

## ABSTRACT

*Valerie: A Screenplay*

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Animated movies by Disney and Pixar make millions of dollars every year. Great stories and great art capture audiences and can create a cultural movement, as evidenced by *Frozen*. This impact and its importance in society prefaces the bulk of my thesis, which is a screenplay inspired by Renaissance Disney movies. My story follows a princess as she learns the responsibility of power. With adventure, betrayal, and romance, Princess Valerie matures into a worthy ruler of her Germanic kingdom Edelstein. I hope this story will inspire and encourage young men and women to be strong yet responsible and humble.

*VALERIE: A SCREENPLAY*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

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Waco, Texas

May 2015

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## INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, there was a girl who was sweet at heart and a joy to friends and strangers alike. As a child, people called her blessed. Yet, as she grew into a young woman, she was cursed with braces, acne, and thick-rimmed purple glasses. Friends grew distant, and strangers mocked her for her appearance and personality. She remained sweet at heart, but grew weary of strangers' oppression. Was there something wrong with her? Was she too sweet and too strange to have friends? She despaired. But when she came home from school each day, Disney shows and movies alike encouraged her to persevere. The movies lauded goodness and kindness above all else — even above beauty. So the girl vowed to remain kind and good, even if the world did not appreciate it, because she believed that one day the kind and the good would triumph over the mockery and oppression.

As you might have guessed, I was (and am) this girl. Disney movies encouraged me to keep going and continue being myself whenever circumstances told me otherwise. I am so thankful for all the people responsible in making these films, and I aspire to create similar work that may encourage others the same way the films encouraged me. In addition to the encouraging morals of these movies, I was so touched by the art. I have loved to draw since childhood, and the beauty of renaissance Disney (early '90s) animation escapes no one. When asked what I wanted to do when I grow up, I would answer, "I want to be a Disney animator." While I'm not sure that's the path my life will take, I do want to be involved in art and story for the rest of my life. Art and story have

encouraged me through the difficulty of maturing into a young adult, and I want to be able to carry that impact forward to others.

I knew I wanted to write a creative thesis, but I wasn't certain which direction I would take. Many honors art students create a portfolio of art works for their thesis. I considered this option, but wasn't totally sold on the idea. After my freshman year at Baylor, Dr. SJ Murray happily mentored me and introduced me to the process of screenwriting. After writing my first scene, reading it to others, and watching and hearing their reactions, I knew I wanted this to be the avenue for my thesis. There was something so incredibly special about seeing this story in my head, writing it down, and imagining how the animation might look. I had written down story ideas for several years, so I chose one dear to my heart, a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*. I've always loved that tale because it represents the Christian life: "while we were yet sinners [beasts], Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Obviously, I wanted to make my story different from the Disney classic: I wanted to part from the practically perfect princess ideal and make the princess the beast. In my story, she would be a beast during the day and only be human at night—much like the tale "East of the Sun and West of the Moon." Only when she learned to love even her bitterest enemy would she return to human form. I wrote this story in screenplay format and finished after the summer of 2014. I only had to add song lyrics for that Disney magic, and I would be finished, done with my thesis before spring semester!

There was just the matter of choosing my opening image, the first scene that (at least theoretically) draws audiences into the story of the film. Since the protagonist

female wasn't particularly likeable in the beginning (after all, she was a beast), I thought it wise to show a horrid memory of her past that would have audiences empathize with her. *Finding Nemo* uses this technique to create audience empathy for otherwise unlikeable and over-protective Marlin. (And actually, my opening scene is very much inspired by *Finding Nemo*.) When I wrote this opening scene and read it to Dr. Murray, she loved it; but she also said it didn't match my story. I needed to find the story that matched this opening, because it was a compelling and original story to tell. That conversation was filled with various emotions. On one hand, Dr. Murray adored my opening and said the story that matched the opening could mean a big break for me as a writer, that it was epic and drew from inspirations without relying solely on them. Clearly, that elated me. However, I loved my original tale. There are so many times when I didn't know what to write, I prayed, and God showed me what to write next. The story flowed so well, and was so interwoven with the characters and the plot and the details. I saw God working in this story. How could I abandon it, whenever God was speaking through it?

But I decided to trust my advisor. After our meeting, I scrapped my original thesis draft and started with just the opening image. I experienced a lot of mental turmoil over the next few weeks as I attempted to create a story from an opening image. It took me quite a while to mentally start over, because I kept trying to make my old story into my new story instead of starting fresh. But finally I was able to move my story from Ireland to Germany, from *Beauty and the Beast* to a story of revenge. I finished this second story around January 2015 and again felt proud of what I created. It was much more difficult than the first story, because I didn't have a starting idea for the story as I did with the

retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*. There wasn't a story I was retelling. I learned to draw inspiration from different movies, such as the dilemma of *Mulan* and the animal sidekicks of *Tangled*. Writing scenes was much more difficult. The story didn't seem to flow very well, but I understood more of what scenes should contain, and aspects of important plot structure that I didn't understand previously. I learned more about a character's desire line and how there must be at least three obstacles to every desire. Writing the second story was a struggle, but it tied up nicely into a great redemptive work. I wasn't sure of its marketability, though, since revenge isn't a light topic for a family movie. Around this time I re-watched *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. I absolutely love this movie for its incredibly profound and philosophical themes, but it certainly is not a light movie like *Tangled*. (*The Princess and the Frog* in this sense also resembles the *Hunchback*. Both films are very well made, yet the themes distance children and therefore families from the movie.) Older audiences may love the movie, but would my tale suffer from marketability challenges? After all, family films are more successful at the box office not because adults turn out in droves to support them, but because children pressure their parents to attend (Jankowski). Nevertheless, I was proud of the second story that I completed. You can imagine my disappointment when my advisor told me that the new draft didn't contain enough external action and therefore wasn't yet a viable screenplay. At the end of January, I again gut my tale. I kept the opening image and character names, but the characters themselves changed drastically. Instead of focusing on revenge, my screenplay was taking me in new directions. Themes of responsibility and maturity emerged, cloaked in a supernatural tale of magic and adventure. By struggling through two heartfelt attempts to tell a story and finish my thesis, I found myself face-to-face with

a whimsical plot that echoed the fairy tales and Disney magic that prompted me to become a storyteller in the first place. By persevering in writing, I learned not only the importance of grit to success, but also how, in the realm of creativity (and by extension, in life), no work is wasted — even if the payoff is not immediate. In three drafts, the story found me.

Suffice it to say that I learned a great deal about what it means to write a truly great story. Writing creative works is actually incredibly difficult. I used to think that a writer simply sat down and wrote what she saw in her head, and this did happen many times with my first iteration. However, good stories take crafting, reworking, editing, and polishing, not just in dialogue or in phrasing, but in story arcs and character development. I also had to learn that it took two full drafts and iterations of a story to get to a really good story, and that those first drafts were not wasted. (I do plan on rewriting the first two stories one day, but they will most likely be novels.)

At first, I was obviously incredibly frustrated to have to scrap and gut my thesis, and became more stressed as the time passed; but I learned so much from writing each time. With each story iteration I became faster and more aware of certain writing tactics. I still constantly learn as I write, and from what I hear, that does not change. In other words, I suppose I've learned that writing is a craft like art: you improve the more you do it. You can read all the books you want on writing or on making a work of art, but that doesn't always translate into writing great stories or painting a masterpiece. Certainly, there is a lot of research and training that goes into crafts, but the end result is based on time and practice. In other words, crafts are applied knowledge. I can know a lot about Shakespeare and about how to write a good story, but a craft is applying that knowledge

to creating something of enduring value.

While many people can write about knowledge and can critique writers, not many can captivate audiences and teach moral lessons through stories just as many Classic authors did thousands of years ago. Dante could have written a commentary on the stages of hell, purgatory, and paradise, yet his *Divine Comedy* reached, inspired, and taught so many more people because of its use of story. And how many people read C.S. Lewis's expository writings every year versus those that read his narratives? If Jesus taught the crowds in parables, then why does academia discourage the use of stories in teaching, especially in teaching moral values? I want my knowledge of ethics and great texts to be useful and applicable to all of society, because even ancient texts are applicable to modern society, though society may need someone to distill the dense, philosophical information into a digestible form. If much of modern society and Hollywood promote immoral activity, then it is important to combat with equally well-told stories that promote ethics and godliness.

I've been fascinated for quite some time by the use of fairy tales or fables in teaching morality to children. Ironically, fables didn't use to be restricted to children: all society took part in reading fables and telling stories that upheld noble values. (I at least hope that the sultry, moralist tales of Ovid were meant for an adult audience.) Part of the inclusivity of the fables' audience was due to the fact that they were viewed not as a genre but as a "mode of discourse" (Wheatley 5). C.S. Lewis argued that fairy tales "can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of 'commenting on life', can add to it" (Rice 4). While medieval society craved these tales, modern society seems too busy

to read.

