

## The Trouble with Prince Sebastian

### *Dramatis Personae*

PRINCESS AURELIA

PRINCESS AMETHYST

PRINCE PERCIVAL

LORD ALPHONSE MOUNTPLEASANT, Chancellor to the realm, engaged to Amethyst

OSCAR, Master of the Royal Music, engaged to Aurelia

LADY GILLIAN DUNBAR, knight, formerly errant, engaged to Percival

HARRY, Royal Herald, Castle Librarian, and Oscar's best friend

LADY HILARIA FAIRFAX, daughter of the Royal Secretary, Lord Fairfax

CROWN PRINCE SEBASTIAN of Borogovia

ANGUS, officially Prince Sebastian's valet and general factotum; in fact a highly experienced diplomat and spy

GUARD 1 (two other guards have non-speaking roles if staged)

### ACT 1

*Scene 1. A guard room at the castle gate. GUARD 1 is standing by the narrow front window, looking out, while GUARDS 2 and 3 play cards in the corner. ALPHONSE and HARRY are sitting on a pair of rather out-of-place-looking chairs that have evidently been hastily dragged into the guard room from elsewhere. It is pouring with rain outside.*

ALPHONSE I thought he was supposed to be here by now?

HARRY I dunno. Horse went lame, maybe? Flat tyre on the carriage?

ALPHONSE Well, whatever it is, I hope it's not his right royal fault, because I have things to do in the office.

HARRY And I've had to close the library.

GUARD 1 Hey, I think I can see a carriage!

ALPHONSE Oh good. About time. Is it still raining?

GUARD 1 Pelting down, m'lord.

HARRY Should we bring some towels? The coachman's going to be soaked to the skin.

GUARD 1 Good point, sir. Hey, you two! Make yourselves useful and get some towels, will you?

*[Vague grumbling noises from GUARDS 2 and 3, who had clearly just got to an interesting point in their game. Scraping of chairs as they get up. Exeunt both.]*

ALPHONSE I have to confess, I don't even know where Boro... Boro...

HARRY Borogovia.

ALPHONSE Borogovia is.

HARRY Me neither. I'll ask Oscar. He'll know.

ALPHONSE Oh... I suppose he might. He seems to know an awful lot. I was thinking of asking Sir Galahad, but then Oscar's here at the moment and he isn't.

HARRY Lady Gillian might know.

ALPHONSE She might.

GUARD 1 Definitely a carriage, m'lord. Eight horses and a lot of stuff on the roof.

ALPHONSE Oh, yes, that'll be him all right. I don't know of anyone in this kingdom outside the royal family who drives eight, and the royals are, very sensibly, all indoors right now.

HARRY Do we know how long he's thinking of staying?

ALPHONSE Search me. I'm just here to do the formal welcome and escort him into the presence of the King and Queen. I don't honestly care what he does after that.

HARRY I hope he'll find time to come and visit the library. Though I do say so myself – not that I can take anything like all the credit, of course – it's a good one.

ALPHONSE We really don't know anything about him. Prince Percival is hoping he's up for some hunting and shooting. Lady Gillian wants him to joust, though she might have to pretend to be a man again to get him to do it. Both the Princesses are sad that he didn't bring his sisters. You want him to see the library, and Oscar is probably hoping he appreciates a good lute song. Everyone's got different ideas, but he may not be like any of them.

GUARD 1 Right, m'lord, I'm opening the gates! *[Hauls on a massive cable, grunting a little as he does so]*

ALPHONSE Here we go, then. Let's see what this Prince Sebastian is like.

*[ALPHONSE goes out through the side door into the area just behind the gate, which is covered by a wide arch. HARRY follows. A few moments later, a very ornate carriage with embossed and painted shields on the doors comes rattling into the courtyard, drawn by eight white horses. The coachman, who is indeed extremely wet, scrambles down from the top of the coach and opens one of the doors, while various stable hands and other servants appear from various quarters and attend to the carriage, the horses, and the luggage. ALPHONSE approaches the open door and extends an arm, which is taken by PRINCE SEBASTIAN, who then climbs out of the carriage.]*

ALPHONSE *[bowing]* Welcome to our castle, Prince Sebastian. I am Lord Alphonse Mountpleasant, Chancellor of the Kingdom, and it will be my great pleasure to escort you into the presence of Their Majesties.

SEBASTIAN We are gratified by your welcome.

HARRY Ah, Your Royal Highness, my name is Harry Hoffnung. I am the Royal Herald and Castle Librarian. It will be my duty to announce you as you enter, and naturally I wish to do this correctly. Would you be so kind as to provide a full list of your titles?

SEBASTIAN Ah, yes, we were expecting something of the sort. One moment. *[Sticks his head back inside the carriage]* Angus! The scroll. *[A large scroll is immediately handed out to him from within.]* There you are. *[Hands it to HARRY, who unrolls it.]*

HARRY All this?!

SEBASTIAN We have 112 titles.

HARRY Your Royal Highness, I'm not being funny, but it's going to take me twenty minutes to read all this out. Is there any way we could... um... compromise in the interests of brevity?

SEBASTIAN We are exceedingly noble. We are probably the most astonishingly noble person you will ever meet in your life.

HARRY I'm duly astonished.

ALPHONSE Let me have a look at that scroll, Harry.

HARRY Be my guest. *[Hands it to him]*

ALPHONSE H'mm. Do we really need "Earl of Dystopia and the Surrounding Fens"?

SEBASTIAN [*haughtily*] None of our titles is superfluous!

HARRY Couldn't we at least omit the surrounding fens?

SEBASTIAN We would have you know that the fens surrounding Dystopia are one of the most important wildlife reserves in Borogovia!

HARRY This isn't getting us anywhere. Pass me that scroll back, Alphonse. I've got an idea. [*ALPHONSE obliges.*]

ALPHONSE Are we ready, then?

HARRY As far as I'm concerned.

ALPHONSE Very well. If Your Royal Highness would be pleased to accompany us to the throne room...

SEBASTIAN We graciously consent to do so. Angus! See to it that everything is in order. [*He follows ALPHONSE and HARRY.*]

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*Scene 2. The throne room, a few minutes later. PRINCE PERCIVAL, PRINCESS AURELIA, PRINCESS AMETHYST, and LADY GILLIAN DUNBAR are present.*

PERCIVAL I say. He's awfully late.

AURELIA Hardly surprising in this weather. He's probably bogged down in the mud somewhere.

GILLIAN I know we do need the rain, but I hope it clears up soon. This is hardly jousting weather.

AMETHYST How are you finding your new squire?

GILLIAN Ah... well, she's very keen...

AURELIA But?

GILLIAN Well... everyone seemed to think she might be good at squiring because she's no good at things like needlework. But she's not that good at squiring either. Well, at least, not at the moment. Perhaps she'll learn.

PERCIVAL What was her name again?

GILLIAN Yvette.

PERCIVAL Nice name. Perhaps you could get Sir Eustace to teach her a few things?

GILLIAN I could, if he was here.

[*Enter HARRY, with the scroll.*]

HARRY Your Royal Highnesses and Lady Gillian! Please welcome Sebastian, Crown Prince of Borogovia, plus all this lot. [*He drops the scroll into PERCIVAL's lap.*] What happened to Their Majesties, by the way?

AMETHYST Oh... I'm afraid Mother had one of her funny turns. She'll be all right soon.

PERCIVAL Oh golly. I'm going to have to do the formal stuff, aren't I?

AURELIA Oh, don't fret, Percy. You'll be just fine.

PERCIVAL It's not as if I know anything about him...

HARRY Well, you can start with his 112 titles. They're all there in the scroll. Right, I'm off back to the library, if you don't need me. Alphonse is bringing him in.

AMETHYST 112?

HARRY So he reckons. I didn't count them, myself. Did you need me here or not?

PERCIVAL Oh... no, don't think so, Harry. Great Scott! I can see why you didn't stand here reading all this out. It would have taken you ages!

HARRY Fine. See you later. [*Exit*]

[*Enter ALPHONSE and SEBASTIAN.*]

PERCIVAL Ah, jolly good show. You'd be Prince Sebastian, what? I am Percival, the Crown Prince, and it is my great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of our royal parents, who are necessarily absent due to, ah...

AURELIA [*smoothly*] Due to an unfortunate indisposition on the part of our mother, which I fear is a recurring problem. She will certainly be much improved by the evening, and both she and the King will be able to receive you at the feast.

PERCIVAL That. Definitely. And I expect you'll want your scroll back.

