING
What do you mean, "not for much longer"?

AURORA
I won't be a princess after tonight. Garrison and I are going to be married later this evening.

GARRISON
The public seem to be accepting the story that the spell didn't get cast until after the wedding had already happened, back twenty years ago. So we're going to let that stand. Why invite public comment by changing it now?

CHARMING
Very PR-savvy of you.
AURORA
We'll just have a small ceremony, nice and quietly. It's a relief, really. After the last fiasco, I've lost my taste for big weddings.

ANN
I can imagine. Besides, why expose your child to the taint of illegitimacy?

AURORA
Exactly. Anyway, Ann, I hope you'll stand up with me at the ceremony. You've been so kind to me since we met and you're really the only friend I have in the world. It would make me very happy if you were my maid of honour.

ANN
Oh, Aurora, how sweet of you to ask me! Of course I'll be your maid of honour. You're such a dear, dear friend. I feel as though we're sisters.

AURORA
Oh, Ann, I feel exactly the same way.

ANN and AURORA hug.

WENDELL
Sheesh.

CHARMING makes his way to NORVILLE, WENDELL in tow.

CHARMING
Do you think she'll like me?

NORVILLE
She liked you at the ball. Very obviously so.

CHARMING
Do you think she'll still like me?

NORVILLE
If she does, I can only hope she is less demonstrative in her affections.

CHARMING
Yeah, well, I hope you're wrong. The thing about this girl, Norville, is that I never rescued her from anything, never saved her life, never helped her out of a tight spot. She doesn't owe me a thing.

(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
Which means that when she started rubbing her thighs against me at the ball, she was doing it purely out of...

NORVILLE
Lust.

CHARMING
Yeah! Isn't that great?

NORVILLE
No. And I am compelled to point out, Prince Charming, that none of the young ladies you have rescued owed you a thing, either. One does not expect favours simply for doing one's duty.

FUNCTIONARY
Miss Cynthia and Madame Esmerelda.

CYNTHIA is a sex-bomb on the megaton scale. Long red hair cascades to her waist. She wears a tight, strapless dress and high heels. Her breasts spill over the top of her gown. She looks nowhere but at CHARMING, and her gaze is full of ripe promise. ESMERELDA looks like a short sailor in a dress, with a bent and faded bonnet on her head.

CHARMING
What did I tell you? Isn't she incredible?

WENDELL
She looks okay.

CYNTHIA
Oh, my prince.

CHARMING
Oh, my lady.

ANN
Oh, my stomach.

AURORA
(to ANN)
Hush.

AURORA is staring at ESMERELDA with hatred etched into her face. She draws ANN away from the group.

ANN
What are you doing?

AURORA
I'm going to kill the bitch.

ANN
Why do you care if the prince loses his head over that bimbo?
AURORA
Not her, the troglodyte in the hat! That's the same fairy who cast the spell on me!

MANDELBAUM and RUBY overhear this.

MANDELBAUM
She's a fairy? Are you sure?

AURORA
Of course I'm sure. You don't forget a woman who asks you to... er... never mind.

ANN
What?

AURORA
Put it this way. I wouldn't put her in charge of the royal cherry orchard, if you know what I mean.

ANN
What?

AURORA
That woman is a manipulator of the first order. She always had an angle on everything in Alacia. She kept trying to wangle some political appointment out of Daddy and eventually they had a huge fight, so she cursed us all.

RUBY
That was a hell of a curse. She must be very powerful.

MANDELBAUM
Not necessarily. The spell she cast was crudely handled. She drained all the power from that fairy wood to maintain it. I suspect she only meant it to last for a short time, then discovered she couldn't turn it off.

AURORA
And now she's trying to get influence over Illyria through Charming. Or... what if she's still after me? I'm getting married and she shows up again - what are the odds?

MANDELBAUM
Unlikely. Charming has been searching for that girl for three months, before he even heard of you.
ANN
She probably doesn't even recognise you. Remember it's been only a couple of weeks for you, but twenty years for her.

AURORA
Whatever. I'm going to get Garrison to order Charming to stay away from that girl. She's not even his type.

MANDELBAUM
I doubt Charming would accept an order like that. You'd just push him into her arms.

RUBY
It doesn't look like much pushing is required.

AURORA
Ann, how can you be so calm? I thought you liked Charming. How you you bear to see him hanging all over that slut?

MANDELBAUM
Excuse me, princess, but are you really in a position to cast aspersions on another person's moral character? I ask merely for information.

AURORA
That's different. I was engaged.

ANN
That's right. It's okay for a couple to do it if they're engaged.

RUBY
It most certainly is not.

ANN
Well, maybe not exactly okay. But it isn't as bad as if they weren't engaged.

RUBY
I can see you and I are going to have to have a serious talk, young lady.

ANN
Oh, yes, because you've been the picture of chastity.

RUBY
Mandelbaum and I are just good friends.
AURORA
Well, I'm not waiting around to see what happens. I'm going to get those two gold diggers kicked out. And you don't fool me, little princess, with your oh-so-casual attitude. You're clenching your fists so tight I can hear your knuckles cracking.

AURORA storms towards GARRISON, who is in conversation with ESMERELDA. ANN, MANDELBAUM and RUBY follow.

AURORA (CONT'D)
Garrison, a word with you...

ESMERELDA
No need to be so secretive, dearie. The king and I have just been discussing the true sequence of events twenty years ago. If you wish to make it a public conversation, that's entirely up to you. By all means, let's set the record straight.

AURORA
Straight! What a novel concept for you. You're about as straight as a corkscrew. You and that trollop you hired to seduce the prince.

ESMERELDA
Feeling a little cranky, aren't we, blondie? Cramps? Why don't you lie down and take a nice, long nap. I can arrange it for you.

AURORA
Take your best shot, bitch. Illyria has court magicians that can fry you like a piece of bacon. And they can neutralise anything you cast on Charming, too, so you can forget your little schemes.

ESMERELDA
The spell Cynthia casts on men has nothing to do with magic.

GARRISON
Speaking of Cynthia, where did your goddaughter get to?

ESMERELDA
I shouldn't worry about Cynthia. I'm sure Charming will take good care of her. Let's have a drink and talk about something else, shall we?
RUBY
Let's. Because there's something
I want to ask you.

INT. ILLYRIA CASTLE -- CHARMING'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

CHARMING and CYNTHIA stumble into the room, locked at the
lips. CHARMING slams the door behind them.