In my mind, I can either encourage people to read, or I can reach them in a different medium. Film is a fantastic medium because all ages go to the theater. People from all walks of life, rich and poor, go to the movies. And the best part: they are captivated for two hours and passively consume a story with embedded morality. When I interned with a Christian media company in California summer 2012, I learned that children gain the vast majority of their moral formation through the media. Studies continue to show growing trends of media consumption. Indeed, a recent study has shown that millennials spend nearly eighteen hours a day consuming media (Taylor). I was blown away. I considered that the highest moral teacher must be education, or parental guardians; but nearly all a child's morality comes from the media. To be sure, storytellers have an incredible responsibility to the good of society. Plato expelled storytellers from his *Republic* because he knew the dangers that could come from irresponsible storytelling, and throughout modern history we can see the dangerous use of storytelling in propaganda (Book II, 368d). One need only turn to and evidence the Second World War and Hitler's various campaigns. The media can be used for great evils, even unintentionally; but so can it also be used for great good. If the media can sell stories that have dangerous ethics, it can also sell great, ethical stories. This is why it is imperative that students of ethics and great texts also learn to craft dramatic narratives. Stories are the "digestible" form of ethics and philosophy: philosophy for the layman, if you will. Graduates of great texts have a responsibility to improve the world with their knowledge, and stories might just be the best method of doing so.

Some of this begs the question: I am a Great Texts minor and a Studio Art major. Why then would I apply my minor and not my major toward my thesis? Someone could argue that a picture of art reaches more people faster and more cheaply than a piece of writing. Perhaps this is true, especially in today's connected world. And the busy nature of life today might suggest we have just enough time for a quick glance at artwork rather than the leisure needed to engage a lengthy text.

I found that the more I wrote, the more I fell in love with movement. A work of art, specifically painting or drawing, acts as a snapshot. We can see the characters in the faces of the disciples of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, but we would have to imagine how they would act and play out in our world. Movies play out characters before your eyes, and you can see how their actions impact those around them. Whenever audiences read or watch Macbeth kill King Duncan and Banquo and watch him spiral to his destruction, we learn that we really shouldn't try to take control of our destinies or listen to the prophecies of scary witch-hags. We might even go so far as to say that stories allow writers (and readers) to tease out the kinds of conscious decision-making processes Aristotle encourages human beings to make in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Living virtuously is a habit — not because it becomes automated, as the word might imply today, but because we take more and more seriously our duty to consider our actions in light of the greater good.

In addition to the aspect of movement, I love the encapsulation of audiences that movies have, especially in family movies. As *Frozen* attests, one movie can start a cultural flurry (pun intended). One story can spread like wildfire, and its morals can spread the same way, whether consciously or not. (This might most clearly be

represented by the now-infamous song “Let It Go.”) Perhaps my most selfish reason for writing a creative thesis is that I miss the original movies of the Disney renaissance.

While Hollywood has had somewhat of a revival recently, I miss the original stories and ideas. Yes, the stories were based off of other literary works, but they were rendered in an original way. There was a new idea generated from an old idea. So, I wanted to present some of my own ideas.

### *Influences*

As stated above, Disney renaissance films heavily inspired me in writing my thesis. In the early phases of my work, I focused mostly on the progression of *Beauty and the Beast*. *Mulan* proved very informative for my second iteration, because the story followed the general storyline of the Disney classic. Like *Mulan*, my princess also left home despite her father’s wishes and disguised herself as a man to infiltrate the enemy army. She, too, is later discovered to be the princess. But there were plenty of other resources.

Vogler’s *The Writer’s Journey* proved to be an incredibly helpful guide in writing a story with clear plot points and character types. Vogler’s text explained different character motifs that crop up in Classic myth as well as modern stories. Through his text, I learned of the shapeshifter character type, which provided the inspiration for antagonist, Ralph. Ralph acts as a mentor throughout the first half of the story, but proves in the second half to be the protagonist’s greatest adversary.

Another resource that carried me forward was Dr. Murray’s *Three Act What?*,

which outlines the basic principles of three-act structure and prepared me to generate the step outline. That text, coupled with Richard Walter's guide on the *Essentials of Screenwriting* made clear to me the specific format and style of screenplays and offered examples of what to do and what to avoid. For instance, I learned that every scene should be driven by a conflict. Moreover, that conflict should escalate throughout each scene. Walter pleads with writers to avoid boring scenes of car rides and cliché scenes of romantics meeting in a coffee shop. He also explains that while novels are peppered with descriptive imagery, screenplays are intentionally devoid of such. The reason for this involves another point I have learned in this process, which is that movies are a very collaborative process. Typically, a screenwriter will turn in a story, which will be read and considered by a reader, then picked up by a director, edited by a story editor, designed and formed by a director/producer, interpreted by actors and animators, and finally edited again. Therefore, the screenwriter should be very sparse, snappy, and economical when writing. In other words, screenwriters create the skeleton of a story that the directors fill in with muscle, and which the actors and editors flesh out.

In addition to the technicalities of writing, I learned about the business side of writing. This was not my favorite thing to learn. I was a business major my freshman year and disliked the subject greatly. But business is important to learn in order to continue creating. Walt Disney went bankrupt before he achieved worldwide success. Throughout my thesis work and courses, Dr. Murray explained that learning the business side of art is important to art itself, because the less you worry about finances, the more you can focus on the creation of art. There's also another (and even more important) reason for learning the business side of writing. If a writer makes a highly marketable film, then bigger

companies will purchase it. Bigger companies have higher marketing capabilities and therefore a greater reach into audiences' lives. So, the more marketable a script is, the greater amount of people it can reach. A very obvious example of this is Jennifer Lee's *Frozen*. The script was highly marketable because it contained themes applicable to everyone and because it was light enough to attract an audience of all ages. Add the stunning animation and the addicting songs, and you have a hit movie. Especially when starting as a writer, it's important to be marketable. If you can sell your first few scripts, you then have the collateral and the recognition to make a film that isn't as marketable. For example, since Jennifer Lee wrote *Frozen*, "Frozen Fever," and likely will write *Frozen 2*, then she has the funds to make an art-film about a teenager learning to fight drug abuse, or a documentary about the state of agriculture in Scotland. When I learned about marketability, I understood that I could make a happy and profitable family film in order to gain funds for an art-film or more mature-themed film.

### *Creative Process*

For each of the story iterations, I first started by outlining the story beats, which are the main plot points of the story. Dr. Murray's *3 Act What?* story worksheet proved to be quite helpful in outlining a great story — and I became better and faster at filling out a beat sheet with each iteration. Here is the final beat sheet I produced for my thesis:

ACT I: Opening Image: Family happiness. Queen Rachel announces her

pregnancy to Young Valerie. Dunric (the enemy king) invades. The royal family is whisked away, but Rachel dies protecting Valerie. Rachel miscarries her child and passes a ring to Valerie before Rachel dies.

Ordinary World: 10 years later. Valerie wears the ring on a string around her neck. Valerie practices fighting (bow and sword) with her pet donkey, Albert. Her maidservant Karla rushes her and beautifies her for a party—It's her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. She slouches and complains the whole time. King Frederick makes her dance with Commander Raimund, and the two have a spat.

Storm is Brewing: The king and commander are called to a military hearing, and Valerie overhears. Dunric is building an enemy base to attack Edelstein. Fearing for her safety, the king sends Valerie to a monastery.

Inciting Incident: Valerie's caravan is attacked by Dunric. She escapes. She overhears talk of a wanted crystal.

Dilemma: She reconnects with Albert and seeks directions at a local tavern. A seer-wizard named Ralph tells her about this crystal and why they need to seek it out. Dunric invades the town and tavern, and they have to escape out a back window.

Crossing the Threshold: Valerie decides to seek the crystal in order to protect Edelstein and take vengeance on Dunric. (In making this active decision, she commits to the quest.) Raimund overhears Dunric, who mentions his plan to attack Edelstein in a week, and sends thugs to follow Valerie and get the crystal. Raimund wants to go back to Edelstein, but agrees to follow the princess.

ACT II: Adventure Sequence: Valerie, Albert, and Ralph are attacked by gators; Ralph uses magic to blast them away. He sends a flare that attracts the thugs and Raimund to follow. Ralph explains backstory, location, and power of the crystal.

Introduce B Character: Raimund and the thugs catch up with the trio. The thugs chase the group across a bridge, which Ralph blasts and destroys. The thugs find another way around as the now-quartet heads toward the mountain. (Raimund forced on the quest.)

Continued Adventure: The quartet winds up a narrow mountain path and slip several times. Raimund protects Valerie from falling. When she can't sleep, he gives her his cloak for her comfort. The thugs trap them on the path. Ralph blasts a hole in the mountain, and they enter in. Valerie's ring glows and leads them to the big cavern where the crystal is. One of the thugs meets them and attacks.

Midpoint: Valerie cedes fighting to Raimund in order for her to retrieve the crystal. She also breaks off a shard that Raimund (unobserved) pockets. Ralph's blasts make the mountain unstable and cave-in. A falling rock knocks out the thug. The group runs out of the cavern as it collapses.

All Downhill: A rock falls and breaks Valerie's foot. She gives the crystal to Raimund and tells him to save Edelstein, but he helps her out of the mountain before it collapses. He applies a splint to her leg while Ralph fetches water. Ralph inconspicuously poisons it and gives it to Valerie, who drinks. The thugs catch up to them, and they fight. Valerie fights on one foot, then mounts Albert. The group escapes. The poison takes a toll on Valerie, and she acts strangely. Ralph tries to take the crystal from Valerie, but

Raimund and Albert protect it. Albert wakes Raimund from sleep to help Valerie, whose heart rate is low. Raimund takes her to a spring and resuscitates her. Ralph spurs them onward and fails to take the crystal. The thugs catch up with them at the swamp and attack.