SEBASTIAN How did your herald manage to read out all our titles in so short a time?

PERCIVAL Oh, he didn't have to, since you'd had them all written down to save time. Dashed thoughtful of you. I ought to encourage some of our nobles to do the same. [*Hands him the scroll*]

SEBASTIAN That was not exactly the idea...

ALPHONSE Am I further required, Your Royal Highness? Because, with your permission, I do have work to do.

PERCIVAL Oh, gosh, no, that's fine, Alphonse. Off you go, what?

[*Exit ALPHONSE.*]

PERCIVAL So let me introduce all these delightful ladies. My sisters, Princess Aurelia and Princess Amethyst, and my future bride, Lady Gillian Dunbar.

SEBASTIAN We are most charmed.

AURELIA I hear you have three sisters of your own, Your Royal Highness.

SEBASTIAN Indeed we do.

AMETHYST We were a little sad that they weren't able to come with you.

SEBASTIAN We were not. They all bore us to death. All they ever talk about is gowns and embroidery and eligible princes and the latest in corsetry.

GILLIAN Ah! So you are, perhaps, the more martial type? Do you joust, Your Royal Highness?

SEBASTIAN We do, in fact.

GILLIAN Excellent.

PERCIVAL Gillian loves to...

GILLIAN     [*quickly*] ...see a good joust. [*She gives PERCIVAL a meaningful look.*]

AMETHYST Do you like music, Prince Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN We do. Indeed, we are consummately skilled upon the dulcimer.

AMETHYST Then you must meet our Master of the Royal Music! His name is Oscar and he is engaged to my sister.

SEBASTIAN Really? Such a charming and gracious lady is engaged to a mere bard?

AURELIA     Well... Oscar isn't exactly a mere bard, Your Royal Highness. Amethyst is right. You should meet him. And Amethyst, you may be interested to know, is engaged to Alphonse, our Chancellor, whom you have just met.

SEBASTIAN Clearly there is a severe shortage of suitable princes in your vicinity.

PERCIVAL     Oh, come on, old chap, one doesn't have to marry royalty. I mean, they wanted me to marry a princess, but Gillian here is worth any six princesses you could name, don't you know!

GILLIAN     I'm sure I'm not, but I'm most flattered.

SEBASTIAN We shall send for Angus to fetch our dulcimer, and then you shall all see how well we play.

PERCIVAL     Not yet! I won't hear of it. You've had a long and deucedly wet journey, so I'll have someone escort you to your suite and bring you, you know, drinks and nibbles and what-not, and then you can rest. Maybe get out the dulcimer after the feast, what?

SEBASTIAN We are most gratified by your kind attention.

PERCIVAL     I'll see to it straight away... oh, bother it! I'd forgotten the bell in here wasn't working. If you wouldn't mind just coming with me, I'll go and ring the one in the anteroom. They think they can get it fixed on Tuesday.

AURELIA     What takes them so long, anyway? It's just a bit of rope.

PERCIVAL     Apparently it's not. Some kind of doo-hickey has come loose in the servants' hall.

AMETHYST Things are usually a bit more organised round here, Prince Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN We do not doubt it, fair lady. [*Exit, with PERCIVAL.*]

AURELIA Well!

AMETHYST Well?

AURELIA He's not at all what I was expecting.

AMETHYST What were you expecting?

AURELIA Well... some kind of amiable clot, I suppose. I can't wait to hear him play the dulcimer.

AMETHYST It's true, he's very polite. What do you think of him, Gillian?

GILLIAN I'm... not sure. He does seem to have a very high opinion of himself.

AURELIA I expect it's warranted. He's obviously clever and accomplished.

AMETHYST He's... kind of good-looking too, isn't he?

AURELIA You're not supposed to notice that kind of thing! You're engaged to Alphonse!

AMETHYST I can *notice*. Can't help just *noticing*. Anyway, he is. You've got to admit it.

AURELIA Well... yes... it's true. He has one of those classical faces. It would be... educational to sketch him.

GILLIAN I'm sure nobody needs 112 titles.

AURELIA What's usually done is that you dish out the spare ones to your children.

GILLIAN I sincerely hope he's not thinking of having 111 children.

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*Scene 3. A few hours later. AURELIA is escorting SEBASTIAN around the castle gardens. It has, at least for the moment, stopped raining.*

SEBASTIAN Ah, such delightful gardens! They almost inspire us to verse.

AURELIA I'm glad you like them. They're Mother's thing, really. Father wouldn't know a rose from an antirrhinum, I'm afraid.



SEBASTIAN And do you take after your mother in that respect?

AURELIA Somewhat. Though I'm not as knowledgeable about it as she is. Many of our nobles just leave the whole thing to their gardeners, but Mother always tells them exactly what to plant where. I'm sorry you missed the rhododendrons. They were wonderful this year.

SEBASTIAN Of course, for a garden, the rain is a blessing... but not for those walking in it, and we fear it is about to start again.

AURELIA Bother! I should have thought to bring my umbrella. Of course, we could always go and shelter in the rose arbour. It's still looking lovely.

SEBASTIAN We should be most charmed to see it.

AURELIA Very well, then. I shall take you there, and we shall see if the weather clears up. It does look very threatening, I agree.

SEBASTIAN Is it far?

AURELIA No; in fact just round this corner.

SEBASTIAN Why, it is a veritable floral rhapsody! And yet it pales in comparison with your ethereal beauty.

AURELIA Oh... oh my... I'm not sure you ought to be saying things like that.

SEBASTIAN Why should we not?

AURELIA You might turn my head.

SEBASTIAN We see no harm in that. Ah, yes, the rain is starting again. Let us go and sit in this beautiful rose arbour.

AURELIA Mother designed it herself. She put a lot of thought into it. It rains quite a lot in these parts, so she was very particular about the waterproofing.

SEBASTIAN Then it will be a good place to wait until the rain stops again. And we ourselves are not at all inconvenienced by that. To be temporarily marooned in such surroundings, and with such company...!

AURELIA [*clearly both flattered and flustered*] Really, you mustn't...

SEBASTIAN We shall, of course, be King of Borogovia one day; and we shall thus require a Queen. We feel it wise to give such matters due consideration at the

earliest suitable opportunity, and never has there been an opportunity more suitable. Such a Queen you will make! Indubitably royal, and most gracious and beautiful. All will love you.

AURELIA But... I...

SEBASTIAN Oh, yes. You are engaged to that bard. Tell us truthfully: what can he give you that we cannot, ten times over?

AURELIA Well... he... he did... deal with a dragon for me. That's got to count for something.

SEBASTIAN He slew a dragon? Most enterprising for a bard, but nonetheless we can slay all the dragons you require.

AURELIA Oh, he didn't slay it, as such. He just neutralised it. More humane. I mean... I think they're becoming an endangered species.

SEBASTIAN He *neutered* it?! As if it were a tomcat?

AURELIA Um, no, not that kind of neutralised. He just made it go to sleep for five hundred years so it wouldn't bother anyone.

SEBASTIAN Oh. Hardly impressive. We suppose he is handsome, then?

AURELIA Well... um... well, / like the way he looks.

SEBASTIAN So that would be no, then. Perhaps he sweeps you off your feet with grand passionate romantic gestures?

AURELIA Oh, well, yes, he does that. He writes songs for me.

SEBASTIAN Songs? We can write better. *And* we can buy you the most beautiful jewels, which will only be enhanced by your own radiant loveliness. Moreover, at home in Borogovia we are unmatched in the jousts, and therefore we no longer compete, in order to allow the other knights a fair chance. We look forward to jousting with the finest of your knights, and we should take the greatest pleasure in carrying your favour into the fray.

AURELIA Ah! I think... er... Sir Giles would like to joust with you. Um. Lady Gillian's brother, that is.

SEBASTIAN He shall have that pleasure. Fairest Aurelia! Bestow upon us the merest token... a handkerchief, a fan...

AURELIA Oh... oh well... I suppose you carrying my fan into battle can't do any harm... here it is.

SEBASTIAN [*clasping it theatrically to his breast*] We shall treasure it always. [*Puts an arm round her*]

AURELIA Er... I'm not sure we should... er...

SEBASTIAN We are royalty. Therefore, we do exactly as we please. [*Kisses her; she is hesitant at first, but then returns the kiss.*]

[*Enter HARRY.*]

HARRY Hey! What do Your Royal Highnesses jolly well think you're doing?

SEBASTIAN Go away, minion.