CYNTHIA
My prince, you cannot know how
I've longed to see you again.

CHARMING
I do. It's long for me too. I
mean, it's been long. I've been
long... er... longing for you,
too.

CYNTHIA
You've rescued me from my
stepfamily.

CHARMING
Well, you know, rescue is what I
do.

CYNTHIA
I hope... that is, I fear that
after such dreams and endeavours,
I may be a disappointment to you.

CHARMING

CYNTHIA
Because I would do anything to
avoid disappointing you, my prince.
Anything at all.

CHARMING
You would? Oh. Okay. I mean,
good... good... heavens, there's
no need...

CYNTHIA
But there is need, my lord. There
is very great need... in me.

CYNTHIA pulls CHARMING onto the bed, and tears at his
clothing. CHARMING has his hand inside CYNTHIA's dress,
cupping her breast.

ESMERELDA (O.S.)
Cynthia? Cynthia, open this door
at once!

CYNTHIA
My godmother!
CHARMING
My God! There seems to be a recurring pattern in my life.

There is a flash of magic and the door flies practically off its hinges. ESMERELDA marches into the room, wand out. RUBY stands in the corridor.

ESMERELDA
Come on, kid. We're leaving.

CYNTHIA
What are you doing? I had him on the hook!

ESMERELDA
Change of plans, kiddo. Forget this so-called prince. We're going home.

CHARMING
No, wait! Esmerelda, I assure you that my intentions were honourable.

ESMERELDA
A great pleasure to make your acquaintance, Queen Ruby. Thank you for your help.

RUBY
The pleasure was all mine.

ESMERELDA and CYNTHIA exit. CHARMING doesn't know whether to scream or cry. RUBY draws a chair near to the bed and sits.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Want to talk about it?

CHARMING
You interfering idiot! I had her on the bed with her legs in the air. It was a sure thing!

RUBY
Yes, what an effort it must have been to overcome the inhibitions of such a shy and modestly clad girl.

CHARMING
Three months I've been searching for that girl. And then, when I finally get her alone, you have to bring that harridan down on top of us. Are you crazy? The old twit was pushing the girl at me when she arrived. What the hell did you say to her?
RUBY
I merely mentioned in passing to
Esmereldad that you weren't really
a prince.

CHARMING
What? What? Not really a prince?
Are you bonkers? I'm Prince
Charming! I'm the prince! The
most eligible bachelor in the twenty
kingdoms and heir to Illyria.

RUBY
Ah, but you are illegitimate.

CHARMING
...excuse me?

RUBY
Garrison and Aurora were married
twenty years ago. That means the
king's marriage to your mother was
not legal, since he was still
married to Aurora. Because he was
never legally married to your
mother, you are, I'm sorry to say,
a bastard. Aurora's child is the
first legitimate heir to the thrones
of Illyria and Alacia.

CHARMING
Oh, for heaven's sake. I've got
news for you, Ruby. Dad and Aurora
didn't... er... they weren't...

RUBY
I suppose you're going to tell me
some nonsense about Aurora and
Garrison not being married before
the spell took effect. That you
and she just concocted the story
to protect her reputation. That
you swore to keep her secret, not
realising that the father of her
child was also your father.

CHARMING
Suppose, merely as conjecture,
that I was to claim something like
that?

RUBY
Oh, Charming, you are so cute!
That overdeveloped sense of honour
compels you to keep Aurora's secret
even as your own life is destroyed.
I should have slept with you when
I had the chance. At least you
would have got something out of
the deal, you poor dear.
CHARMING
If, as you say, I've compromised my honour by colluding in a lie, what's to prevent me from compromising my honour to correct it?

RUBY
Once you've established that the great and noble Prince Charming is a liar, why should the people believe you're telling the truth now and not then? Your motive for lying to protect yourself is certainly greater than your motive to protect Aurora.

CHARMING
The people aren't going to argue with their king. If dad says I'm the heir, that's the end of it.

RUBY
Well, now. Let's consider what the king will do. He's... what... forty years old? In the prime of life, really. And he has a beautiful young wife, with many childbearing years ahead of her. Why would he be worried about an heir now? Much more likely he'd be worried about his popular son competing with him for the throne.

CHARMING
Dad knows me better than that.

RUBY
Of course. He knows you so well that he sends you out at every opportunity so you won't have time to form alliances or indulge in conspiracies at court.

CHARMING
He does not. Don't be daft.

RUBY
I rule Tyrovia, Charming. Trust me, all rulers have to be a little paranoid. But if the king had a son by his new queen now, then the whole issue of inheritance could be put off for another twenty years. During which time Aurora will have far more opportunity than you to whisper in the king's ear.

CHARMING
Queen Ruby, your mind twists so much that you're incapable of seeing (MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
how straightforward this issue is.
I'm my father's firstborn child
and the heir to the throne.
Furthermore, the people of Illyria
know me as a hero. The populace
won't turn against me because of
one white lie, and if there's
anything that can turn my father
against me, I'd like to know what
it is.

MANDELBAUM and NORVILLE enter.

NORVILLE
Ah, there you are. I am delighted
to inform you that the king and
Princess Aurora have just been
married.

CHARMING
Norville, I have something to tell
you...

NORVILLE
More accurately, I should say that
they have renewed their vows, having
already been married for twenty
years.

CHARMING
That's not actually...

NORVILLE
May I say that I have had the utmost
pleasure in serving you during
your tenure as prince.

CHARMING
What?

NORVILLE
I assure you, young sir, that we
would never do anything as serious
as denying you your birthright
without a complete examination of
the facts. Of course, since the
king and queen are the only
survivors of the original ceremony,
their statements under oath are
practically incontrovertible.

CHARMING
Mandelbaum?

MANDELBAUM
(uncomfortably)
As a citizen of Illyria, and a
servant to the king, I owe him my
allegiance.
CHARMING
That's great, Mandelbaum. Thanks a bunch.

NORVILLE
Now, Charming, the king has compiled a list of special missions that require your immediate and personal attention. Coincidentally, they are all beyond the borders of Illyria. Not that you are being exiled, you understand. Far from it. Your usual generous allowance will be forwarded to you during your long absence, and we will expect to hear from you through our diplomatic embassies...