Brick Wall: Ralph takes the crystal, knocks out Raimund and the thugs, and summons gators to finish off Valerie. Ralph leaves to defeat Frederick and Dunric. Albert takes on the gators while the thugs wake. The thugs defeat the gators and leave to warn Dunric of Ralph. Valerie despairs, but Albert spurs her forward. She hobbles after the thugs.

ACT III: Hatching the Plan: Valerie trumpets to stop the fighting. Dunric runs to kill her, but the thugs defend her. Ralph emerges and summons an army to fight the kings. Frederick takes Valerie away from the fight and tells now-conscious and –present Raimund to take her to safety. Raimund wants to follow orders, but on Valerie’s command rides back to the fray. Ralph corners Valerie and blasts her good foot.

Fake Success: Frederick knocks Ralph’s crystal-staff out of his hand. Valerie gets the staff but fails to break it. One of the thugs takes it, runs, and throws it to Dunric; but Ralph catches the staff. He grows the summons to giants.

It’s a Trap! Or Mini Brick Wall: Raimund and thugs protect Valerie and gather supplies as she hatches a new plan. Her escorts are torn from her. Frederick distracts Ralph while Valerie makes an arrow out of her splint. She ties her ring as the arrowhead.

Climax: Valerie shoots the arrow into Ralph’s crystal. Everything explodes into

light. Ralph approaches the light and is consumed.

Resolution: Raimund reveals the shard from the mountain. Dunric takes it, and Valerie warns him of its power and Ralph's destruction. Dunric gives it back and chooses to ally with them. Another party is thrown, this time celebrating peace and alliance. Raimund gives Valerie a new ring. There is promise of a happy future between them.

Through all my story iterations, I learned how a story should progress. The opening image should captivate audiences and thrust them into the story. It also introduces the stakes that will dominate the whole screenplay. I picked the moment that everything changes for Valerie and that provides her motive for going on the quest—to avenge her parents and defeat Dunric. The ordinary world should flesh out the main characters so that we understand their changes throughout the story. This was one of the hardest parts for me to learn, because I wanted to send my characters on the quest right away. But I learned to tease out the characters and let them play a little bit in their natural environments before their world gets shaken up. For example, I learned how to emphasize the character arc by pulling on the scenes. By making more and longer scenes, then audiences come to know my characters better so that there is a greater impact when they change. Meanwhile, the purpose of the “storm is brewing” sequence is to show that not all is right in the world. We know Dunric will invade soon. This propels us into the inciting incident, which causes a rift in a protagonist's world. In *Tangled*, the inciting incident occurs when Rapunzel first encounters Flynn, and romantic comedies typically use the inciting incident as a “meet cute,” where the protagonist first meets the love interest. Since my story is primarily about the adventure and not the romance, I chose

instead to focus on the call to adventure. Valerie's caravan is attacked and she needs to get directions back to Edelstein. I drew from *Tangled* when Valerie enters a tavern to get information but is ambushed and has to sneak out. She meets Ralph, who presents her with a dilemma: Either surrender to Dunric, or go after the legendary crystal of power. She crosses the threshold and commits to the quest when she chooses to go with Ralph.

The adventure sequences in Act II are some of the most freeing and yet most frustrating parts of writing a story. Dr. Murray calls Act II "the place where all writers go to die." It is so tempting to write "talking head" scenes, where the characters simply talk and give exposition without conflict. In addition, the characters have to be pushed on the quest and encounter conflict. There's a joke within my thesis group that Disney movies tend to use wolves. *Beauty and the Beast* uses wolves to inspire Belle's love for the beast and his bravery. *Frozen* uses wolves to destroy the sled and deplete Kristoff, Anna, and Sven of resources. The sled's destruction also pushes Kristoff to help Anna since she promises a replacement. Wolves are an easy fix to push the characters on the journey, but I wanted to do something different. So, I made my obstacles into alligators. In turn, I also changed the setting to a swamp. The gators return again at the brick wall, when Ralph summons them to kill Valerie. The first gator scene also provides a way for me to give background information about the crystal while having conflict. We know the gators are there, and Albert can sense them, but Valerie and Ralph talk freely. The dramatic irony of the scene excuses the otherwise entirely expositional dialogue.

Originally, I wrote Ralph with an owl companion, but when I had him summon gators I realized I wanted to set up his summoning abilities. That's when the owl in Act I became not a companion but a summon. The owl scene also gives a warning of Ralph's

character, and he later enforces that he's not a healer but a fighter. Valerie's character readily accepts this because of her affinity to fighting, and it is only the peace-loving Raimund that instills doubt that Ralph is not a trustworthy character. My characters are actually one of my favorite parts of my story. Even though *Brave* capitalized on a fighting princess, it's obviously not the norm. And who ever heard of a peaceful commander? In addition, my mentor turns to a villain, which is a fun twist of the helpful wizard motif in many medieval stories. Ironically, one of my favorite and most helpful characters is the ass, Albert. I had a lot of fun with him. A pleasant surprise came when I named my thugs. Dr. Murray asked me to name them so they weren't merely "Thug 1, 2, etc." When I named them, they took on very distinct personalities that I can imagine how fun it will be for concept artists to create. Four of the five thugs have highly similar names: Earl, Murl, Pearl, and Burl. The last two names especially evidence a lot of their characters, one prissy and one burly. My fifth thug's name is Terrence, who is very much an arrogant and annoyed leader of the thugs before he disappears in the mountain. (Fun addition: Terrence disappears, and then Valerie joins the thugs in the end to make Earl, Murl, Pearl, Burl, and girl.)

The midpoint of a story marks an active decision of the protagonist that changes the course of the story and leads to the brick wall. My midpoint shows Valerie actually using her mother's ring and getting the crystal instead of fighting, which would be her normal course of action. Originally I did not have Terrence meet them in the cavern and fight them, and the scene seemed far too easy. Putting Terrence in the scene escalated conflict, increased Valerie's decisions, and showcased more of Ralph's character.

I also learned how to set up and pay off certain details. For instance, in the beginning of Act II Ralph warns Valerie against eating berries from a lily of the valley because they are poisonous; in the second half of Act II, we see Ralph holding a stalk of lily of the valley behind his back. We know he poisoned her, and therefore is not the great mentor we thought he was. He becomes a shapeshifter through the set up and payoff.

The brick wall is perhaps one of my favorite parts of a story because I truly feel for the characters. In writing, I faced a lot of brick walls of my own: frustration, stress, writer's block, apathy, and depression. I understand a lot of what that feels like, so when my character finally pushes through it's an encouragement to me. The brick wall represents "all is lost," as though there is no way the protagonist can succeed on the quest. In my story, Ralph takes the crystal, knocks out the thugs and Raimund, summons gators to kill Valerie, and leaves to destroy the kings. It appears that all hope is lost. A mentor figure generally gives the protagonist a pep talk to push them into the final act, and in this case the mentor is Albert. Who would have thought, an ass as a mentor? Unexpected twists like these make me love my story.

The third act tends to move quickly, and I struggled a lot in learning to stretch it out and heighten the stakes. The first part of Act III shows a forming plan: Valerie goes with the thugs to the battle and halts the fight. There's an apparent success: she gets the staff! But there's something wrong. Oftentimes this represents a trap. In my story, Valerie's plan doesn't work: The staff won't break. She has to formulate a new plan and execute it before Ralph kills them all. This part is also called a "mini brick wall" because it represents another hurdle to conquer, but this time the protagonist doesn't need the help

of a mentor. Valerie pushes through on her own.

A funny thing happened when I was writing this part of the story. I had her get a bow and arrows, and she was to tie the ring onto the arrow and shoot it into Ralph's staff. Then before I knew it, I had a giant summon falling on and breaking the arrows. When I saw the words on the page, I was so confused. Did I write that? She needs arrows. She needs those. They just broke. Why did I break the arrows? How is she going to get more arrows? I had these reactions and knew I had to keep the broken arrows. If I have this reaction as the writer, then how much more will the audience respond? So I had to brainstorm with a friend to think of how she was going to make an arrow. I had always intended her to have a splint on her leg, and I noticed that I never actually wrote it in. So when I had her create an arrow out of her splint, I had to go back in my story and set up Raimund's applying the splint to her leg.

The climax is possibly the most familiar of the story beats, because it manifests itself in all genres in the same way. This is the final showdown between the protagonist and antagonist. Valerie has one shot, and she shoots her crystal into Ralph's, causing it to break and be destroyed. For hero stories, the trope is that the hero doesn't directly kill the villain but the villain destroys himself or else dies by accident. In *Tangled*, Mother Gothel dies as Rapunzel's hair is cut. Gaston dies by falling off the castle in *Beauty and the Beast*. Sometimes the villain is redeemed, such as in *The Lego Movie*, but Ralph was already a shapeshifter and not trustworthy, so I decided to kill him off. The purity of the crystal destroys his evil heart in a way that perhaps my story does not explain, but I trust my audience to understand. The light defeats the darkness, and Ralph was darkness and needed to be defeated. Dunric, on the other hand, was a more vague character. We didn't

know his motivation for fighting. Certainly medieval Germany contained a lot of inter-kingdom warfare, so I didn't feel the need to give him a clear desire line. I also wanted him to ally with Edelstein at the end because it marks the completion of Valerie's character arc: She is no longer concerned with vengeance on the living, but with honoring the dead and the living. The fruit of her forgiveness is alliance and peace. The resolution circles back around to the beginning and shows how the characters have changed. I threw them in the same setting under a similar celebration, but the characters interact opposite from the beginning. There is peace, love, and fun instead of boredom and fighting.