AURELIA Ulp.

HARRY Princess Aurelia. Have you spoken to Oscar about this?

AURELIA Er... no... um... I mean to say, that is, not yet...

HARRY Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!

SEBASTIAN Sweet Aurelia, can you not do something about this saucy minion? Have him flogged, or something of that nature? He must learn proper respect for his betters.

HARRY *Betters?!* You behave like that and you have the utter brass neck to tell me you're better than I am? If you weren't royalty, and visiting royalty at that, I'd...

AURELIA Harry... please calm down. I promise I'll go and talk to Oscar as soon as I can.

HARRY You mean as soon as Lothario here can spare you? Save your breath. *I'll* talk to him.

SEBASTIAN How can you just sit there and listen to this bumptious peasant?

AURELIA It's not as simple as that. Harry is Oscar's best friend. He's got a right to be furious.

SEBASTIAN A *right* to be furious with *royalty*?

AURELIA    Actually... yes. He has.

HARRY        Indeed. And in the interests of total fairness I will tell Oscar you said that. [*Exit, at speed*]

SEBASTIANWe do not feel that you have been correctly taught about your inherent privileges. No matter. We can help you to put that right.

AURELIA    I've messed up.

SEBASTIANThe future Queen of Borogovia does not "mess up". You must rise above all this. We will help you to do so, never fear.

AURELIA    Thank you. I... appreciate that.

SEBASTIANRemember. You are glorious. You are magnificent. You are above petty rules and standards.

AURELIA    I'll try.

SEBASTIANAnd you will succeed!

AURELIA    [*very quietly*] But I still messed up.

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## ACT 2

*Scene 1. A room in the castle. It is full of books and musical instruments. OSCAR is sitting at a table in the middle of the room, studying a book of lute tablature. Enter HARRY, visibly upset.*

HARRY        Oscar!

[*Pause*]

HARRY        Oscar!!!

OSCAR        Oh... Harry. You look a bit ruffled.

HARRY        [*sitting down opposite him*] I'm so sorry to drag you unceremoniously out of your music, but the most awful thing's happened.

OSCAR        Oh dear. Is there anything I can do to help?

HARRY      Not that sort of awful thing. It's... you know that Prince Sebastian?

OSCAR      Not personally, but I understand he arrived a few hours ago. I hear he plays the dulcimer – is that correct?

HARRY      I don't know if he plays the dulcimer and I don't especially care, and neither will you when you hear what I've got to say about him. I *do* know he plays the *field*. I caught the blackguard kissing Princess Aurelia in the rose arbour just now!

OSCAR      Oh. Ah.

HARRY      And I'm so sorry. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but someone had to tell you... she said she'd do it herself, but I've no idea when she's going to manage to tear herself away from that smooth-talking, swollen-headed, arrogant lump of frogspawn. At least she did admit I had a right to be furious, which was more than he did. *He* was all for having me flogged.

OSCAR      I'd better go and find her and, ah, have a quiet word.

HARRY      Er... what? I thought you'd be more upset than that. A whole lot more upset, in fact.

OSCAR      Well... in fact... I have been thinking recently. And it has occurred to me that Aurelia and I are perhaps... well... not as compatible as I originally believed.

HARRY      Oh... oh, right... well... I mean, I can't disagree, but... I thought... you know... I thought you were madly in love?

OSCAR      When one realises that things are... lopsided, it is inclined to cool one's ardour somewhat.

HARRY      Gosh. Well. I'm... I'm glad you've finally noticed. It wasn't exactly the sort of thing I could tell you.

OSCAR      Harry, you and I go back a very long way. You should know by now that if you honestly believe I'm making a mistake, you can always tell me.

HARRY      I know that is usually true. But, seriously. You were in love. Would you have listened to me if I'd told you from the start you'd got the wrong woman?

OSCAR      Ah... well... perhaps not. Anyway, I shall go and speak to her. I expect she will be feeling a little... shall we say... uncertain at the moment, and it will be a

great relief to her to know that I am not unduly distressed. I'm sure she will make a splendid Queen.

HARRY I should think she will, but I'm not sure about having to put up with that Sebastian. It may turn out to be too high a price to pay.

OSCAR Well, you say she appears more than willing to pay it.

HARRY At the moment, yes, but I think she's making a huge mistake.

OSCAR Perhaps we should...

HARRY ...tell her? Really?

OSCAR Alas, you have a point. People in love never do listen.

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*Scene 2. The castle gardens. OSCAR catches up with AURELIA, who is walking around with a dreamy expression holding a rose in her hand.*

OSCAR Ah, there you are, Aurelia. I... believe you have something you might like to tell me?

AURELIA [*guiltily*] What exactly do you mean?

OSCAR I understand that, with circumstances as they are, you might wish to return your engagement ring.

AURELIA Errr... you look... very calm about it all.

OSCAR There is really no point in any unpleasantness, now, is there?

AURELIA You're not upset?

OSCAR Well, since you ask... no, not really. I feel that we are indeed not as compatible as I originally believed, and I'm sure you will make a most excellent Queen of Borogovia. I'm quite happy to wish you every success.

AURELIA Hey, wait, hang on a minute. Is there someone else?

OSCAR Only on your side. Though would it actually matter if there was on mine?

AURELIA Yes... no... er... I don't know! Stop asking difficult questions!

OSCAR I have to say I did not expect such a reaction. I thought you would be greatly relieved.

AURELIA And *I* thought *you* wouldn't want to give me up without a fight. Not that I was expecting you to go into the lists yourself; but I thought at least you'd get one of the knights errant to fight for you. I mean, obviously, Sebastian could beat any of them, but it would have been *so romantic!*

OSCAR I... see. *[Pause]* The... ah... ring?

AURELIA Oh... yes, of course. *[Hands it to him]* There you go.

OSCAR Thank you. Now you can proceed with a clear conscience.

AURELIA Why do you have to be so awfully *nice* about all this?

OSCAR Would you have preferred me to be otherwise?

AURELIA Yes! It'd have made me feel so much better.

OSCAR Oh dear. You should perhaps have said.

AURELIA Aaaargh! *[Exit, rapidly.]*

OSCAR Oh dear. I don't think I handled that at all well.

*Enter PERCIVAL.*

PERCIVAL I say, old chap, what's the matter with Aurelia? You two had a tiff, what?

OSCAR I wouldn't say exactly a tiff. The engagement is off, but there wasn't any unpleasantness about it.

PERCIVAL Off?! I say, are you serious?

OSCAR Of course. You must be aware she's, ah, now paying attention to Prince Sebastian.

PERCIVAL Oh, golly, Oscar, you've made a ghastly mistake! Sebastian isn't courting Aurelia. He's courting Amethyst. Poor Alphonse is terribly cut up about it.

OSCAR Your Royal Highness... I think you should know that Princess Aurelia herself is quite clear that she and the Prince are now a couple. Do you mean to tell

me that he is *also* courting Princess Amethyst? Because, if so, I'm quite certain that Princess Aurelia is not aware of the matter.

PERCIVAL I say. You're quite sure about that?

OSCAR I have just broken off the engagement on that premiss. And Aurelia made no attempt to convince me that it was untrue. There is no doubt that she believes it.

PERCIVAL What? The boulder! I saw him with Amethyst half an hour ago, and a few minutes later Alphonse walked in. Great Scott, he was furious. He did that thing where he talks very quietly through his teeth.

OSCAR Oh dear. I'd better go and find Alphonse and have a word.

PERCIVAL I should be quick if I were you. He said he was going to have a drink about it, and you know he hardly touches a drop. Two cups of sack and he'll be under the table.

OSCAR Ummm. How did Princess Amethyst react?

PERCIVAL Oh, she was embarrassed. Well, she would be, what? But I'm quite sure she has no idea that that Sebastian is also courting Aurelia.

OSCAR I can't see that state of affairs lasting for very long. If you feel like taking my advice, Your Royal Highness, I suggest you get both your sisters together, break the news to them as gently as you can, and then remain until they have both calmed down somewhat. A catfight between princesses would be more than normally undignified.

PERCIVAL Ah... yes... sensible. Very well. I shall go and have at it. *[Exit]*

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*Scene 3. A luxurious guest suite in the castle. SEBASTIAN is preening himself in the mirror. Enter ANGUS.*

SEBASTIAN Ah, Angus. We think perhaps the red doublet this evening. We need to make an excellent impression.

ANGUS I think it's a bit too late for that, Your Royal Highness. It is my painful duty to inform you that you have massively loused up.