There is a flash of reflected light as CHARMING's sword neatly cuts in half the stack of papers NORVILLE is holding. NORVILLE steps quickly backward, and a squad of royal guards appear in the hallway, weapons ready.

RUBY
Steady, lad.

CHARMING turns on her, his blade an inch from her throat.

CHARMING
This is all your fault, Ruby.

RUBY
Listen, you little simpleton, don't blame me for your problems. If you hadn't been playing your Prince Charming role for so long you actually started to believe in that honour and duty nonsense, you would have seen this coming from a mile away. Welcome to reality, Charming! Honour is just a word that clever rulers like your father use to manipulate dumb kids like you into doing what they want.

CHARMING
That's enough!

CHARMING pushes RUBY back into her chair. He turns, sword drawn, to the guards, who ready themselves for battle. NORVILLE and MANDELBAUM watch impassively.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
All right. I'm going. But I'll be back. And when I return, you'll all wish this night had never happened.

CHARMING sheathes his sword and stalks from the room. NORVILLE and the guards follow close behind. MANDELBAUM helps RUBY up.
MANDELBAUM
Are you all right, my dear?

RUBY
Fine, Mandelbaum dearest. I'll join you in a moment.

ANN has arrived in the doorway. MANDELBAUM leaves ANN and RUBY alone.

ANN
Did he fall for it?

RUBY
He fell for it, indeed. Poor boy. He was very upset. And who could blame him?

ANN
Oh, dear. Being the prince meant such a lot to him. Perhaps I should have told him myself. Broken the news more gently.

RUBY
Don't get carried away by sentiment, Ann. We can't afford to have his anger directed towards you. It would spoil everything. You told me that yourself.

ANN
Yes, I know. You're right. It just pains me to see him so sad.

RUBY
Well, now you can go and offer him comfort. And you'd better leave quickly, before he gets too much of a start.

ANN
It doesn't matter. I know where he's going.

RUBY
Alacia?

ANN
Right. There are some survivors that might testify that the wedding never took place.

RUBY
But will he go for the grail?

ANN
I think so. He's mad enough at you that he'll try to find it just so you can't have it.
RUBY
Good. Still, you should try to catch up to him now, otherwise it will look like you're pursuing him.

ANN
But I am pursuing him.

RUBY
All the more reason not to look like you are. Go on. I've packed you a bag.

ANN gives RUBY an impulsive hug and starts down the hall. ANN stops and looks back.

ANN
You know, I always thought you were a bitch.

RUBY
I am, dear, when I don't get what I want. Now I'm getting what I want. And I want you to get what you want, too.

ANN
Thank you.

EXT. ALACIA CASTLE -- NIGHT

ANN picks her way through the ruins of the castle. Near the center of the ruins, ANN sees the light of a fire. CYNTHIA is waiting fireside.

CYNTHIA

ANN
Yes. Any you're Cynthia, aren't you? The one with the slipper.

CYNTHIA
We've been expecting you. Nice night, huh? I guess you're looking for Prince Charming, but he's not here yet.

ANN
What are you doing here?

CYNTHIA
Getting the grail, same as you. Esmerelda needs it to power her magic.

ANN
No, I mean...
CYNTHIA
Of course, a lot of this magic stuff is useless, if you ask me. Most of it is like throwing hexes on your neighbours and making cattle infertile and talking to animals.

ANN
Um...

CYNTHIA
I mean, what's a cat got to talk about, anyway? They've got a brain the size of a walnut. What's the point?

ANN
Uh-huh.

CYNTHIA
Political power, now that's a different story. Boost it with magical power, then you're getting somewhere. That's why Illyria is so strong. That's what Esmerelda says. She's my fairy godmother.

ANN
How did you get a fairy godmother?

CYNTHIA
My mother died when I was born. When I was eight, my father remarried, but then he got kicked in the head by a horse a week later. So my stepmother was pretty pissed about the whole thing, 'cause she had an extra mouth to feed and no payoff. She turned me into the household slave, scrubbing floors, cleaning the fireplace, chopping wood, that sort of stuff. A few years later, when it became obvious that I was going to turn out gorgeous and my stepsisters were always going to be trolls, things got even worse. I couldn't even escape through marriage, since there was no way the trolls were going to let me out of the house until I was an old maid, or they were married first, which is pretty much the same thing. Then, a few months ago, the night of the ball, I was crying in the kitchen all by myself and suddenly the room fills with little sparkly lights and there's Esmerelda.

ANN
Really?
CYNTHIA
Yeah. Then she magicked up a ball
gown and these glass slippers.
She's got some really awesome
clothes spells. And she told me I
was going to marry Prince Charming.

ANN
She did?

CYNTHIA
But that's all off now, since he
isn't really a prince. Just as
well. I mean, he's cute and all,
but it makes my skin crawl, having
to cosy up to him.

ANN
It does?

CYNTHIA
Oh, yes, but that's just something
you've got to do if you want to
land a husband. Esmerelda says
the way to a man's heart starts
below the waist. So I was going
to sleep with Charming, he was
going to marry me, and then I
wouldn't ever have to touch him
again. That's what marriage is
for.

ANN
I see.

CYNTHIA
You probably never had to think
about this, since you're already a
princess. You're so lucky. Lucky
for Esmerelda and me, though, we
heard about this grail thing, so
we've still got an angle. We get
the grail, use its magic to muscle
our way into the court and we're
set for life. Esmerelda has it
all figured out.

ANN
She sounds very clever.

CYNTHIA
Oh, she is. Come on. She wants
to meet you.

ANN
Actually, I'm waiting for a friend.

CYNTHIA
Prince Charming, I know, you said.
Don't worry about it. He'll be
along in a little while. Let's
go.
CYNTHIA takes ANN's arm in a vice-like grip and drags her through the ruins.

ANN
Where are we going?

CYNTHIA
The grail chapel. It's underground. This whole hill has been hollowed out. It's all underground rooms and passages and stuff. It's kind of spooky.

ANN and CYNTHIA reach a small set of stone steps leading down into darkness.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Watch your step. The rock is kind of damp and there's a lot of rubble and stuff.

ANN
Thanks for the tour and everything, but I think I'll just sit up here and wait for Prince Charming.

ANN tries to pull out of CYNTHIA's grip and fails. CYNTHIA stops and looks into ANN's eyes with a steely glare.

CYNTHIA
(menacing)
I think you should wait inside.