I tried to make my story into a sort of chiasmic structure, where the story mirrors out from the middle. From the middle of the story going both forward and backward, the characters hit a bridge, cross a swamp, go to battle, and then go home to a celebration. Obviously the characters are very different from the beginning and end, which is desirable. The only part that is left out is the tavern; I took solace that *Frozen* also abandons Oaken's trading post after its scene.

As you may have noticed, there was a lot of going back and forth in my story between acts. In a sense, I think writing is like a dance, especially when you have such set ups and payoffs as I did. I recognized the need for certain conflict or events to happen, so then set it up so it wasn't just a convenience for the story. By building solid foundations, audiences come to accept even seemingly outrageous details.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, the story I'm telling has gone through many transformations. While it started as a retelling of *Beauty and the*

*Beast*, it morphed into a tale of revenge and then ultimately into its current form, a story of maturity and responsibility. My female protagonist, Valerie, is a strong and spirited princess: she prefers sparring with a dummy alongside her donkey Albert than dancing with a man alongside nobility. She has similar character attributes as Merida from *Brave*, yet Valerie is older and therefore more stubborn than whiney in her rebellion. Where *Brave* fails, in my opinion, is in the moral department, because Merida always gets her way. Even at the climax, she says, “I want you back” — thereby expressing her selfish desires and self-centered worldview — and she gets precisely what she wants, instantly: her mother becomes human again. Though the movie was theoretically about a mother and daughter coming together, it actually was about a girl getting everything she wants and her mother conforming to her wishes. Our world already contains enough rebellious and proud teenagers. I want to tell a story that warns against that and teaches humility and responsibility. Valerie wants to fight for herself, but through her actions nearly destroys her own kingdom.

Like most Disney movies, there is a romance in my adventure tale. Valerie, like Merida, first revolts at the idea of marriage; but she also doesn’t want to go to a “nunnery.” The love interest, Raimund, is also Edelstein’s commander and therefore is a natural match for the princess. Their first meeting, as in many romantic comedies, is a disaster. He gets stuck on their adventure, though, and learns to appreciate her strength and stubborn spirit, just as she learns to appreciate his humility and ironically poetic spirit. Since the story isn’t primarily a romance, it doesn’t conclude with the traditional Disney wedding. The story promises a relationship between them, but like *Frozen*, does not explicitly show a “happily ever after.”

One of my greatest challenges was learning that every character change must express itself in an external action. In a stageplay, a character may monologue or speak of how she is thinking or how her thinking has changed; yet a screenplay works only in action. Dialogue is used quite sparsely in screenplays. In fact, many screenwriters will write entire scenes without dialogue before they pepper in lines.

The main problem with my first and second story iterations was that there wasn't a central adventure, storyline, or MacGuffin. The MacGuffin refers to "the main driving force of the movie" (Murray 6). There must be a main quest to follow, a main object to pursue. In *Tangled*, the object to see is the floating lights. In *Frozen* they seek Elsa in order to bring back summer. Obviously, the characters' goals change once they're on the quest. Rapunzel realizes that she loves and wants Flynn; Anna learns what true love is. Despite the changing goals, or changing MacGuffin, there is a main storyline of adventure. It took me three story iterations to realize that there has to be a main external goal instead of merely an internal journey from selfish to selfless. Dr. Murray explained this point several times, but it took me three drafts to truly understand it. Internal journeys aren't expressed well in screenplays. Internal journeys work well in novel format, but not in screenplay format. In other words, one very important thing I learned through this process is that different stories require different devices and techniques. My first two iterations leaned toward a novel format because the stories were very internal, while my third iteration definitely works better as a screenplay because of the external adventure. Also, because I learned this, I learned why many movies adapted from books don't turn out well. More often than not, the stories must be reworked to fit within the screenplay format and guidelines.

Another important aspect of my particular story is that not all loose ends are tied at the conclusion: not every issue is resolved at the end. The mountain and crystal and their power are still present, and an antagonist could yet utilize its power for evil. I learned that in a good story, there should be some mystery and loose ends present, to intrigue the audience to keep thinking of the story as well as to provide an opportunity for a sequel. I personally despise sequels, but I love the loose threads of stories. Despite the agony of not knowing how the story ended, I love how Margaret Mitchell concluded *Gone with the Wind*. Miyasaki's *Spirited Away* also capitalizes on this technique and leaves the audience wondering if Chihiro will ever see Haku again or how she will live after her experience in the spirit realm. *Toy Story 3* utilizes this technique when Andy gives the toys away: audiences don't know how the story continues, so they imagine the possibilities and continue in the magic of the story. *The Incredibles* and *The Lego Movie* end in a similar vein and inspire ideas of a sequel.

An integral writing tactic I learned through three drafts and will continue into future work was the importance of imbedding the moral into the story and action instead of explicating it in dialogue. In movies, the inner conflict should manifest itself in an external manifestation or outward adventure. For instance, Mulan must learn that her honor does not rely on someone's opinion of her, but on her view of herself and her actions. This is manifested through the framing adventure of China defeating the Huns. In fact, the moral must be teased out of the narrative because it is so well hidden. This is something that filmmakers who are Christian typically don't practice well: Instead, they veer towards preachy messages or dialogue and very explicit morals that bore and tire the audience if they accept it — or, even, push away those who disagree. That is not to say

that movies that contain Christian themes are not marketable. Quite to the contrary: There is a huge demand for positive worldview programming. It is time, however, to infuse that market with outstanding storytelling skills rather than being satisfied with financial success.

### *Personal Reflection*

The creative writing process profoundly influenced my appreciation of Great Texts, especially of moralistic stories. I had thought that writing moralistic stories from Ovid to C.S. Lewis was relatively simple, that the hard part was making the writing sound pretty. However, when I learned to see the story structure of texts and movies, I began to see how incredibly difficult and nuanced the creative writing process. Clearly, there is an aspect of making the writing sound pretty, even in the snappy screenwriting form; but the story and its ideas captivate when words are sparse. I also began to see how the Great Texts that did not contain specific stories (such as Aquinas and other philosophy) could be formed into a story for easier digestion. I, for one, do not easily understand philosophy because of its lofty language and structure; yet whenever the ideas are condensed and phrased in a story, I understand and appreciate the ideas. (Let me again say that stories are the layman of philosophy.) Whenever I wrote a character performing a certain way, I began to see the ideas of Augustine and Aquinas come to life. A character, even one I wrote, demonstrated the philosophy that I never before understood. Even something like Aquinas's proof of greed leading to other sins demonstrated in my character of Ralph showcased the beauty of moral philosophy and Christian ethics.

There is a picture from Homer's *The Odyssey* that I can never forget. Penelope wove on her loom by day and unraveled it by night to dissuade men from pursuing her. In class, Dr. Murray spoke of the reflection of weaving in storytelling, and how Homer was weaving this story and creating a picture by the intersecting threads of story. The beauty of that image never left me, and now that I have created something of my own, I understand it even more. I hope that one day I will be able to write something that stands the test of time like *The Odyssey*, and I don't pretend to say that my feeble work is on par with such a masterpiece. But with more work and more practice, perhaps I can reach the shadow of Homer, and then say that this thesis was the beginning of a writer's journey.

-KCS



QUEEN RACHEL  
With her as a sister, he'll be one  
tough cookie.

KING FREDERICK  
She'll still eat him.

QUEEN RACHEL  
Frederick.

KING FREDERICK  
It's true.

Frederick picks up Valerie and sits her down at their picnic.

QUEEN RACHEL  
We have exciting news.

KING FREDERICK  
Do you remember seeing the babies  
with their mothers on the street?

YOUNG VALERIE  
Yes. Where do the mothers get them?

KING FREDERICK  
That's an explanation for another  
time--

QUEEN RACHEL  
You're going to be a big sister.

YOUNG VALERIE  
Really. I'm going to have a sister.

QUEEN RACHEL  
I don't know yet, Val. We could get  
a girl or a boy.

YOUNG VALERIE  
You should get a girl. Boys are  
smelly.

A guard approaches and salutes the king. Several guards  
emerge and surround the family. Rachel looks concerned.

KING FREDERICK  
Dunric.

The guard nods. Frederick rises and goes with him.

QUEEN RACHEL  
Don't worry. It's probably nothing.

Rachel and Valerie rise. A few GUARDS go with the king while a few station around the queen and princess.

The alarm SOUNDS.

The guards tighten around Rachel and Valerie, and the cluster moves toward the gates.

The king runs to the top of the hill.

Enemy soldiers stream out across the landscape.

A horseman distinguishes himself. He is DUNRIC (35).

He extends his arm, and archers release a flurry of arrows.

Guards shield the royal family and lead them up the rampart.

Dunric notices their retreat and gallops forward.

Soldiers fall to his left and right.

Arrows fly again.

Guards protect the family. One guard perishes. Rachel watches him fall.

The enemy soldiers advance.

The guard turn to attack the onslaught while the family run inside the gates.

The enemy army breaks through the gates.

Dunric sees the family enter the castle, and signals to five men.

DUNRIC

After them.

The men break through the guards and race inside the castle.

INT CASTLE HALLWAY DAY

The king pushes them through the hallways.