SEBASTIAN We are the Crown Prince of Borogovia! We do *not* "louse up"!



ANGUS I strongly suspect that Your Royal Highness's regal and august parents will take a rather different view of the matter. What on earth were you *thinking*, you... you... you right royal idiot? Courting *one* princess who is already engaged to someone else is a serious diplomatic faux pas. But courting *two* of them? It is going to take all the diplomatic skills I possess to sort this out, if not more, and what do you suppose your mother is going to say when she finds out? H'mm?

SEBASTIAN Ah... well... of course, she doesn't actually *need* to find out. Angus, you do understand, don't you, that when we become King we shall have need of the most loyal and... *discreet*... advisors? And that it will be in our power to reward such discretion with, for example, a dukedom?

ANGUS That is not going to work, Your Royal Highness. Your father has, in fact, already promised me a dukedom, in exchange for your safe return and *accurate* information regarding this visit. And Your Royal Highness is well aware that I am a stickler for accuracy.

SEBASTIAN Oh. Um.

ANGUS Therefore I am going to ask: what does Your Royal Highness plan to do to extricate both your own royal person and the Kingdom of Borogovia, which Your Royal Highness represents, from this more than unfortunate situation?

SEBASTIAN We haven't the foggiest idea. We, er, need to think.

ANGUS Not, if I may say so, Your Royal Highness' strongest suit.

SEBASTIAN It's all very well you looking so smug! You're the blasted diplomat round here! You're *paid* to think!

ANGUS May I remind Your Royal Highness that Your Royal Highness is supposed to be, as you put it, the blasted diplomat round here? I am, for the purposes of this visit, merely Your Royal Highness' faithful valet and general factotum.

SEBASTIAN Well, we can't decide between the two of them and we are not having you or anyone else decide for us. They are both stunning beauties.

ANGUS And Your Royal Highness will be very fortunate if they don't literally stun you with the nearest blunt instrument when they find out what you've been doing. Not to mention their ex-fiancés. And their brother. *And* their parents. Really, how can one prince cause so much trouble in the space of only a few hours?

SEBASTIAN Angus. The red doublet.

ANGUS     Yes, Your Royal Highness. Nonetheless, you have not heard the end of this, not by a very long way.

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*Scene 4. ALPHONSE is seated at his desk with his head in his hands. Enter LADY HILARIA.*

HILARIA    Alphonse!

ALPHONSE Oh. How can I, er, help you?

HILARIA    This isn't exactly that kind of visit. [*She sits down*] So. I've heard all about you and Princess Amethyst being off.

ALPHONSE Oh. Right. Maybe you can help me plan what to do next, then? Because at the moment all I want to do is kick His Royal Highness Prince Sebastian all the way back to Borogovia, which probably wouldn't help, and in any case it's a long way. I'd probably put my hip out or something.

HILARIA    [*sweetly*] I think you should look at it another way.

ALPHONSE Such as?

HILARIA    Well, if she's going to have her head turned the moment some prince arrives on the scene, she was never good enough for you in the first place, now, was she?

ALPHONSE That doesn't help! I love her!

HILARIA    Oh, well, in that case, you should want her to have the very best. And, after all, being Queen of Borogovia is... pretty good, don't you think?

ALPHONSE Hilaria, no offence, but you are not helping. Please go away.

HILARIA    But I've only just got here! And, in any case, I haven't finished saying what I want to say.

ALPHONSE In that case, go ahead and say it, but I hope it's more to the point than what you've said so far.

HILARIA    I just want you to know that I am madly and passionately in love with you.

ALPHONSE Eeek!

HILARIA Well, *that* wasn't a very tactful response.

ALPHONSE Oh dear... this is really embarrassing... I'm going to have to tell you now, aren't I?

HILARIA Tell me what? That you've been nursing a secret passion since...

ALPHONSE No, no, no, *no!* Hilaria, I need to tell you... er... um... I'm not sure there's any way to break this to you gently... you're actually... er...

HILARIA Oh no! I've got a massive pimple, haven't I?

ALPHONSE No, no, not at all. You are, as far as I can see, 100% pimple-free.

HILARIA Whew! Then what?

ALPHONSE You're my sister.

[*pause*]

HILARIA Alphonse. Have you been hitting the bottle?

ALPHONSE Not yet. I haven't had the chance.

HILARIA Then what on earth do you mean I'm your sister? My family tree goes back five hundred years! I can show you all the paperwork!

ALPHONSE Um... you are undoubtedly of noble birth. Just, er, not quite the noble birth you thought you were. I'm afraid my father... er... for goodness' sake don't tell your father, er, that is to say, Lord Fairfax, who isn't your father, I mean, it wouldn't make any difference if you told your *actual* father because he already knows. I mean, he'd have kittens. That is, Lord Fairfax. Would have kittens. Er. Metaphorically speaking, of course.

HILARIA Are you *quite sure* you haven't been hitting the bottle?

ALPHONSE Believe me, Hilaria, I have never been so tempted to hit it in my life as this very moment. What I'm trying to tell you is that my father got... er... inappropriately involved with your mother. And you were the result.

HILARIA Prove it!

ALPHONSE Certainly. Please call the nearest servant and ask them to go and get Oscar and Harry.

HILARIA Very well. [*Rises, sticks head round door*] The Chancellor wishes to see Oscar and Harry! [*Sits down again*] Though I don't see what those two have to do with it.

ALPHONSE They're witnesses. Reliable ones, I'm sure you'll agree.

HILARIA Witnesses?! Neither of them was here at the time!

ALPHONSE Not that sort of witnesses. All right, let me give you some background. You recall, I'm sure, that my father used to be Chancellor, but he was stripped of his titles and imprisoned for summoning a demon. More than once, in fact.

HILARIA As far as I know he's only been imprisoned once.

ALPHONSE No, I meant summoning the demon more than once. And the demon was abjured to tell the truth, which meant it had to, whether it liked it or not. But it was a clever demon, so it told the most inconvenient truths it could think of, and that included a list of my father's illegitimate children. We have quite a number of brothers and sisters.

HILARIA If this is true, it's terrible!

ALPHONSE Oh, you'll learn to live with it. I have. And it's certainly true. Both Oscar and Harry were present when the demon rattled off the list of names, and they both have excellent memories. There were a few others as well – the knights errant, in fact – but I'm sure Oscar and Harry will be sufficient.

HILARIA So... the knights errant arrested your father, right... and they caught him with the demon... fair enough... but what in the world were Oscar and Harry doing there?

ALPHONSE The king sent Harry with them to raise the alarm if anything went wrong, and Oscar came along to keep an eye on Harry.

HILARIA Oh. Yes. That makes sense.

ALPHONSE So, er, you know, that's how it is. I mean, I'm very happy to have you as a sister, but... well, I'm sure you can understand why I didn't tell you earlier. I realise it must come as quite a shock.

HILARIA Who else have you told?

ALPHONSE Nobody. Everyone who was present is sworn to secrecy... that is, unless my father decides to try making trouble, in which case it will be necessary for his misdemeanours to be made known. But he hasn't done so far, and I don't see any reason to believe he will. They gave him quite a comfortable cell, and I'm allowed to bring him books and rather more interesting food than they generally serve the prisoners. He was Chancellor, after all.

HILARIA Well, *that's* something.

[Enter OSCAR and HARRY.]

HARRY Alphonse, you look as if a weight has just dropped on you. Are you all right?

ALPHONSE It has, and no, I'm not. Not really. Princess Amethyst has dumped me for that Prince Sebastian.

HARRY What?! But...

OSCAR I'm afraid the young Lothario is courting *both* the princesses. A fact of which I was unaware until Prince Percival told me about Princess Amethyst.

ALPHONSE He's doing *what?!!!*

OSCAR Oh. I'm so sorry. I had no idea you weren't already aware. Er...

ALPHONSE No, no, Oscar, you've done me a favour by letting me know. Why, the absolute blackguard!

HILARIA You mean to say he's courting Princess Aurelia too?

OSCAR That is indeed what I mean to say. The engagement has been quite amicably broken off as a result.

HARRY This is dreadful! I'm really sorry, Alphonse. I had no idea.

ALPHONSE Are *you* all right, Oscar?

OSCAR I am, thank you. Aurelia and I were... not really as compatible as I originally believed. Nonetheless, I have no wish to leave her in the hands of someone as unreliable as Prince Sebastian, nor, for that matter, Amethyst. I think we must find some way to get him out of the kingdom before he causes any further trouble.