ANN
...actually, I suppose I can wait just as well inside as out.

CYNTHIA
That's the ticket! Just stay close to me, it's not that bad.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- TUNNELS -- NIGHT

The tunnels are rough-hewn. There are several side tunnels. Some are covered by curtains but most have solid-looking wooden doors with iron hinges.

CYNTHIA
See? We cleaned it up a lot. Well, I cleaned it up. Esmerelda would live in a pigsty. Too obsessed with magic and scheming to attend to the details of daily living. Look, here's the grail passage.

The entrance to the grail passage is is framed by thick, dark wood, intricately carved. The passage beyond the open double doors is impenetrably black.

ANN
Oh, my. The grail's down there?
CYNTHIA
Don't stick your head in too far. You're likely to get it lopped off.

ANN
What?

CYNTHIA
The wrong person steps into that chamber, a ghostly arm swoops down and chops his head off.

ANN
That is really stupid.

CYNTHIA
Those ancient priests had a lot of power, but not much imagination.

ANN
So you're saying someone like Prince Charming, a pure knight, could just walk in and take the grail without any problems?

CYNTHIA
Nope. Everybody has to fight the arm. But only a knight who's never got his wick dipped can defeat it. Well, if he's good enough with a sword.

ANN
Charming is good.

CYNTHIA
Then he shouldn't have a problem. I don't know why it should be this big a deal, really. It's just a crummy fertility grail. So your sheep pump out a few more lambs. Your peas sprout a few more pods. Maybe a barren woman gets knocked up. Not exactly something to die over.

ANN
There are people for whom the birth or death of a single lamb can mean the difference between starvation and sustenance.

CYNTHIA
Tough break. Because Esmerelda has plans for that grail. Once she figures out its magic, she can use it to power her own spells. They won't end at midnight, either.
ANN
That's thrilling. Well, this has been really interesting, but I'm going to be going now. Past my bedtime and all that.

CYNTHIA
Oh, we're just getting started. You haven't met Esmerelda yet.

ANN twists out of CYNTHIA's grip and stares her down.

ANN
I will wait outside. I am a princess and you do not command me.

CYNTHIA
Yes, you're a princess. Bully for you. You give orders, you don't take them. You don't have to work from before sunup to past sundown, bossed around by two hideous teenage trolls and a shrew of a stepmother. You don't sweat until your muscles scream and your back aches and then sleep in the cold by what's left of the kitchen fire. You don't have to dream of a prince to come and rescue you, then have it all melt away in front of your eyes. Well, I've lived that life, princess. I need those dreams. And no soft-skinned, big-eyed, manor-born cream puff is going to take them away from me.

ANN
I'm sorry for you, Cynthia. Our lives are more similar than you realise. Perhaps when this is all over, we can be friends.

ANN turns and starts walking away.

CYNTHIA
Ann?

ANN turns back. CYNTHIA decks her with one punch.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- TUNNELS -- LATER

CHARMING comes down the stairs, holding a lantern. ESMERELDA is waiting for him by the grail doors.

CHARMING
Hello, Esmerelda.

ESMERELDA
Charming. Surprised to see me?
CHARMING
More impressed than surprised. I had no idea when I invited you to dinner that you were responsible for the deaths of an entire castle household and the nobility of a whole kingdom.

ESMERELDA
Dear boy, you can't hold me responsible for that catastrophe. King Stephen's wizards were all off duty, enjoying the wedding festivities, and I took advantage of their distraction to cast a sleep spell over the castle. Purely temporary, I assure you.

CHARMING
So what happened?

ESMERELDA
They must have had a backup spell in place. When all three wizards were disabled, the spell went into effect automatically, erecting the wall of thorns around the castle. I couldn't get in at all. The spell drained so much power from the fairy wood that I couldn't even lift my own spell. Nor could your father break it by kissing Aurora, because he also couldn't get in. So you see, it was a most unexpected and unfortunate chain of events that caused that tragedy.

CHARMING
Very neat story. I'm not sure I believe it, though. I've suddenly become a lot more cynical.

ESMERELDA
I'm not surprised.

CHARMING
So you knew Dad was outside the castle when the hedge went up. He couldn't have made it to the wedding.

ESMERELDA
Correct. And you are the legitimate heir to the throne of Illyria. I can provide evidence to refute the king's story. So... shall we make a deal?

CHARMING
Nope.

(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
No, I think I'll just kill you, grab the grail and be on my way. I've been in kind of a bad mood lately, anyway.

ESMERELDA
And I don't blame you. When a young man's natural physical desires are thwarted by a repressive and hypocritical society, small wonder that he seeks release in acts of violence.

CHARMING
Shut up.

ESMERELDA
Look, Charming, Ruby had me misinformed. We were halfway to Alacia before we put the whole story together. So, as part of the deal, I'm giving you another chance with Cynthia. I think you'll like this.

CHARMING
Don't hold your breath.

ESMERELDA
Cynthia?

One of the heavy doors in the corridor opens and CYNTHIA enters. She wears a dress of thin, red silk and nothing else.

CHARMING
...okay, I'm impressed.

ESMERELDA
Thought so. Listen, you want your position back, and I can help you get it. You want to sleep with a beautiful girl, and I can provide one. All I ask is that you give me a place in the court of Illyria and listen to my... advice.

CHARMING
Advice?

ESMERELDA
Guidance, let's say. So here's the deal. Take Cynthia for the night and leave the grail for me.

CHARMING
That's it?

ESMERELDA
That's it.
CHARMING
You get the magic cup and I get
one roll in the hay?

ESMERELDA
I assure you, Prince Charming,
Cynthia will provide you with a
night you'll remember for the rest
of your life.

CYNTHIA stretches, poking her nipples out through the fabric
of her dress, then runs her hands down her sides,
accentuating her curves. CHARMING swallows.

CHARMING
I thought only a man could work
the power of the grail. The Fisher
King.

ESMERELDA
There are ways around that. But I
cannot guard the grail at all times.
After you sleep with Cynthia you
will not only have to leave the
grail with me, you'll have to go
back and report that it was never
here. Nobody can know I have it.

CHARMING
If... if I leave you alive, with
this source of power, you're going
to do terrible things to the people
of this kingdom.