Guards come out behind them and defend against the enemy.

Three soldiers break through.

Dunric's men stream into the hallways. Guards stream from rooms and push them back.

INT CASTLE BALLROOM DAY

The family flies in, slams the door, and bars it.

The three enemy soldiers break down the door.

The king draws a sword and attacks the men.

Guards emerge from other doorways and shield the queen and princess.

Frederick fells a man.

Guards kill the remaining two.

The cluster around the ladies relaxes.

EXT CASTLE DAY

Dunric watches guards stream out of the castle and overcome his army.

DUNRIC

Fall back.

The enemy flees.

The gates shut.

INT CASTLE BALLROOM DAY

A call of retreat SOUNDS.

Frederick relaxes, sheathes his sword, and embraces his family.

KING FREDERICK

It's over.

A guard approaches and salutes, and the king separates to talk to a group of them.

The cluster around the ladies disperses.

The fallen soldier opens his eyes. His hand travels to his bow.

Rachel kneels and places her hands on Valerie's shoulders. She wipes the tears off her eyes and smiles.

The soldier trembles and notches an arrow.

QUEEN RACHEL  
It's okay. It's over.

Rachel notices the man aim at them. Rachel places herself in front of her child.

SCREAM.

The arrow hits Rachel. She tumbles to the ground.

YOUNG VALERIE  
Mama!

Everything goes SILENT.

The soldier falls dead.

The king parts his men and runs to his wife's side.

Guards pick up Valerie and tow her away while she cries.

INT QUEEN'S BEDROOM DAY

Rachel lies in bed. Attendants mill about.

A midwife washes her hands and places a cross on a small, wrapped bundle before she carries it out of the room.

The king watches with tears in his eyes.

A doctor inspects Rachel. He looks to Frederick and shakes his head.

The doctor packs his bag.

Valerie and Frederick approach the bed.

QUEEN RACHEL  
My love.

YOUNG VALERIE  
Mama.

The queen pulls off her RING. She takes Valerie's hand, places her ring in it, and closes the hand.

QUEEN RACHEL  
Your hand is so small to bear this weight. God help you.

Valerie cries. Queen places her hand on Valerie's cheek and wipes her tears.

YOUNG VALERIE  
Don't die. I need you.

QUEEN RACHEL  
You're a strong girl. I love you.

Queen looks to her husband and smiles.

Her hand falls away.

Valerie holds the hand and cries. The king bows his head and places his arm around her.

INT VALERIE'S ROOM MORNING

A maidservant named KARLA (40) bursts through the doors. The bed has a lump beneath its covers.

KARLA  
Frau Valerie, you were supposed to  
wake hours ago.

SILENCE.

Karla sighs. She rips the curtains apart.

KARLA  
Princess, you have to get up now.  
Your father won't have you tardy.

SILENCE.

Karla crosses to the bed.

KARLA  
Are you listening to me?

She rips back the covers to reveal pillows where a body should be.

She screams Valerie's name.

EXT CASTLE FIELD SUNRISE

RUSTLE. There's a movement behind a hay bale.

SWISH. A boot peeks from behind a tree.

Fingers appear around the edge, and then an eye peers out.

It disappears. The figure notches an arrow. The hand pulls back on the bow, and the sun glints off of the ring laced on her necklace. It's VALERIE (now 18). She exhales, spins out from the behind the tree, and fires.

Bulls-eye.

She grins as sweat courses down her face.

A donkey BRAYS.

VALERIE

Thanks, Albert. I feel good about that one too.

She walks to the back of the hay bale. A hole in the middle of the bale stores her weapons. She places her bow and arrows into the hole and retrieves a sword.

INT CASTLE MORNING

Karla runs through several rooms of the castle and calls for Valerie.

EXT CASTLE TOWER MORNING

KARLA

Valerie.

The scream reverberates throughout the city and forest.

It hits Valerie just as she thrusts, and she misses her target.

Albert BRAYS.

Valerie stabilizes and GROANS.

VALERIE

Why can't everyone leave me alone.

Albert BRAYS.

VALERIE

Not you too. What's the big deal anyway.

He BRAYS and nudges her toward the castle.

VALERIE

Albert, stop it. I don't need to go anywhere. At least one more go.

She raises her sword.

Albert bumps his head against her. She drops the sword and falls on her bum. She glares at him.

He nuzzles into her necklace.

VALERIE

Albert, why didn't you tell me.

He SNORTS.

She jumps up, runs to the bale, and stashes her sword. She picks up extra hay to conceal the hole, and some falls in her hair.

She runs back to the castle. Albert follows her.

INT CASTLE HALLWAY MORNING

Valerie sprints and dodges servants. Albert's hooves CLOP on the stone floor.

They round a corner, face Val's bedroom, and run into Karla.

Karla can't speak for a moment. She eyes Valerie's state.

KARLA

How am I supposed to fix this.  
You're filthy, tracking mud through  
the hallways, and what is he doing  
inside the castle.

She points to Albert. His ears go down, and his face droops.

VALERIE

We lost track of time.

KARLA

You talk about that donkey like  
he's a man. Come. We must see what  
magic Karla can work on you.

She pushes Valerie into her room. Albert tries to follow. Karla puts a finger in his face.

KARLA

You. Back outside.

His ears drop. She slams the doors shut.

INT CASTLE BALLROOM DAY

Doors open to reveal the princess.

She slumps through a line of people toward her father, who stands on the podium.

NOBLEMAN  
Happy birthday, Princess.

NOBLEWOMAN  
Happy birthday, Princess.

She GRUMBLES in reply.

She steps up on the platform and stands next to her father.

The trumpets HERALD.

The people bow and curtsy.

Her dad leans in to her.

KING FREDERICK  
You're late.

VALERIE  
I'm here.

Frederick puts on a smile. The musicians begin to play.

Gentlemen approach and extend a hand to dance. She fake smiles and grabs a cookie off a passing waiter's platter.

The gentlemen take other women to the floor.

KING FREDERICK  
You can lead the girl to the party,  
but you can't make her dance.

She gives him a look. He bumps her and smiles, then descends to the dance floor.

Valerie crosses her arms and looks bored to death.

Commander RAIMUND (20) nears.

RAIMUND  
May I?

VALERIE  
No thank you.

He holds his hand extended, unsure.

VALERIE

No thank you.

He pulls his hand back and turns to walk away. The king approaches.

KING FREDERICK

Commander Raimund, so good to see you. You must give my daughter the honor of a dance.

Raimund extends his hand to her.

She looks at her dad, who gives her the eye.

She takes the hand and shuffles onto the dance floor.

They dance: they don't look each other in the eye or move well together.

RAIMUND

Quite a lovely party, Princess.

VALERIE

I didn't ask for it.

RAIMUND

You look lovely.

VALERIE

I look like a bird during mating season.

RAIMUND

I'm speechless. Really. This proposal is unexpected.

VALERIE

What. No. Never in a thousand years.

RAIMUND

Don't worry. I'm joking. Spare me the thought.

VALERIE

What's that supposed to mean.

RAIMUND

It's just that the princess is spirited.

VALERIE

You mean difficult.

RAIMUND

I suppose.

She stomps on his foot in heels. He cringes.

RAIMUND

Nice shoes, Cinderella.

The song concludes. He bows, and she walks away.

He rises, composes his dignity, and limps off the floor.

Valerie sees gentlemen approach her, and she dashes to the buffet table to munch some cookies.

Guards approach the king and salute. They talk. Frederick leaves with several guards.

The remainder of the guard approaches and salutes Raimund. They talk and follow the king out.

Valerie puts down a cookie and follows.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

The guards, commander, king, and noblemen stand around a table with a map of the kingdom. Pegs mark certain areas of the map.

GUARD

They're getting bolder. Scouts have reported attacks here and here.

He places two more pegs on the map. They are closer to the city.

INT HALLWAY DAY

Valerie sneaks, finds a hole in the wall, and peeks through. The conversation carries.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

KING FREDERICK

Dunric.

EXT VILLAGE SUNSET

Flames CRACKLE and ripple toward the sky. Homes and barns burn around fallen bodies.

RAIMUND (V.O.)  
They're preparing a base.

A fallen branch CRUNCHES under a boot. It's Dunric's.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

KING FREDERICK  
They'll attack the city.

RAIMUND  
It's only a matter of time. And  
judging from the scouts'  
descriptions, we're outnumbered.

KING FREDERICK  
We must move Valerie to safety.

RAIMUND  
What about the monastery. Even  
Dunric wouldn't attack a holy  
place.

He points on the map opposite the pegs.

The men nod.

INT HALLWAY DAY

Valerie looks disgusted.

VALERIE  
A nunnery.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

KING FREDERICK  
It's decided. Arrange a carriage to  
depart in the morning.

NOBLEMAN  
One more matter deserves our  
attention.

KING FREDERICK  
Must we discuss this now.

NOBLEMAN

She is of age. You know as well as I that if the princess isn't married within 30 days of her 18th birthday, the throne passes to the next in line. She'll have to marry or forfeit the throne.

INT HALLWAY DAY

Valerie stifles a gag.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

KING FREDERICK

Then it seems war has spared her highness from a hasty decision. We can revisit this when the kingdom is safe. I'm sure even you would agree.

The nobleman remains silent.

INT VALERIE'S ROOM NIGHT

Valerie trudges in and leans on a chair.