ALPHONSE I should be entirely happy to kick him out personally.

HARRY      Much as I sympathise, that doesn't really fit with royal protocol.

HILARIA    Alphonse says you two are witnesses.

ALPHONSE Er... yes, that's right. The reason I asked you to come here is that Lady Hilaria here doesn't entirely believe she's my sister, and I told her you two had both heard the demon. Who'd been abjured to tell the truth.

OSCAR      Oh, indeed. Yes, I'm very sorry, Lady Hilaria, but I'm afraid Alphonse's father was... somewhat free with his affections.

ALPHONSE Like a certain prince we could name.

HARRY      Not quite in the same way, I hope.

OSCAR      And it's quite true. You are Alphonse's sister. So are several other people.

HARRY      Or his brother, depending.

HILARIA    I am absolutely certain I'm not his brother.

HARRY      No, no, I was just filling in the logical gap here. There are several people whose father was Lord Mountpleasant. Some of them are your sisters, and the ones who aren't are, obviously, your brothers.

HILARIA    And this demon said so? How did it know?

ALPHONSE I have no idea, but my father didn't deny any of it.

HILARIA    Well. This is a highly unfortunate situation. Do I even still inherit the title?

ALPHONSE I don't see why not, if you don't tell anyone.

HARRY      I mean, Lord Mountpleasant had about six of them, and Alphonse was his only legitimate heir so he got them all... so if you did find yourself short, I expect Alphonse could spare one, couldn't you, Alphonse?

ALPHONSE Oh, absolutely. I don't need all six. But it won't come to that. You'll be Lady Fairfax and that'll be the end of it.

OSCAR      I feel we need some ideas about the discreet removal of Prince Sebastian. In line with royal protocol, of course.

ALPHONSE Sing him a nice long ballad about some philandering prince who came to grief.

OSCAR I'm afraid I don't know any.

HILARIA Well, then, write one!

HARRY Do you think that would work? He doesn't strike me as the sort to take a hint.

OSCAR Possibly we need another lady here. One who would like to be queen and isn't already attached.

HILARIA Don't look at me!

ALPHONSE H'mm...

HILARIA I can't just change my affections in a moment! This isn't a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta!

HARRY Queen of Borogovia, though. That'd be a lot better than being Lady Fairfax, right? And you wouldn't have to bother your head about your father... er... Lord Fairfax finding out!

HILARIA Oh no. That does it. I'm off. [*Exit, hurriedly*]

OSCAR Change her affections?

ALPHONSE Um... yes. Apparently she's in love with me. That's why I had to tell her she's my sister.

HARRY Wow. Awkward.

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*Scene 5. Another room in the castle. PERCIVAL, AURELIA, and AMETHYST are present.*

AURELIA This is a complete disgrace! I thought so much better of you, Amethyst.

AMETHYST Oh, so it's all *my* fault, is it? I didn't know *you* were messing around with him! I thought *you* were happily engaged to Oscar!

AURELIA If it comes to that, I thought *you* were happily engaged to Alphonse!

PERCIVAL Um... can we not have a fight here? It's obvious that neither of you knew about the other, so you can't blame each other. It jolly well stands to reason. There's only one person to blame here, and that's Prince Sebastian.

AMETHYST But... he seemed so charming. So... genuine. Exactly what a Prince ought to be.

PERCIVAL You've got to admit it. He led you right up the garden path. Both of you.

AURELIA He... *was* rather pushy, I suppose... but I thought that was just his youthful enthusiasm getting the better of him.

AMETHYST Pushy. Yes. Actually, you're right. That's the word. And... he was quite rude about poor Alphonse.

AURELIA Um. Now you mention it... he was pretty rude about Oscar too.

AMETHYST You know what, Aurelia? You can have him. If he's going to behave like that, I don't trust him any more. I don't want him. I'm going to go straight back to Alphonse and apologise. Maybe he'll take me back.

AURELIA After what he's done, I don't want him either. Making all those flowery promises and then two-timing me with my own sister!

AMETHYST Very sensible. Let's both go and tell him together! That'll wipe the smug smile off his face.

AURELIA Oh, yes, let's! What a good idea! Percy, you must come along too. As a witness.

PERCIVAL Oh, I say...

AMETHYST No, do come, Percy. Apart from anything else, there's probably some kind of royal protocol involved somewhere.

AURELIA Hey! I've just had a wonderful idea!

AMETHYST What sort of idea?

AURELIA I was just thinking that anyone who can act like that has no idea what love really is. So... I think he ought to find out, don't you?

AMETHYST I'm not sure I like the way you said that. What are you driving at?



AURELIA A love philtre! Mistress Bellwether is sure to have one. We can slip it to him and make sure he falls in love – I mean, *really* in love, not just play-acting – with... oh, I don't know. Someone. Just not either of us.

AMETHYST Is that quite ethical?

AURELIA Usually I'd be asking the same question. But in the circumstances, I think it would teach him a most salutary lesson. Don't you?

PERCIVAL Which... someone... did you have in mind? I mean, Lady Hilaria is single, but... I don't think I'd want to wish him on her. He's such a pill.

AURELIA We'll find someone! There's bound to be one of the servants or someone like that who'd be prepared to put up with him in exchange for being a queen.

AMETHYST I don't know. Seems like a bit of a raw deal. I think I'd rather be a servant.

AURELIA That's only because you've never been one. It's pretty tough. You do realise some of them have to get up at five in the morning?

PERCIVAL Golly! I'd put up with almost anyone not to have to do that!

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### ACT 3

*Scene 1. A pleasant room in one of the castle turrets. GILLIAN is standing by the bed, throwing darts at a dartboard. She has an uncannily accurate aim. There is a hesitant tap on the door.*

GILLIAN Come in!

*Enter HILARIA. GILLIAN throws another dart, nods in satisfaction, and then turns to her guest.*

GILLIAN Do sit down.

HILARIA Thank you. My word... I didn't know you were so good at darts.

GILLIAN (*Sitting down*) Oh, I don't play in public, but I like to keep my aim up. It helps with the jousting. What can I do for you, Hilaria?

HILARIA Um. Well, it's like this. Alphonse... no, let me start at the beginning. You helped to arrest Alphonse's father, didn't you? While you were still pretending to be Sir Giles?

GILLIAN I did, yes. You know he summoned a demon?

HILARIA I did know. Did you actually see it?

GILLIAN Saw it and heard it, and hope I never shall again.

HILARIA Right. Well... Alphonse told me it said I was his sister.

GILLIAN It did. I'm afraid the previous Lord Mountpleasant was... shall we say... rather free with his affections in his youth. The demon greatly resented having been not only summoned, but bound to tell the truth; so it told the most awkward truths it could think of.

HILARIA Oh dear. And apparently I... er... I should say, Alphonse and I... have a number of other brothers and sisters?

GILLIAN That is correct. I don't recall the entire list, but I think Harry does. I do remember there was Rosie Banks.

HILARIA What?! Rosie Banks? You mean the washerwoman?

GILLIAN Er... yes. But, really, it's not as if it's your fault.

HILARIA But this is terrible! It was bad enough finding out Alphonse was my brother, but to have a washerwoman for a sister?!

GILLIAN It's not the end of the world, you know.

HILARIA How would *you* like it?

GILLIAN Well, I'd certainly be upset if I found out that my father wasn't my father, or that he had been having affairs all over the place, but it wouldn't bother me to find I was related to someone unexpected as a result. One can't do anything about one's relations. If it helps, one of my uncles was mad.

HILARIA How mad?

GILLIAN He thought he was a cow. Naturally he died quite young. He couldn't live on grass.

HILARIA Did it... not occur to him that he wasn't able to give milk?

GILLIAN I don't think he attempted to rationalise that. After all, cows aren't much given to rational thought.

HILARIA Oh. Oh, well... I'm sorry. I suppose that's probably worse than being related to a washerwoman.

GILLIAN It was unfortunate, but still, it was just how it was. Nobody was to blame. And, after all, he was a gentle soul. He never bothered anyone, once you got used to all the mooing.

HILARIA I wish I was as philosophical about things as you are. I just don't know what to do.

GILLIAN Why? After all, what is there to do apart from shrug your shoulders and accept that you have some extra family?

HILARIA You don't understand! I'm in love with Alphonse.

GILLIAN Oh dear. Now that *is* awkward. H'mm... oh, wait, I have an idea.

HILARIA Do tell!