ESMERELDA
I will do what I feel is necessary,
of course. But you've defended
the common people quite enough,
Charming. Let them find another
hero. Better yet, let them take
responsibility for their own lives.
And this night with Cynthia need
not be a one-time event. You can
take her as your queen or, if you
do not wish to marry a commoner,
as your consort.

CHARMING
You're asking me... you're asking
me to sell out my beliefs. To
betray the people who trust me.

ESMERELDA
I'm giving you an opportunity,
Charming. An opportunity to stop
being a slave to an ungrateful
populace and to be your own man.
It's what you deserve. It's what
you want.

CHARMING
...okay.
ESMERELDA
We have a bargain?

CHARMING
Yes.

ESMERELDA
Well done, Charming. You won't regret this. Cynthia, reward the brave prince.

CYNTHIA
My lord.

CYNTHIA leads CHARMING into her room. ESMERELDA listens long enough to hear a key turn in the lock and a bolt thrown. Then she moves down the passage and enters another door.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- ESMERELDA'S LAB -- NIGHT

ESMERELDA has converted this room to a makeshift lab. ANN is chained to a table in the middle of the room. ESMERELDA does a little dance of joy.

ESMERELDA
He went for it! He went for it! Prince Charming in my clutches and a princess on my dissecting table. I should have thought of this years ago. Charming can slash his way past an army of bodyguards, but set him up with the right girl and he goes soft in the head.

ANN
He's just upset over what's happened. He isn't thinking clearly.

ESMERELDA
You have no understanding whatsoever of teenage boys. And, sadly, you are not going to live long enough to learn about them. The blood of a princess, killed at midnight with a silver blade... well, I won't bore you with the necromantic details, but your death is the necessary key to give me access to the power of the grail.

ANN
So you must have been planning to sacrifice a princess twenty years ago, too. You were going to kill Aurora.

ESMERELDA
You understand now why King Stephen was so adamant about hiding the (MORE)
ESMERELDA (CONT'D)
grail from me. But you, my dear, will do just as well. It's a pity, in a way. Once the prince has strayed from the straight and narrow path of virtue, only the gentlest push is required to keep him on the long downhill slide to degradation. It would be so nice to force you to watch his gradual corruption.

ANN
I think you're expecting a lot from one roll in the hay.

ESMERELDA
He'll be back for more. It's always the same with these chivalrous types. They abstain for so long, then they fall in love with the first woman who lets them get their leg over.

ANN
That's nonsense! Boys aren't like that. They want nice girls.

ESMERELDA
Like I said, no understanding. Well, can't stand here gabbing all night.

ESMERELDA picks up a silver knife. She begins slicing ANN's dress, opening it up like a surgical gown, exposing the flesh beneath.

ESMERELDA (CONT'D)
Hmmm. Silver is such a soft metal. So hard to put a decent edge on it. You don't mind being carved up with a slightly dull blade, do you?

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- SEDUCTION ROOM -- NIGHT

CYNTHIA is sitting on the bed. CHARMING is running his hand over the rock wall by the door.

CYNTHIA
What are you doing?

CHARMING
It's dry. But this place is below the water table. I would have expected at least some seepage.

CYNTHIA
The power of the grail holds back the water. Remove it and this place would fill right up.
CHARMING
Really?

CYNTHIA
Don't you want to come over here with me?

CHARMING
Why lock the door?

CYNTHIA
We don't want to be disturbed, do we? Or would you rather have an audience?

CHARMING
(going to the bed)
No, not really.

CYNTHIA
Is this really your first time?

CHARMING
The very first.

CHARMING puts his arm around CYNTHIA. She snuggles closer.

CYNTHIA
Esmerelda says boys are a little nervous the first time.

CHARMING
Are you nervous?

CYNTHIA
What is there to be nervous about? You know what to do, don't you?

CHARMING
Of course.

CHARMING kisses her deeply.

CYNTHIA
Oh, Prince Charming. I've waited so long for this moment.

CHARMING
Me, too.

CYNTHIA
I guess I just didn't think you'd be so easy to seduce. I thought you'd have all sorts of idealistic notions of honour and virtue that I'd have to overcome.

CHARMING
Oh, that. Actually, I did.
(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
But... um... from the very first moment I saw you, Cynthia, all other thoughts were swept from my mind and I could think of nothing else but being with you.

CYNTHIA
Really?

CHARMING
Sure.

CYNTHIA kisses him deeply.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Uh, listen. What do you say we go topside and... uh... take a walk in the moonlight and make love under the stars. Wouldn't that be romantic and stuff?

CYNTHIA
Silly boy. You don't have to stall. If you need more time, just relax. We've got all night.

CYNTHIA rips open CHARMING's shirt and starts kissing his chest. CHARMING slips the straps off CYNTHIA's shoulders and the dress pools around her waist. CHARMING takes her breasts in his hands. CYNTHIA is undoing the buttons on his pants.

CHARMING
Oh, wow.

CYNTHIA
Oh, Prince Charming, I've waited so long for this night.

CHARMING
Hmmm?

CYNTHIA
For two nights, I've watched you in Esmerelda's magic mirror. All the time you grew closer, my heart beat faster and faster for you. The sound of your horses pounded like... like... wait a minute. Where's your page?

CHARMING
Page? What page?

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- GRAIL CHAPEL -- NIGHT

WENDELL slowly creeps down the passage to the grail chapel, naked sword in one hand and lantern in the other.
WENDELL
Okay, no problem. Sword at the ready. Religious drawings, clearly on the right path. Passage slopes suddenly downward, clearly getting close now. Still talking to myself, clearly have to stop doing that.

WENDELL enters the grail chapel. There is a crunching underfoot. WENDELL lowers the lantern to find that he's standing in a small sea of skeletons, armour and weapons.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
That's not very encouraging. Okay, get a grip, Wendell. Let's just find the grail and get out.

WENDELL takes a few nervous paces forward. At the limit of the lantern light is a small, nondescript altar.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Here we go. Thank heavens. This place is spooky.

A ball of green flame rises into the air above the altar and takes on the form of a ghostly arm with a sword.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Oh, boy.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- SEDUCTION ROOM -- NIGHT
CHARMING is holding CYNTHIA on the bed as she struggles to run for the door.

CYNTHIA
You jerk! Let me go!

CHARMING
Why? I thought we had a date?

CYNTHIA
You liar! You made a deal with Esmerelda. You only get to have me if you leave the grail alone.

CHARMING
I'm not touching the grail.