VALERIE

Karla. Get me out of this thing.

Karla enters and unties her dress and corset.

KARLA

It wasn't so bad.

VALERIE

Dad made me dance with the commander, who insulted me the whole time. What's the point of this torture device anyway. You can't move at all in it.

Karla frees her from the confines of her dress. Valerie stretches.

KARLA

Don't blame your discontent on the dress. It's for a lover, not a fighter.

VALERIE  
Lovers don't save kingdoms, Karla.

Valerie sits at a mirror, removes her tiara, and takes pins out of her hair.

KARLA  
That's not your job.

Karla takes her hair down. She unties the necklace.

VALERIE  
I want it on.

KARLA  
Valerie, necklaces become nooses  
when you sleep.

VALERIE  
Mom's necklace wouldn't strangle  
me.

Karla gives her a look.

Valerie SIGHS and walks to the bed.

Karla hangs the dress.

KARLA  
Guten nacht, Frau Valerie.

VALERIE  
Guten nacht.

Karla extinguishes all but Valerie's bedside candle, and exits.

Valerie rises from bed, crosses to the mirror, and takes the necklace.

She returns to her bed, kisses the ring, and puts it under her pillow.

VALERIE  
Guten nacht, Mama.

She blows out the candle.

EXT      CASTLE GATES      MORNING

Valerie and Karla stand in silence while servants load her bags into the carriage. There's an entire caravan of carriages.

Frederick joins them.

KING FREDERICK

You're an adult now. You must be  
taught your letters.

VALERIE

From a nunnery.

KING FREDERICK

Monastery. No better way than from  
the holy texts.

Valerie strides to the carriage and struggles up the steps.

She can't fit her skirts through the carriage door. She  
struggles to smash them.

Karla helps her squeeze inside the door.

The carriage takes off. Albert trots after it.

The servants return inside. King Frederick watches the  
carriage disappear.

KING FREDERICK

Be safe, my daughter.

INT CARRIAGE DAY

Valerie is smothered by her own skirts.

Albert BRAYS.

Valerie pushes her skirts down to see out the window. Albert  
trots beside her.

VALERIE

Albert. Thank God you're coming.  
I'd die of boredom without you.

The drivers and servants look back at her. They're baffled.

Albert BRAYS.

VALERIE

I tried to pack the weapons. Karla  
took them from me and said weapons  
weren't allowed in a monastery. Can  
you believe that. What am I  
supposed to do.

Albert BRAYS.

VALERIE

I know. Everyone's so cruel to me.  
But I hid a dagger in my bag.  
Albert, you're the best friend I've  
ever had.

She scratches his ears. He nuzzles her hand and smiles.

She brings her hand back in. Her skirts pop back up. She  
sighs, closes her eyes, and falls asleep.

EXT CARRIAGE NIGHT

A horse WHINNIES.

CRASH. The carriage falls on its side.

Valerie wakes, and is cushioned by her skirts from injury.

DRIVER

Ambush.

Valerie rights herself and peeks out the window.

Men crawl out of the forest. In the light of their torches,  
she can see the sign of Dunric on their breasts. She GASPS.

She fights with her skirt and sees the battle is hopeless.

The men attack the front carriage.

Valerie looks around for a way of escape. She sees broken  
GLASS from the window.

Men YELL as Dunric's men kill them. They approach the second  
carriage. Men flee. The enemy chases them down and kills  
them.

She cuts wildly at her skirts.

The men approach her carriage and look inside.

They see a heap of skirts topped with a tiara.

From the edge of the forest, Valerie peeks from behind the  
tree and gasps for air.

ENEMY SOLDIER

A crown but no princess.

Dunric grabs the crown from his hand, throws it on the  
ground, and grinds it into the dirt.

DUNRIC

She can't have gone far. We have to  
get that crystal.

He waves a hand, and the soldiers move out. Men carry off  
supplies and leave wreckage, bodies, and her crown.

She emerges from the trees.

She picks up her crown and dusts it off. She leaves it on the  
carriage.

She pulls bags from her carriage. She opens her bag, riffs  
through the gowns, grabs a dagger, and throws the bag aside.

She opens a servant's bag, pulls out some clothes, and dons  
them. She stretches, and the clothes give her full range of  
motion.

She searches for shoes. There aren't any in the bag. She  
slips a foot out of her heel and tests the ground. It's sharp  
and cuts her foot. She slips the foot back in her heel.

She cuts a piece of her skirt to use as a cloak, and uses a  
nail to pin it together.

She gives one long look at the wreckage. She walks into the  
forest.

EXT        FOREST        DAY

Valerie sneaks through the forest.

She finds a covering, stops, sits, and removes her heels.  
Blisters cover her feet. She bows her head.

RUSTLE. Her head snaps to the sound. The leaves move.

She rises, backs against a tree, and draws her dagger.  
RUSTLE.

BRAY. Albert runs up to greet her. She sheathes the dagger.

VALERIE

Albert. You made it. How did you  
escape. Your great animal  
instincts, I bet. You clever ass.

She scratches his head, and he GRUNTS at her.

She looks at her feet, and he SNIFFS them.

He bows his neck. She mounts him, and they continue on.

Her HEELS are left on the ground.

EXT        TAVERN        DAY

Valerie and Albert come upon a village and approach the tavern.

Valerie dismounts in the shadows.

                  VALERIE  
                  Stay here, Albert. I'll get  
                  directions back to Edelstein.

He protests then obeys.

INT        TAVERN        DAY

Despite the early hour, the tavern is filled. Drinks and glasses litter the tables, and CHATTER fills the air.

Valerie pulls her cloak tighter and approaches the bar.

The bartender frenzies about. She flags him. He doesn't notice.

                  VALERIE  
                  Excuse me. Could you tell me the  
                  way to Edelstein.

                  BARTENDER  
                  Get in line, sweetie. I'm a little  
                  busy here.

She starts again. She yields and looks around. Men and women alike are occupied.

One man in a corner sits alone, RALPH (60). His face is obscured. An eye-patch sticks out of the shadow. His beard falls on the table. A STAFF leans against the wall.

                  VALERIE  
                  Excuse me. Do you know the way to  
                  Edelstein.

                  RALPH  
                  Yes.

He sticks a dead salamander in his mouth and chews.

                  VALERIE  
                  Will you tell me the way.

His eyes peer up at her. He takes a swig of his drink.

RALPH

No.

He sets his drink down. An eyeball floats in it.

Valerie squirms and turns to go.

VALERIE

Thanks anyway.

RALPH

You're Rachel's girl.

She stops dead in her tracks. She turns to face him.

He points to her necklace and the ring. She clutches it and stuffs it inside her tunic.

RALPH

You want to save the kingdom, don't you.

VALERIE

I just want to get back to Edelstein.

RALPH

So you can marry the commander.

She SCOFFS.

VALERIE

No, so I can fight. Wait. How did you-- you're a seer, aren't you. Show me the way to Edelstein.

RALPH

Dunric will invade soon, and he will destroy your kingdom unless--

He coughs up a salamander leg. It twitches. He sticks it back in his mouth. He takes another swig of eyeball brew.

VALERIE

Unless.

RALPH

Unless you acquire the crystal of power and destroy him.

VALERIE  
I don't need a crystal. I'll kill  
him myself.

RALPH  
Go ahead. He's right outside.

She peers out the window.

Dunric's men swarm like bees and search houses in the  
village. Dunric rides in their midst.

Valerie stares.

RALPH  
You won't defeat them.

VALERIE  
Then help me.

He stands, grabs the eyeball from his drink, dumps the  
liquid, stashes the cup, flips up his eye-patch, and puts the  
eye back in his head.

RALPH  
Follow me.

They climb the stairs.

EXT FOREST DAY

Raimund and guards explore the wreckage.

Raimund picks up and examines the tiara then stashes it in a  
knapsack.

A guard calls from the forest.

GUARD #1  
Commander, we found shoes.

Raimund and his men follow into the forest.

INT TAVERN UPSTAIRS DAY

The two step into a room. A lady SQUEALS and covers herself.

Ralph crosses to the open window. Valerie follows.

VALERIE  
Tell me about this crystal.

RALPH

There is legend of a crystal of power growing from the bark of a tree inside the mountain. This crystal would amplify the power and ability of its carrier. Imagine what you could do if your power multiplied by hundreds. That is the power of the crystal.

VALERIE

Impossible.

RALPH

Anything is possible, my dear. And judging by the size of Dunric's army, Edelstein doesn't stand a chance without it.

He puts a leg out the window.

VALERIE

This is ridiculous. I refuse to listen to this nonsense. Seek it out yourself.

RALPH

Only one of its kind can remove it. And only an heiress can free it from the tree.

He climbs out the window and stops.

RALPH

I'm surprised you don't jump at the opportunity to get revenge on Dunric.

He climbs down the outside of the tavern.

EXT      FOREST      DAY

Raimund examines the shoes and cringes.

RAIMUND

Those are hers alright.

He looks at her tracks, which disappear. He notices the donkey's tracks continue.

He stands and runs after the trail.

INT TAVERN DAY

Men burst through the door and swarm the tavern. Customers raise their hands in surrender.

Soldiers race up the stairs.

INT TAVERN UPSTAIRS DAY

The soldiers burst into the room. The lady SQUEALS again. No one else is in the room.

One soldier crosses to the window and sticks a head out. He looks straight ahead.