GILLIAN You could always go and see Mistress Bellwether. I think she does love philtres. She might do an anti-love philtre, too. It would make sense.

HILARIA Ohhh... that's a really good idea! I shall do exactly that. Thank you!

GILLIAN My pleasure. I hope she can help.

\* \* \*

*Scene 2. Outside the apothecary's shop. AURELIA and AMETHYST are just coming out, and they almost collide with HILARIA on her way in.*

AURELIA Oh, Hilaria! Just the person I wanted to see. Do you happen to know anyone who'd like to marry Prince Sebastian?

HILARIA To marry...?! I thought... I mean... I thought you'd gone and ditched Oscar...

AURELIA Ah, yes, Oscar. Thank you for the reminder. I need to talk to him, too.

AMETHYST Prince Sebastian was two-timing us. With each other.

HILARIA Oh my! I had no idea.

AURELIA So he is not flavour of the month with either of us now. And we've got this for him. (*Holds up a small phial*) He doesn't know what love is, so he's about to find out. It's a love philtre. We just need someone for him to fall in love with.

HILARIA Huh! Well, if he's treated you two so badly, let him fall in love with *me* and I shall take great pleasure in rejecting him. I won't have anyone treat my friends like that.

AMETHYST That's... a little bit cruel, though. I don't know about anyone else, but all I want him to do is find someone and then go away.

AURELIA It would totally serve him right if he was rejected. I don't suppose he's used to it.

HILARIA Well, it's up to you, anyway.

AMETHYST What are you here for? Can I ask?

HILARIA (*sighs*) I'm here for an anti-love philtre. If she's got one. I've fallen for the wrong man.

AMETHYST Oh no! I'm so sorry.

AURELIA Just make sure it's not the same colour as this one. It would never do to get them mixed up.

HILARIA Mistress Bellwether knows what she's doing. I'm sure they'll be very different.

AURELIA Good. Amethyst, I have a suggestion. Let's just give him the philtre and then get well out of the way. Then he'll fall in love with the first woman he meets, and whether she accepts him or rejects him is... just fate. Nothing we did. Then he gets a fair chance. That's not cruel, is it? In fact, it's a lot better than he really deserves!

AMETHYST Well... all right. It saves asking a lot of women embarrassing questions. Anyway, if you'll both excuse me, I really need to go and find Alphonse... oh! There he is, over there! I'll see you later. (*She picks up her skirts and runs*)

ALPHONSE Amethyst?

AMETHYST Oh, Alphonse! I'm so, so sorry! Will you ever forgive me?

ALPHONSE Phew! Yes, of course. Oh, Amethyst, this is such a relief!

AMETHYST You're so lovely. I don't deserve it at all.

ALPHONSE I've been talking to Percival, and I've got a very good idea what happened to both you and your sister. He deliberately went after the pair of you, even though he knew very well you were both engaged. He turned the charm and persuasion up to full volume. I don't blame you for being bowled over temporarily. I'm just delighted you've come to your senses.

AMETHYST We both have!

ALPHONSE Good... but... you might want to have a quiet word with Aurelia. I don't think Oscar will have her back.

AMETHYST He won't? But Oscar's so nice! I thought he'd forgive her without a moment's thought.

ALPHONSE Oh, he'll do that. In fact, I'd say he already has. It's just that forgiving her and taking her back aren't exactly the same thing.

AMETHYST So... why won't he take her back, then?

ALPHONSE You... haven't noticed that they're not, in fact, especially compatible?

AMETHYST No?

ALPHONSE Oscar has. It took him a while, of course.

AMETHYST Ah. Oh dear.

ALPHONSE I'm not worried about Aurelia. She'll fall on her feet. She's a princess, she's very able and intelligent, and between you and me and the gatepost I think Sir Galahad Blakeley-Norris is going to be overjoyed when he finds out she's single again. And she could do a lot worse than Sir Galahad.

AMETHYST Well... I suppose he *is* a geek. And she does like geeks.

ALPHONSE True. Perhaps not quite so geeky as Oscar, but that would take some serious work. Anyway, why are we standing here in the street? Let's go and dally somewhere!

AMETHYST I am totally in favour of some honest dalliance!

ALPHONSE Splendid. Oh, by the way, have you told Prince Sebastian yet?

AMETHYST Not yet. Aurelia and I are going to do that together, and we're bringing Percy as a witness.

ALPHONSE Can I come? I want to see his face when you tell him!

AMETHYST Of course you can, Alphonse dear!

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*Scene 3. The same music room where we found OSCAR earlier. He is there again, and this time he is singing. It doesn't really matter what he sings, as long as it's in keeping with the general milieu; and he should manage at least four lines before he's interrupted. Enter AURELIA, AMETHYST, PERCIVAL, and ALPHONSE.*

OSCAR Oh...! Sorry. I was just rehearsing.

AURELIA You really don't need to apologise for doing that. In fact, *I* need to apologise to *you* for letting myself be bowled over by that... that...

ALPHONSE Cad?

AMETHYST Blighter?

PERCIVAL Pill?

AURELIA All of those things and a few more. Probably not all repeatable.

OSCAR No, no, don't worry at all. Totally understandable. I'm delighted that you saw through him so quickly, and I'm quite sure you'll find someone far more suitable soon.

AURELIA Ah...

AMETHYST Oscar, we're going to see him right now and tell him we know all about his little games. Percy's going to be a witness, and Alphonse is coming to see justice done, and we thought... even if you're not going to take Aurelia back, you probably should too. Well, at least, you should have the opportunity. If you want.

*Enter HARRY.*

HARRY Oscar, you'll never... oh! Your Royal Highnesses!

OSCAR H'mm. You know, I think I shall come with you. It will be interesting. Harry, would you like to join us? The Princesses are going to confront Prince Sebastian over his misconduct.

HARRY Well, I'm not sure what it has to do with me, but if I'm invited I'd love to come and see him get what for.

OSCAR You were a great deal more upset about the whole thing than I was.

HARRY True enough, but only because I didn't know what was going on in your head.

AMETHYST Ooh, yes, I think Harry ought to come, don't you, Aurelia?

AURELIA I don't see why not.

PERCIVAL Good-oh. We shall be quite the party!

HARRY It just so happens that I was coming to tell Oscar a little titbit about that Prince Sebastian. You know how he was going on about how well he played the dulcimer?

AURELIA He was, indeed.

HARRY He's practising in the gardens at the moment. I hid in the shrubbery to listen to him. And he's a fraud. He can play one tune really well because he practises it to death, and everything else he's only so-so. He's not a *real* musician.

AMETHYST You know what? I bet he isn't even a real Prince!

PERCIVAL I'm afraid he is. Gillian knows him. Well, she doesn't know him very well personally, but she does know the family. Ran across them while she was knight-erranting, don't you know.

AURELIA Oooh... he told me he was, what was the word? Unmatched, that was it. Unmatched in the jousts back at home. We should get him to have a round with Gillian.

AMETHYST Bet he won't joust with her if he knows who she is. But she could always be Sir Giles again.

PERCIVAL I say, capital idea, what? She can knock anyone off a horse!

OSCAR Would she joust with him?

PERCIVAL Silly question! She's not proud. She'll joust with anyone.

ALPHONSE Now that I *have* to see.

HARRY Well, come on, then! Let's go and find him. Follow me!

OSCAR Lead on! This will be... somewhat diverting.

\* \* \*

*Scene 4. The castle gardens, a few minutes later. SEBASTIAN sees the others approaching and abruptly ceases to play the dulcimer. Enter AURELIA, AMETHYST, PERCIVAL, ALPHONSE, OSCAR, and HARRY.*

AURELIA Ah! *There* you are! We want a word with you!

AMETHYST A lot of words, actually!

AURELIA Amethyst, I think Prince Sebastian is already aware that we weren't just going to say one word and then go away.

ALPHONSE Well, you know, we could. One well-chosen word would definitely get the message across. Something like... umm...

PERCIVAL Pill!

SEBASTIAN Has Your Royal Highness forgotten his medication?

PERCIVAL Not that sort of pill... pill.

AURELIA We know all about your little games and we are very displeased. Obviously, since you are visiting royalty, there are certain protocols that must be observed, but you will kindly do us the courtesy in future of not addressing either my sister or myself unless we speak to you first.

AMETHYST Which we probably won't. You could have lost me Alphonse!

AURELIA Yes, well, we might have to. You know how it is. And, as it happens, Sebastian, you *did* lose me Oscar. If you weren't who you are I'd have you thrown out right now.