CYNTHIA
Your page is! It's the same thing!

CHARMING
It is not.

CYNTHIA
Is too!

CHARMING
Is n... OW!
CYNTHIA scrapes her nails down CHARMING's chest and wriggles free. She falls to the floor. CHARMING grabs at her, tearing her dress, and CYNTHIA hits him in the groin. CYNTHIA runs to, and hammers on, the door.

CYNTHIA
Esmerelda! They're after the grail!

CYNTHIA pulls back the bolt but then sees the key is missing.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Where's the...

CHARMING sits on the bed, recovering. He holds up the key in one hand, then puts it back in his pocket.

CHARMING
Give it up. The door is four inches thick and the walls are solid stone. She can't hear you.

CYNTHIA
You rat! Esmerelda was going to make us both great. Now you're taking away the source of her power.

CHARMING
That's life.

CYNTHIA
You cheated. You weren't supposed to bring a back-up virgin.

CHARMING
I guess this means you're not going to sleep with me? Oh, well. I'm getting used to it.

CYNTHIA
Charming, I swear...

CHARMING
Swearing won't help. Neither will screaming, hitting, or wishing I was dead. You might as well get comfortable, Cynthia, because there's nothing else you can do.

CYNTHIA glares at him, then starts to cry.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- ESMERELDA'S LAB -- NIGHT

ANN
Okay. I'm willing to make a bargain with you.

ESMERELDA
Well, that's a new twist.

(MORE)
ESMERELDA (CONT'D)
The usual reaction of girls in your position is to cry a lot and beg for mercy. I hate it when they beg. Well, actually, I rather enjoy it, but I still think they shouldn't do it. A girl should have more dignity.

ANN
Oh, yes. Take Cynthia, for example. I can tell dignity is really important to her.

ESMERELDA
However, I'm afraid you are hardly in a position to bargain. Your life is in my hands and you have nothing to bargain with.

ANN
I'm very rich. I can offer you the wealth of a kingdom.

ESMERELDA
Your country is impoverished. You couldn't provide a glass of water in a rainstorm.

ANN
Magical secrets, then. My stepmother is a powerful sorceress who can weave powerful incantations that even you, with all your knowledge, would yearn to master.

ESMERELDA
Queen Ruby has the skill of a good apprentice, nothing more.

ANN
How about season tickets to the jousting matches?

ESMERELDA
Forget it. I never bargain with my victims.

ANN
You bargained with Prince Charming.

ESMERELDA
That was different. Charming is a vicious son of a bitch. He took out Magellan, one of the most powerful wizards in the twenty kingdoms, without a scratch. Why don't you just accept the inevitability of your fate with calm resignation and good graces? Then you can start crying and screaming, too.
ANN
(unconvincingly)
I'm not going to scream.

ESMERELDA
Spoken like a true princess.

ESMERELDA takes up a leather strop and starts to sharpen her knife.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- GRAIL CHAPEL -- NIGHT

WENDELL is in an en-guard position, sword up, gaze steely and ready for anything. The ghostly arm just hangs there. Eventually, WENDELL waves his sword about a bit, trying to get a reaction.

WENDELL
Hello? Hey! Virgin with a sword. I've come to take the grail.

Nothing continues to happen.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
The grail. I'm here to steal it. Take it away. You know, remove it from this place to another place. Just the kind of thing you're not supposed to let happen. Are you going to let me get away with that?

Nothing. WENDELL relaxes his pose.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
What's up with you? You could at least put up a fight. The Prince said that you probably wouldn't be any good, since swordfighting was so primitive in the old days, but I expected at least some kind of challenge. Aren't I worth it? Is that it?

(re: dead knights)
They were worth it, but I'm not? I'm not just some kid, you know. I was trained by Prince Charming!
(fed up)
Oh, just give me the grail.

WENDELL marches up to the altar and reaches for the grail. The ghostly arm draws back and lunges, like a bird swooping. WENDELL gets his sword up in time but the floating sword's blow knocks him down. WENDELL clammers to his feet as the ghostly arm swings around for another pass.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Well, it may not have great technique, but it sure is strong.

The arm lunges again. WENDELL is staggered but keeps his feet. He runs for the entrance and stands three paces in front of the wall.
WENDELL (CONT'D)
All right. Let's try this again.

The arm lunges. WENDELL deflects the blade, which crashes into the wall with a ring of steel. The arm hovers for a moment, recovering. WENDELL swings a blow at the ghostly arm. His sword passes right through it without effect.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Not good.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- SEDUCTION ROOM -- NIGHT

CHARMING
Hey, look. Come on, let's not have any of that. Stop it. You're going to ruin your makeup. I didn't hurt you, did I? If I did, I'm sorry.

CHARMING steps close enough to reach for her hands. CYNTHIA throws her arms around his neck and sobs.

CYNTHIA
You don't understand. All my life I've been scorned and abused. And now that Esmerelda is offering me the chance to be someone, you're taking it away from me.

CHARMING
Take it easy. It's not like we're going to destroy the grail. If you want to work some magic, I'm sure we can work something out.

CYNTHIA
But Esmerelda...

CHARMING
Forget Esmerelda. She's bad news. Look, I know plenty of magicians who can spell rings around Esmerelda. If you want an apprenticeship, I'll introduce you around. And if you still need a grail, you can have this one on loan.

CYNTHIA
No. Your little princess friend wants the grail to restore her kingdom. You'll give it to her and, once she has it, she'll never let it get away.

CHARMING
Don't be silly. Ann doesn't tell me what to do, and I have no intention of turning over the grail to...

(MORE)
CHARMING (CONT'D)
(realising)
Ann. She's here, isn't she? That
was her horse outside the thorn
wall. Where is she? What have
you done to her?

CHARMING grabs CYNTHIA's shoulders and shakes her. CYNTHIA
knees him in the groin. She laughs and holds up the key.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Where's Ann?

CYNTHIA
With Esmerelda. She's dead meat
by now, Charming. With the blood
of a princess, Esmerelda will have
all the power she needs. With or
without the grail.

CHARMING lunges at CYNTHIA. She avoids him, holds up the
key for him to see, puts it in her mouth and swallows it.

CHARMING
Damn you.

CYNTHIA
Wish your girlfriend Godspeed,
Charming.

CHARMING gives the door a calculating look and tries a
shoulder charge. CYNTHIA laughs.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
The door is four inches thick, my
prince, and the wall is solid rock.
We're in here until Esmerelda lets
us out.