EXT TAVERN DAY

Valerie looks up at the soldier's head. He doesn't look down and returns inside.

She EXHALES.

They land on the ground.

VALERIE

You're quite supple for an old seer.

RALPH

Let's go.

VALERIE

Not without Albert.

RALPH

We don't need a donkey. Leave him.

Valerie sneaks around the side, crouches, and reaches Albert. She shushes him and leads him back to Ralph.

Albert sees Ralph, recoils, and BRAYS.

VALERIE

Albert, no.

She peeks around the side of the tavern. Men heard and approach to investigate.

Ralph uses his staff and conjures an owl, and it flies toward the men and SCREECHES.

Ralph gestures Valerie to come. She and Albert follow him into the shelter of forest.

The owl lands on the roof and dissipates.

The men lie dead on the ground.

EXT FOREST DAY

From behind a tree, Raimund peers at Dunric and men.

EXT VILLAGE DAY

Men flurry in and out of buildings. Dunric sits on a horse in the middle of the main road.

DUNRIC

Cease. She's not here. You five.  
Go. Find her and get that crystal.

The five thugs salute. Their names are EARL, PEARL, MURL, BURL, and TERRENCE.

Several bump into each other and have to regain balance.

TERRENCE

What of the princess? Do you want her dead or alive.

DUNRIC

Once you have the crystal, she's of no use to us. (to army) Roll out. We attack Edelstein in three days' time.

Dunric rides out, and the army follows.

The thugs stay and look at each other.

EARL

So he wants her alive.

PEARL

I got the impression he wanted her dead.

MURL

He doesn't care about her. He just wants the crystal.

The Burl GRUNTS and crosses his arms.

TERRENCE

Let's just go find her and get the crystal.

EARL

How do we know she has it.

TERRENCE

We don't. We follow orders.

He walks toward the forest. Burl follows him.

The rest of them look at each other.

The bartender STOMPS out of the tavern and gives them a fiery look.

They scurry to follow their comrades.

PEARL

Wait up.

EXT FOREST DAY

Raimund overheard it all.

He paces and mutters to himself.

RAIMUND

I need to go back.

A root trips him.

RAIMUND

What's more important, a girl or the entire kingdom. An immature girl at that.

His guards approach.

GUARD

Commander, any news about the princess.

RAIMUND

We must return to Edelstein.

GUARD

Our orders are to get the princess--

RAIMUND

I know our orders, but Dunric will attack in three days' time.

GUARD  
What is a soldier's first rule.

RAIMUND  
To follow orders.

GUARD  
Then you must. On your order, we  
may return to warn the king and  
prepare for battle.

RAIMUND  
You return to the castle. I'll get  
her and be back shortly.

The guard salutes and heads out.

Raimund GROANS and kicks the root.

EXT SWAMP DAY

Valerie follows Ralph through the forest and to a swamp.

They SLOSH through the mud.

VALERIE  
The mountain is close, I hope.

RALPH  
Due north. We should reach it by  
tomorrow. Don't step there.

She steps, and a snake writhes.

She SCREAMS.

The snake poises to attack. Ralph blasts it with magic from  
his staff. It explodes.

Valerie catches her breath.

VALERIE  
Seer or magician?

RALPH  
They're practically euphemisms.

They continue. The muddy water becomes deeper, and they have  
to step around on stones.

Albert slips and cuts a leg on a stone. A thin trail of blood  
runs down his hoof.

SNIFF.

A gator opens his eyes at the smell of blood. He swims toward the smell. His body camouflages with the swamp.

The humans and donkey continue.

VALERIE

Where did this crystal come from.

RALPH

According to legend, an angel bequeathed the crystal tree to the Virgin Queen, first ruler of Edelstein. But she feared that men would use its power for evil and built a mountain around the tree.

Albert senses something. He turns his head and sees nothing. He continues on.

VALERIE

This is all legend, not fact. The crystal might not even exist.

RALPH

Even legends contain a portion of truth. The Virgin kept a portion of the crystal to use for good, and she passed it on to her followers. Queen Rachel was the last one known to possess the crystal.

VALERIE

My mother.

Albert sniffs and smells something. He turns his head and sees nothing. He WHIMPERS.

VALERIE

She never told me anything about a crystal.

RALPH

She never got the chance. But she gave it to you.

He points to her neck. Valerie touches a hand to the ring on her necklace.

Albert senses movement. He turns his head to face a gator.

He BRAYS.

Valerie slips, and her foot hits a moving platform. It's a gator tail.

The group looks and realizes the gators are everywhere.

RALPH

Run.

They jump from stone to stone.

Albert slips and falls into the swamp.

VALERIE

Albert.

Valerie goes back to protect him. She draws her dagger and swipes at the gators.

Albert kicks them.

Ralph goes back to protect them. He blasts the gators with his staff. They advance.

The gators surround them.

Ralph releases a FLARE from his staff. The flare shoots up and out. It plummets the gators and burns them enough to discourage them from any more attacks.

EXT FOREST DAY

Dunric's thugs hear and see Ralph's FLARE in the distance. They run after it.

EXT FOREST DAY

Raimund also follows the flare.

EXT FOREST SUNSET

Valerie cuts a portion of her cape and wraps Albert's wound.

VALERIE

You really can't heal it. What kind of magician are you.

RALPH

I happen to be better at offensive spells than healing spells.

VALERIE  
How about shelter spells. Or cookie  
spells.

RALPH  
Nope.

VALERIE  
At least you're good in battle.

Her stomach GRUMBLES.

She searches around for food and grabs some berries from a  
LILY OF THE VALLEY.

RALPH  
That's poisonous.

She throws it out.

VALERIE  
What I wouldn't give for a cookie  
right now.

She hacks a hole in a bush, climbs in, and curls up.

Albert lies down in front of the opening.

Ralph blasts a hole in a tree. The tree topples over. He lies  
down inside.

Inside the bush, Valerie pulls out her necklace, examines the  
ring, and kisses it.

VALERIE  
Guten nacht, Mama.

EXT FOREST SUNRISE

Valerie wakes to the CRACKLE of a fire and a nice smell.

Her stomach GRUMBLES.

She climbs out of her hole and startles. Raimund cooks over a  
fire.

RAIMUND  
Guten morgen, Princess.

VALERIE  
Commander. What are you doing here.

RAIMUND

Nice to see you too, especially after that little gift you gave me on the dance floor. I don't know why your father is so concerned about your safety.

VALERIE

For your information, I battled gators.

RAIMUND

I bet they ran away at the step of your heel.

VALERIE

At least they were more attractive than you.

RAIMUND

I'm bred for war, not looking pretty like you.

Ralph sits up in his tree-bed.

RALPH

Did someone say bread.

He jumps out of the trunk and grabs some bread from beside the fire.

Raimund stares in bewilderment.

VALERIE

Commander, Ralph. The magician.

RALPH

(mouth full of food)  
I prefer the term seer.

RAIMUND

Nice to meet you.

RALPH

Is he coming with us.

VALERIE

No.

RAIMUND

What.

RALPH

Oh well. Thanks for the bread.

He takes the remainder of the bread and walks off.

Valerie follows. Raimund grabs her arm.

RAIMUND

You're coming with me to the  
monastery.

She slaps his hand away.

VALERIE

I'm not going anywhere with you,  
and I'm especially not going to a  
nunnery.

RAIMUND

Do you think I want to go anywhere  
with you. A soldier's first rule is  
to follow orders.

VALERIE

Go wash his feet then, you kiss-up.

RAIMUND

I'm no servant. I'm commander of  
armies.

VALERIE

At least I'm commander of my own  
life.

RAIMUND

You mean you're a spoiled brat  
whose daddy gives her everything  
she wants.

VALERIE

That's not true. I want to fight,  
and I fight for what I want.

They hear a voice behind them:

EARL

There she is.

They turn to see Dunric's thugs run toward them.

They run. Albert runs beside them.

RAIMUND

Get on the donkey.

VALERIE

His name's Albert.

He picks her up and throws her on Albert. They run.

They SPLASH through mud and puddles. Valerie ensures that Albert splashes some on Raimund.

Valerie pulls back a tree branch as they run, and releases it to swing back on Raimund. He dodges it in the nick of time.

A fallen tree appears in their path.

Albert jumps. He doesn't clear it. His injured hoof hits the tree. He BRAYS and topples.

Valerie is thrown off. She rolls and isn't harmed.

Raimund throws himself over the log and keeps running.

VALERIE

Albert.

There's a RUSHING river and a bridge ahead. Ralph gestures to them from the other side.

RALPH

Come on.

RAIMUND

Come on, Princess.

VALERIE

Not without Albert.

RAIMUND

It's just a donkey.

VALERIE

He's more human than you.

RAIMUND

He's an ass.

After it leaves his mouth, he realizes what he just said.

Raimund runs back to help them. He gets behind Albert and pushes his backside.

Albert FARTS, and Raimund GASPS for air.

Valerie supports his hurt leg as they walk him to the bridge. Raimund pushes Valerie across.

VALERIE

Albert.

RAIMUND

I got him.

He helps the donkey along the bridge.

Dunric's thugs jump over the fallen tree.

VALERIE

Hurry.

Raimund helps the donkey along. It's slow going.

The thugs near.

Raimund pushes Albert onto grass.

The thugs are about to step onto the bridge.

RALPH

Jump.

Ralph BLASTS the bridge.