OSCAR While I'm not in any way condoning His Royal Highness' conduct, I do feel that in the interests of complete fairness I should point out that he is not responsible for the incompatibility between us.

AURELIA You know what, Oscar? Right now I'm not feeling very interested in complete fairness. This... this...

PERCIVAL Pill?



AURELIA Oh, all right, Percy. It'll do as well as any other word. This *pill* has behaved abominably towards both Amethyst and myself, and I don't need anyone pointing out that certain things aren't his fault. There's plenty of stuff that *is* his fault, and I am extremely angry about that.

SEBASTIAN But we were bowled over by your outstanding loveliness!

AMETHYST Oh, give it a rest.

AURELIA Not the most royal phrase, but I have to say I entirely agree with my sister.

SEBASTIAN We cannot choose between you!

AURELIA Not our problem. You don't get to choose either of us.

PERCIVAL Pill!

SEBASTIAN Will Your Royal Highness please stop saying that?

PERCIVAL Why? You are one!

ALPHONSE And an extremely bitter pill, at that.

SEBASTIAN Alas! Woe is us! We need a drink.

AURELIA Ohhhh, we can do that all right. Harry, would you mind doing the honours?

HARRY Certainly. What particular variety of honours? Red or white wine? Beer, maybe? Mead?

SEBASTIAN We are a connoisseur of wine. All Borogovia bows to our knowledge.

AURELIA Oh, you mean in the same way that you're wonderful on the dulcimer? I see you have it here. How about you give us a demonstration? We have Oscar here who can sing. You could play... ahh... *A Painted Tale*.

SEBASTIAN Alas, we do not know it.

OSCAR Not a problem. I can teach Your Royal Highness.

HARRY What would Your Royal Highness like to drink?

SEBASTIAN Bring us a measure of your finest wine, minion.

AURELIA *(aside to HARRY)* Get the Dragon's Blood. It's the best red we have, not that he deserves it. And make sure you hand the glass to me first.

HARRY *(aside to AURELIA, appalled)* Great Scott, you're not going to poison him, are you?

AURELIA *(aside to HARRY)* No, no. I wouldn't do such a thing. If you must know, I'm going to feed him a love philtre.

HARRY Oh... *(Exit)*

OSCAR So, Your Royal Highness, if you'd care to pick up your dulcimer I can take you through the piece Aurelia would like to hear.

SEBASTIAN We are not feeling quite well at the moment. We think we shall not play.

ALPHONSE What a pity. *(He makes no attempt to sound as if he means it.)*

AMETHYST And while we're here, I think you probably ought to know that Sir Giles Dunbar challenges you to a joust.

SEBASTIAN Why, that is better news. Who is Sir Giles Dunbar?

PERCIVAL He's Gillian's sister... I mean, his brother... dash it all, I mean *her brother!*

OSCAR *(keeping such an exceedingly straight face that SEBASTIAN would be highly suspicious if he knew him better)* And outstanding in the jousts, at that.

AURELIA Indeed. The best we have. So you can show off your much-vaunted skill, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN We are wounded. We feel you do not quite believe us.

AURELIA You haven't exactly given me good reason to do so, have you?

PERCIVAL Face it. Every single person here is dashed annoyed with you.

SEBASTIAN But we were...

PERCIVAL Bowled over by the wossname thingy loveliness of my sisters. Both my sisters. Simultaneously. That kind of thing does not go down well.

SEBASTIAN *(almost plaintively)* Every single one of you? What, even the bard?

OSCAR     H'mm. Well, I am certainly annoyed with Your Royal Highness. I do retain a very warm regard for both princesses. But I am not quite sure whether or not I qualify as *dashed* annoyed.

SEBASTIAN We feel that is splitting hairs.

PERCIVAL   Hard cheese, old fruit. It's the best you're going to get.

*Enter HARRY with a bottle of wine and some glasses on a tray.*

HARRY     Where should I put this lot?

AURELIA   Just on the wall here. I'll give you a hand.

HARRY     Thank you. (*Aside, to AURELIA*) Isn't a love potion going to cause more problems than it solves?

AURELIA   (*aside to HARRY*) Not at all. He has no idea what love is, and now he's about to find out.

HARRY     (*aside to AURELIA*) But what if he really falls for one of you?

AURELIA   (*aside to HARRY*) Not happening. We're going to get well clear before it takes effect.

PERCIVAL   Do I get a glass?

AURELIA   Certainly. (*Hands him one*)

PERCIVAL   Topping!

\* \* \*

## ACT 4

*Scene 1. Back in SEBASTIAN's suite. The Prince is pacing up and down.*

SEBASTIAN Angus! (*Pause*) Angus! Where are you when I need you?

*Enter ANGUS.*

ANGUS     Your Royal Highness is very lucky I am here at all. Had matters not at least to some extent resolved themselves, I would at this moment be in some very delicate negotiations with the King and Queen on your behalf.

SEBASTIAN Never mind all that. Did you see that exquisite vision of loveliness with the raven hair?

ANGUS To which exquisite vision of loveliness does Your Royal Highness refer *now*? Both the Princesses have light brown hair.

SEBASTIAN Why, the one who was in here just now, of course.

ANGUS Your Royal Highness has been entertaining a woman in your guest suite?! Has Your Royal Highness no sense whatsoever?

SEBASTIAN No, no, no, Angus! Not “entertaining”. She came to collect our laundry.

ANGUS Your *laundry*?!!!

SEBASTIAN We swear, Angus, we have never before been truly in love! The Princesses? Huh! They pale beside this paragon. Why, we could write a sonnet... *(Pause)* Angus. What rhymes with “girl”?

ANGUS “Curl”, Your Royal Highness?

SEBASTIAN That won’t do, we’re afraid. As far as we know her hair is totally straight, though we suppose it might have a little wave to it. It is hard to tell. She wears it in a plait.

ANGUS “Squirrel”, then?

SEBASTIAN We suspect you are extracting the michael, Angus.

ANGUS Well, really, Your Royal Highness! As if you hadn’t already caused enough trouble over the Princesses, now you’ve fallen for the laundry maid. How am I supposed to take you remotely seriously?

SEBASTIAN Have you no soul? If you but saw this angelic being...

ANGUS I always thought angels were supposed to have wheels. And a lot of eyes.

SEBASTIAN Her eyes are deep, dark pools, lit by rays of sunshine dappling through overhanging branches. Her neck is like the swan’s. Her lips...

ANGUS Yes, Your Royal Highness, I get the picture. And has this Venus among laundry maids shown any sign of reciprocating your undoubted ardour?

SEBASTIAN She said “Coo!” Like a dove...

ANGUS I imagine she was, in fact, merely extremely startled.

SEBASTIAN She, and no other, shall be our Queen!

ANGUS Oh, great *Scott*, Your Royal Highness. If I can wrench you off the subject for one moment, I also need to tell you that it would be very inadvisable for you to joust with Sir Giles Dunbar.

SEBASTIAN Why?

ANGUS Because he is not Lady Gillian’s brother, and because it is almost certain that he will win.

SEBASTIAN Why should we care who he is or is not related to?

ANGUS Because, as I was about to tell you, he is actually Lady Gillian. I managed to track down his... her... squire. Most informative. A rather stupid young woman, but it appears that Lady Gillian feels rather sorry for her.

SEBASTIAN What?!

ANGUS It is generally known in court that Lady Gillian previously went on errantry with a pair of other knights under the convenient pseudonym of Sir Giles Dunbar. She plans to do this again for the purposes of the joust, feeling – I believe quite correctly – that you would otherwise refuse to joust with her.

SEBASTIAN If she wishes to pretend to be a man, it will serve her right when we beat her.

ANGUS Your Royal Highness is not listening. As usual. She is the best jouster in the kingdom, an accolade she owes entirely to her outstanding dexterity. While she is not as strong as most other knights, she does know exactly where and how to hit.

SEBASTIAN Are you sure about that?

ANGUS What kind of a spy does Your Royal Highness think I am?

SEBASTIAN Oh. Er. You do have a point. But we’ve agreed to it now! We can’t just back out without an extremely good reason.

ANGUS Your Royal Highness has injured his arm. I have taken the precaution of obtaining this bandage, which I shall now proceed to tie into a sling.

SEBASTIAN Oh. Which arm? And how did we injure it?

ANGUS Your Royal Highness is free to choose which arm. You tripped and fell while walking in the castle gardens. Fortunately you did not have your dulcimer with you at the time.