Rubbing his shoulder, CHARMING limps over to the bed.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
I'm glad it worked out this way,
Charming. I'm not sure I could
have kept up that wanton woman act
for much longer.

CHARMING reaches for his discarded sword. With great
menace, he draws Endeavour. CYNTHIA's eyes get very wide.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
You wouldn't dare!

CHARMING
I really hate to do this.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- GRAIL CHAPEL -- NIGHT

WENDELL evades the swooping sword and swings at the ghostly
arm again. Again his blade passes through, meeting no
resistance. WENDELL is getting winded.
WENDELL
Okay. Can't touch the arm. Only
the sword. Can't kill the sword.
Only the arm. Problem. Think,
Wendell. Think. What would Prince
Charming do?

WENDELL mistimes his next parry and loses his grip on his own sword. He scrambles for it.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
No! No! Not good. Losing sword
not good.
(realising)
Losing sword...

The ghostly arm lunges and WENDELL parries but doesn't disengage. He locks the blades together, then throws all his weight on his opponent's blade, forcing the ghost arm to the wall. With the ghostly arm's sword blade trapped between his shoulder and the wall, WENDELL reaches through the ghost hand and grips his enemy's sword hilt. With a great effort, WENDELL pulls and the ancient blade snaps off cleanly at the hilt. The arm vanishes into green mist. WENDELL takes a moment to gather himself.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Well, that wasn't so hard.

WENDELL makes his way to the altar. The grail is a crudely shaped wooden bowl, very old and shallow. Unimpressed, WENDELL picks it up.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
This is it? A piece of wood?

There is a sudden rumbling noise and a sound of rushing water.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Uh-oh.

WENDELL stuffs the grail into his shirt and runs for the exit.

INT. ALACIA CASTLE -- ESMERELDA'S LAB -- NIGHT

ESMERELDA has cut off much of ANN's clothing and now places a bucket on the floor at the end of the table.

ANN
You're going to need another bucket
to hold your own blood when Charming cuts your head off.

ESMERELDA
Prince Charming is humping his brains out right now and doesn't want to be disturbed.
ANN
He'll find out eventually and then he'll avenge me. You'd better let me go.

ESMERELDA
I think not. I know what strings to pull to manipulate Charming. After tonight, I will be the most powerful sorceress in the twenty kingdoms.

ANN
Haven't you ever thought of using your skill to benefit people, instead of hurting them?

ESMERELDA
No, never have. Not nearly as much fun. Take a deep breath, dear.

ESMERELDA picks up the knife. ANN clamps her mouth shut, screws her eyes tightly closed and waits for the knife to touch her skin. After a few moments without feeling anything, ANN opens one eye. CHARMING is leaning over her, grinning like a schoolboy. He holds up Endeavour.

CHARMING
Hey, Ann. Did I tell you I finally figured out what this twisty thing in the handle is? It's a lock pick.

ANN
I am very happy to see you.

CHARMING
Ann, what are you doing here? I thought you were back at the castle, celebrating with the happy couple.

ANN
Uh... you don't happen to see a blanket or something lying around, do you? I don't know if you've noticed, but I'm practically naked here.

CHARMING
Oh, I noticed. Here, I'll get Esmerelda's dress off.

ANN
Please don't!

CHARMING
Oh, all right. Here.

CHARMING takes off his shirt and drapes it over ANN. He starts looking through ESMERELDA's pockets.
CHARMING (CONT'D)
You didn't happen to notice what she did with the key to those things, did you?

ANN
I was unconscious. Can't you use that lock-pick thing?

CHARMING
I'm not so good with manacles. Doors are the main obstacle in the slay-and-rescue business. Tell you what. I'll get some tools from Wendell and we'll pound those things off. I'll only be gone a minute. Don't go anywhere.

ANN
Oh, funny.

CHARMING
Just kidding.

CHARMING opens the door and a two-foot high wall of water surges into the room.

ANN
Water? Something must have happened to the grail.

CHARMING
Wendell snatched it. At least we know he got out okay.

CHARMING unfolds the lock pick from Endeavour's hilt and starts working on ANN's wrist manacles.

ANN
Uh-huh. Can you get these things off?

CHARMING

ANN
Damn? You're not supposed to say damn.

CHARMING
It's no problem, really. See? There's one.

The water is rising rapidly. It sloshes over the table.

ANN
The grail must be really powerful if it's been holding back this (MORE)
ANN (CONT'D)
much water for all these years.
Imagine what a benevolent ruler
could do with that power.

CHARMING
Ann...

ANN
On the other hand, somebody evil,
like Esmerelda for example, would
become almost unstoppable with
access to...

CHARMING
Ann! You're babbling. Relax.
I've got it covered. There, your
hands are free. Uh... better stand
up.

ANN stands on the table, putting on CHARMING's shirt and
removing the scraps of dress. CHARMING ducks his head
beneath the water and continues working on the remaining
manacles. CHARMING comes up for air.

ANN
Charming, I don't think we're going
to make it. You'd better leave
me.

CHARMING
Don't be ridiculous. I've nearly
got the first one, and the last
one will take no time at all.

CHARMING ducks beneath the surface again. He opens the
penultimate manacle and comes up for air. There isn't
much space left between the water level and the ceiling.

ANN
You have to leave me! Save
yourself!

CHARMING
Almost have it.

CHARMING takes a breath to submerge again.

ANN
Wait! Prince Charming, I have
something to tell you. Something
very important. I should have
told you sooner. I don't know why
I didn't but I have to tell you
now.

CHARMING
Oh, for God's sake! You're not
going to tell me you love me, are
you?
ANN
Yes! Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say, damn it!

CHARMING
Well, save it!

CHARMING submerges again. ANN takes a last gasp of air as the water rises above her head. CHARMING opens the last manacles and ANN and CHARMING bob to the surface. The water level is almost to the roof.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
Okay. Deep breath. We'll have to swim for it.

ANN
Swim where?

CHARMING
Trust me. I'm Prince Charming. Ready?

ANN nods her head.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
With me. Breathe...

CHARMING and ANN take a deep breath and duck below the surface. CHARMING leads out the door and along the tunnel. They find an air pocket only a few centimeters deep at the top of the tunnel.

ANN
I'm holding you back. I'm going to kill us both.

CHARMING
You know, for an intelligent girl you spout a lot of rubbish.

ANN
You're not telling me you knew this air pocket was here?

CHARMING
Rough hewn tunnel with an uneven ceiling. Bound to be a pocket or two.

ANN
You really are insufferably smug, you know.

CHARMING
Punish me when we get out. Come on.

CHARMING and ANN take another breath and duck beneath the water.
EXT. ALACIA CASTLE -- NIGHT

CHARMING and ANN crawl out of the staircase, which has turned into a spring pouring a stream of water downhill into the nearby moat. WENDELL sits by the fire, cleaning his sword.

WENDELL
You know, sire, for a guy who is always complaining about his love life, you sure have a lot of women stashed around the place. Hi, Ann.

WENDELL takes a blanket from where it has been warming by the fire and passes it to ANN.

ANN
Hello, Wendell. Thank you.

WENDELL
Cynthia stumbled out a few minutes ago. I gave her the other blanket, so you'll have to stay wet. She didn't have any clothes on, either.

ANN
Where is she?

WENDELL
She went off with Bear. He was guarding the entrance while I went inside.

CHARMING
Did you get the grail?

WENDELL
Sure did.

CHARMING
Any trouble?

WENDELL
An arm with a sword. It was no big deal.

CHARMING
It will be by the time the minstrels get through with rewriting the tale. Is that it?

WENDELL
Uh-huh.

CHARMING
A piece of wood?

ANN
It's olive wood. That's a fertility grail, all right.
CHARMING
We should have grabbed the magic mirror. At least that had some resale value.

ANN
This is what we want. Wendell, are the horses tied up outside the thorn hedge?

WENDELL
Except for mine. I brought it through to carry the gear.

ANN
All right. Take the grail and go back to the Briar Rose. We'll be back by daylight.

WENDELL
Have fun.

WENDELL exits. ANN sits in CHARMING's lap.

CHARMING
Well. How about explaining what you were doing...

ANN stops him with a passionate kiss. Once CHARMING gets over his initial surprise, he enjoys it thoroughly.

CHARMING (CONT'D)
I thought you were supposed to be sweet, pure, chaste and innocent?

ANN begins unbuttoning her shirt.

ANN
It's all right, we're going to be married. I'll tell you about it in the morning.

EXT. ILLYRIA -- DAY

WENDELL is fishing. Castle Illyria is visible in the background. CHARMING makes his way through the trees, carrying a stack of books. CHARMING sits beside WENDELL, who doesn't acknowledge him.

CHARMING
How's the fishing?

WENDELL
Fine.

CHARMING
Catch anything?

WENDELL
No.
CHARMING
Look, I guess you're upset, right?

WENDELL
What do you think?

CHARMING
Come on, Wendell. We can't just spend our whole lives running around the countryside seeking adventure. Sooner or later, you've got to settle down and take responsibility.

WENDELL
I'm eleven.

CHARMING
You'll still have adventure, Wendell, I promise.

WENDELL
Do you think I'm worried about me? Do you think that's what I care about?

CHARMING
Well, what then?

WENDELL
I care about you! You were my hero, and the hero of every boy in the twenty kingdoms. You were Prince Charming and you were going to be King Charming and you're letting Aurora's baby take all that away from you.

CHARMING
Wendell, what did you want me to do?

WENDELL
We could go to war!

CHARMING
What?

WENDELL
We'll go south. We'll raise an army. And when we're ready, we'll march on Illyria!

CHARMING
Wendell!

WENDELL
You'll force your father to recognise you as the true prince and heir to the throne. And if he doesn't, we'll take the throne from him. We can do it!

(MORE)
WENDELL (CONT'D)
Then you'll be king! I'll fight by your side, sire. I'll never let you down.

CHARMING
Wendell, I'm already a king.

WENDELL
What?

CHARMING
Ann and I were married last night. I'm king of Tyrovia.

WENDELL
Tyrovia? Why?

CHARMING
They need a king, Wendell. The people love Ann but the country has real problems and she can't do it all by herself.

WENDELL
So that's the end of our adventures. You'll be too busy with Ann and the grail.

CHARMING
It really is a fertility grail, Wendell. But, like Mandelbaum said, it's a male thing. It needs a king to work it. Ann and I figure that with hard work we can turn the country around.

WENDELL
But Ann isn't queen of Tryovia. Queen Ruby is.

CHARMING
Ruby is abdicating in favour of Ann. She's going to stay here and study magic with Mandelbaum. Magic is what she really cares about anyway.

WENDELL
So the women planned this whole thing right from the start. I bet Ruby planted that story about wanting to kill Ann just to get you over there.

CHARMING
I don't know, Wendell. Maybe Ruby knew about Aurora and Cynthia all along. Or maybe Ann had her own agenda and was moving things along, making new plans as the situation changed. She's pretty smart.
WENDELL
What are the books for?

CHARMING
Dad's having his ministers give us a crash course in how to rule a country before we go back. Basics of agriculture, finance, diplomacy and military strategy. Illyria will guarantee Tyrovia's borders so we don't have to sink any money into an army for a while. And Dad's happy about getting a buffer state to the north.

WENDELL
Then the king is happy, too. Everybody is getting what they want.

CHARMING
So are you, Wendell.

WENDELL
What do you mean?

CHARMING
Tyrovia is full of trouble, Wendell. Especially with bandits hiding out in the mountains. Plus they have a persistent problem with mandracores.

WENDELL
Oh, come on. Even I can handle a mandracore.

CHARMING
Glad to hear it. Because a king is busy all the time with affairs of state. He can't go running around chasing after bandits and mandracores. He needs a paladin to fight for him.

WENDELL
Oh, sire! You really mean it?

CHARMING
Of course. You'll start your training when you come back to Tyrovia with us, and you'll be knighted when you turn fourteen. And, of course, you'll need a good sword.

CHARMING unbuckles Endeavour and hands it to WENDELL.

WENDELL
Prince Charming! I mean, King Charming! You're giving me Endeavour?
CHARMING
I know you won't dishonour it, Wendell.

WENDELL
I don't deserve all this.

CHARMING
Sure you do, kid. Come on, let's get out of here. I need to take a break from studying this stuff. What do you think we should do?

WENDELL
I think we should eat.

CHARMING puts his arm around WENDELL's shoulder and they make their way back to the castle.

THE END