SEBASTIAN Oh. Well, then, it had better be this arm.

ANGUS You also seriously bruised your royal kneecap as a result of the fall, so you had better limp a little if you can manage it. But it will have to be consistent. It is better that you don't do it at all than that you do it only when you remember. Now. I suppose Your Royal Highness didn't manage to find out the name of your latest flame, did you?

SEBASTIAN It's Rosie. Such a romantic name!

ANGUS (*with strained patience*) Rosie anything in particular?

SEBASTIAN Banks.

ANGUS Rosie Banks. Very good. I shall locate the girl and ensure that she doesn't give the game away. I suppose you haven't seen anyone else since you came in from the gardens, other than myself, of course?

SEBASTIAN No. And you had better not fall in love with her yourself! Be it clearly understood that she is ours.

ANGUS Believe me, Your Royal Highness, nothing could be further from my mind. We have quite enough to complicate matters as it is.

\* \* \*

*Scene 2. Yet another room in the castle. HILARIA is working at a piece of embroidery. Enter ANGUS.*

ANGUS Ah. Excuse my intrusion, my lady. You are, I believe, Lady Hilaria Fairfax?

HILARIA I am. And you're Prince Sebastian's valet, aren't you?

ANGUS Indeed. My name is Angus. I am honoured to meet you.

HILARIA H'mm. What do you actually want? Because if you've come to tell me the Prince has decided he's in love with *me* now, I'm not interested. I'm on very

friendly terms with both the Princesses and I don't appreciate someone coming along and messing them about.

ANGUS     Oh, no, you need have no fears at all on that score. Prince Sebastian is very much in love with someone else. Moreover, I have been speaking to her just now and it appears to be mutual, or, at least, heading in that direction. I don't believe she quite shares the intense ardour he feels for her, but she is certainly... shall we say... interested.

HILARIA   Well, the more fool her, then, if you don't mind my saying so.

ANGUS     Indeed, I have no objection to your... refreshing honesty. However, it does cause a little, shall we say, difficulty; and it has occurred to me that you also have a little difficulty of your own, and we could rather easily minimise both of those difficulties by putting them together.

HILARIA   I don't quite see what you're driving at.

ANGUS     Simply this, my lady. I am reliably informed that you have had a recent... romantic disappointment, and therefore perhaps a little change of scene might do you the world of good. If you are willing to help me, I can most certainly arrange for you to receive a fine house in Borogovia, a title, and a permanent place at the royal court. And we have very many extremely eligible young lords who would be more than delighted to meet you.

HILARIA   If you're making me an offer like that, I take it you want quite a lot of help. What is it you're asking me to do?

ANGUS     Simply this. The young lady who has so enraptured Prince Sebastian is, in fact, not a lady.

HILARIA   And what does that have to do with me?

ANGUS     Well, she is young, she is quite intelligent, she is a quick learner, and it transpires that also she does have noble blood. She is the by-blow of some lord. Therefore, it occurs to me that it would probably be a great deal easier to let my young master have his way on this occasion and train his beloved to become a lady, and indeed a future Queen, than to drag a besotted Prince Sebastian away from your charming little kingdom kicking and screaming. However... we do need an actual lady to do the training. And this, my lady, is where you come in. If, of course, you are willing.

HILARIA   And who, exactly, is this... young person?

ANGUS     A washerwoman. Her name is Rosie Banks.

HILARIA Oh!

ANGUS Indeed. Quite astonishing. I will grant that she is quite pretty, but nonetheless, for the Prince to lose his head over her in such a way...

HILARIA I... can vouch for the fact that she does indeed have noble blood. Apparently she is my half-sister.

ANGUS Why, even better! I was wondering what we would do about her surname. "Banks" does not sound at all noble. So she is really a Fairfax?

HILARIA Er... no. But then, neither am I. Technically. However, I would rather keep the name, if nobody objects.

ANGUS Not a problem. We shall make her Lady Rosemary Fairfax; and you, as sister to the Crown Princess and of course eventually to the Queen, will naturally be held in the highest honour.

HILARIA H'mm. Well... it's quite tempting, I will admit... but...

ANGUS But, my lady?

HILARIA Could Rosie and I have a separate carriage? I don't want to have to travel all the way to Borogovia with your Prince.

ANGUS An entirely understandable attitude. It shall be arranged. I will confess that I myself was not looking forward to having to deal with the tide of cloying emotion which would have resulted from His Royal Highness sharing a carriage with the apparent love of his life all the way home.

HILARIA Goodness, yes, I should think that would be pretty ghastly. One question, though. What is she going to wear?

ANGUS I have given that matter due consideration, and am about to enter urgent negotiations with your court dressmaker.

HILARIA A sound plan. She will also need some good jewellery. I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll talk to the Princesses. They'll both be delighted to get rid of the Prince, and they'll probably also both feel rather sorry for Rosie. They'll say she doesn't know what she's let herself in for. I should think they'll be willing to give her a few pieces. Come to that, I have a pearl choker myself I never wear; she can have that too if she likes.

ANGUS I think you and I are going to get on extremely well, my lady. You have a practical mind.



HILARIA I'm going to need one.

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*Scene 3. Another room in the castle, occupied by AURELIA, AMETHYST, PERCIVAL, GILLIAN, ALPHONSE, and OSCAR.*

AMETHYST What a lovely day! You know what? I fancy a nice game of croquet. Who wants to join me?

AURELIA Funny how the sun comes out as soon as Prince 112 Titles leaves the kingdom.

GILLIAN A pity he couldn't wait till his arm was better. I'm quite disappointed about that joust.

AURELIA I don't believe there was ever anything wrong with his arm. I think he got wind of the fact that you're not Sir Giles and was afraid you'd beat him.

PERCIVAL Dash it, there's no shame in being beaten by Gillian in a joust!

OSCAR No, but he probably thinks there is. I don't mind playing croquet if you're short of people.

ALPHONSE I'll play.

AURELIA So shall I.

*Enter HARRY.*

HARRY Letter for you, Lady Gillian. I think it's from Sir Galahad.

GILLIAN Oh, thank you, Harry! That's excellent. I've been hoping to hear what Gally and the other two have been getting up to... and when they're thinking of coming back.

AMETHYST Harry, do you play croquet?

HARRY Very badly, I'm afraid. But I can keep score for you if you like.

GILLIAN Oh yes, that's definitely Gally's writing. Let's see what he says... h'mm... oh, very good news! They expect to be back at the weekend. Sir Malcolm has won a little impromptu tournament, and Sir Eustace has slain a basilisk.

PERCIVAL I didn't know there were any basilisks round here.

GILLIAN    There probably aren't now. They're quite rare.

AMETHYST    Aren't they an endangered species, then?

GILLIAN    I suppose they should be in theory, but unfortunately they have a habit of endangering every other species they come into contact with, so... I'm with Sir Eustace.

AURELIA    I wonder how young Rosie is going to cope with being the Crown Princess of Borogovia.

HARRY    Oh, as long as she can put up with the Crown Prince of Borogovia, I should say rather well. I know Rosie. She's bright. With Lady Hilaria at her elbow to give her instruction, I'm sure she'll be the perfect lady well before the journey is even over.

AMETHYST    I'm going to miss Hilaria.

AURELIA    So am I, but we can always write. I bet she'll have plenty of good stories to tell from the Borogovian Court.

OSCAR    Funny thing about Prince Sebastian. I'm not sure any of you has yet realised this, but he left his dulcimer behind.

PERCIVAL    His mind is rather on other things, what?

OSCAR    I'm not sure it's that. I think he left it deliberately. That valet of his... probably isn't just a valet. He's a sharp one. I've spotted him eavesdropping a few times. I suspect it got back to the Prince that we know he's not such a wonderful musician after all.

PERCIVAL    Oh. Well. I've got no use for a dulcimer, but I expect you have?

OSCAR    Odd that you should say that, Your Royal Highness. As it happens...

PERCIVAL    Say no more, old bean. The thing's yours. Unless that pill comes back to reclaim it, of course.

OSCAR    Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness. I have in fact already composed some melodies for it.

AMETHYST    I shall look forward to hearing them!

AURELIA    Gillian, are you going to write back to Sir Galahad or just wait till he arrives?

GILLIAN     I thought the latter. It seems hardly worth troubling a messenger.

AURELIA    Ah. Well. When you see him, then...

GILLIAN     Of course. I shall certainly let slip the fact that you are now single.

AURELIA    Um...

OSCAR       Excellent!

FINIS