Raimund jumps and clings to the ground.

The bridge crumbles into the river.

The thugs stop at river's edge. They turn and run along the river to find another crossing.

The group catches their breath.

RALPH

Guess he's coming with us.

Ralph turns and leaves. Valerie looks at Raimund in disdain, and takes Albert to follow Ralph.

Raimund hoists himself up.

RAIMUND

No problem. I almost died saving  
your ass, but no worries.

He wipes the mud and grass off his tunic and follows them.

EXT MOUNTAIN PATH DAY

The group winds up a mountain on its narrow path. They walk single file: Ralph leads the way, and Raimund brings up the rear.

Albert's hoof knocks some rock off, and he watches it fall down the mountain.

His face pales.

Valerie touches the mountain face.

VALERIE

Are you sure there's a cavern in here. This mountain looks pretty solid.

RAIMUND

(mutters)

You look pretty solid yourself.

Valerie flips around.

VALERIE

What was that.

RAIMUND

Nothing.

Valerie narrows her eyes and turns back around.

RAIMUND

There's a cavern in here?

VALERIE

According to legend.

RAIMUND

Legend. You're going off a legend.

VALERIE

It's the only thing that can save Edelstein.

RAIMUND

You're seeking an old wives' tale while we're preparing for battle. You're such a fool.

She flips around and steadies herself.

VALERIE

You wouldn't dare speak to the Princess that way.

RAIMUND

Someone's got to say it.

She lunges at him and loses her balance. She falls off the cliff--

Raimund catches her. He hoists her back up.

They stare down the mountain and pale.

They breathe.

Valerie realizes they still hold each other. She releases him and turns.

VALERIE

Thanks.

RAIMUND

Just part of the job.

VALERIE

Is it part of your job to criticize me too.

RAIMUND

No more excitement please. Let's not test my reflexes again.

VALERIE

Your reflexes are good.

RAIMUND

Thanks. Your grip's pretty good too.

Valerie flexes her hand to herself and smiles.

VALERIE

I know. I wish I could use it more often.

RAIMUND

A princess's hands are meant for tidier things.

VALERIE

Like needlepoint and poetry.

RAIMUND

I don't know what princesses do. I'm a commander.

VALERIE

I'm a princess and I know what commanders do.



Valerie rises and joins Raimund.

RAIMUND  
That wasn't an invitation.

VALERIE  
Hush.

They look at the stars.

RAIMUND  
Do you know them.

VALERIE  
What.

RAIMUND  
The stars.

VALERIE  
No. I never spent much time looking  
at them.

RAIMUND  
When you're on the field of war,  
oftentimes they're your only  
solace.

Valerie LAUGHS. Raimund stares at her.

VALERIE  
I'm sorry. It's just that  
oftentimes my only solace is  
fighting.

Beat.

RAIMUND  
Virgo's right above this mountain.

VALERIE  
What.

RAIMUND  
The virgin constellation. She's  
right above us.

VALERIE  
The Virgin Queen.

RAIMUND  
The legend again. I hope for your  
sake it's true.

She grasps her necklace.

VALERIE  
I hope for all of us.

Beat.

Raimund removes his cloak and hands it to Valerie.

RAIMUND  
Wad it up under you and you'll be  
able to sleep.

VALERIE  
You'll get cold without it.

RAIMUND  
You'll get cranky without it. Not  
that you aren't anyway.

Valerie opens and shuts her mouth.

VALERIE  
I'll have a comeback tomorrow.

RAIMUND  
Guten nacht, Princess.

She returns to Albert, wads the cloak, and lies down on top  
of it. She looks at her ring.

VALERIE  
Guten nacht.

EXT MOUNTAIN PATH DAY

They hike on the path.

Ralph stops and hugs the mountain face.

RALPH  
It's close.

VALERIE  
What.

RALPH  
The opening to the cavern.

RAIMUND  
How far.

RALPH

A hundred paces, I think. We're nearly there.

Dunric's thugs appear ahead of them. The thugs spot them and run.

The group turns and runs.

Ralph turns to BLAST the thugs. They dodge.

Raimund slips on the rocky ground. Valerie rights him.

VALERIE

Lack of sleep making you clumsy.

RAIMUND

I would have been fine.

VALERIE

Yeah right.

They run on.

Ralph BLASTS at the thugs again. He slips and fires at the mountain.

Rocks rain down on the group. They cling to the mountain face. Rocks dislodge the path ahead of them.

RAIMUND

Bad news. The path is gone.

VALERIE

The path can't just disappear.

RAIMUND

It can and it did.

VALERIE

Jump.

RAIMUND

I don't think you understand the meaning of the word "gone."

VALERIE

There must be something we can do.

RAIMUND

We are stuck between a rock and no place.

VALERIE  
Not a good time for jokes.

RALPH  
Good time for an exit. Or entrance.

Ralph BLASTS a hole in the mountain.

The mountain quakes. Rocks rain on their heads.

Albert BRAYS.

Ralph pulls Valerie through the hole. Raimund dives in after them.

A BLAST, and a rock falls over the opening.

Albert is left on the path. He lowers his ears as the thugs capture him.

They try to push the rock away.

TERRENCE  
Leave it. The seer said there was  
an opening ahead.

They take the donkey and continue.

INT      CAVERN      DAY

Ralph, Val, and Ray slide down into a cavern.

Everything is dark.

VALERIE  
You left Albert. You can't abandon  
a member of our team like that.

RAIMUND  
Princess, calm down.

VALERIE  
I will not calm down. There are  
hooligans up there who might decide  
to eat him.

RAIMUND  
Princess.

VALERIE  
What.

RAIMUND  
Nothing. Just that your necklace is  
glowing.

They look at her necklace. The ring glows.

RALPH  
The crystal.

VALERIE  
It's true.

The mountain shakes. Rocks shower on their heads.

RAIMUND  
We better get it and get out.

They look around. A glow appears in the distance.  
Ralph advances toward the glow, and the pair follow.

EXT MOUNTAIN DAY

The thugs peer into the opening.

TERRENCE  
What are you waiting for. Get in  
there.

EARL  
I'm afraid of the dark.

PEARL  
I'm claustrophobic.

MURL  
The ass won't fit.

Burl GRUNTS and crosses his arms.

TERRENCE  
Fine. You take the donkey around,  
and I'll get them.

He slides in.

The remaining men peer after him. One yells in:

EARL  
Where do we go.

Albert BRAYS.

Burl walks ahead. The others follow.

INT        CAVERN        DAY

The group approaches the glow, which grows more intense.

They enter a round chamber. Water courses horizontally along the walls, and pieces of crystal glow all around them like stars. In the middle, a great tree holds the mother of all crystals.

Valerie holds up her necklace, and the ring's glow matches the glow of the crystal.

RALPH

Only one of its kind can remove it.

She looks at Raimund and approaches the tree.

A sword is DRAWN.

Terrence runs at her with his sword.

She draws her dagger and prepares for the attack.

Raimund draws his sword and approaches.

Valerie parries the thug's sword with her dagger. Though by weapon she is outmatched, she outmatches by skill.

The duel moves in a deadly dance.

Raimund poises to strike Terrence. The dance turns Valerie into his path.

He tries to strike again and ceases.

He lowers his sword and watches, mesmerized.

Ralph approaches and raises his staff. The dance foils his attempts to hurt the thug.

He shakes with impatience. He BLASTS the ceiling above Terrence.

A rock CRACKS from the ceiling and falls toward Valerie. Raimund knocks her out of the way.

The ceiling rains down on them. The mountain quakes again.

RAIMUND  
(to Ralph)  
Are you crazy. The mountain's  
unstable.

RALPH  
You have to get the crystal.

Terrence approaches the couple on the ground. Raimund rises  
and parries him.

VALERIE  
Not until I defeat him.

RAIMUND  
I can fight him. You're the only  
one who can get the crystal.

Valerie curls to butt into the fight.

Raimund swings his sword at her, which she blocks.

VALERIE  
What.

RAIMUND  
Get the crystal.

Valerie lowers her dagger while the two men duel.

She obeys and runs to the tree.

Ralph appears at her side.

RALPH  
Hurry. The crystal.

The mountain quakes. Rocks shower from the ceiling.

Valerie removes her necklace and holds the ring.

She hesitates and examines the crystal, unsure how to  
proceed.

RAIMUND  
Hurry up over there.

VALERIE  
Give me a break. I've never removed  
a magical crystal before.

RAIMUND  
You could at least pretend to try.

She fingers the crystal. Nothing happens.

She scores the crystal. A small SHARD breaks off and falls at her feet.

The ground shakes. More rocks fall on them.

Raimund steadies his balance. Terrence falls to the ground. A rock falls on his head and knocks him out.

Valerie picks up the crystal shard at her feet. Ralph knocks it out of her hand.

RALPH

It needs to be bigger.

His eyes are saucers. He grabs at the big crystal. The tree animates and lashes him across the chamber. His eye pops out and rolls.

VALERIE

Ralph.

RAIMUND

Get the crystal, Princess.

Larger rocks start to fall from the ceiling. Rocks hit and break the horizontally-flowing water streams.

Ralph chases and grabs his eyeball. He puts it back in.

Raimund runs to Valerie.

She cuts around the whole crystal, and it falls into her hand.

VALERIE

I've got it.

The walls start to CRACK and crumble. Stones fall and block their entrance.

Ralph rises and gestures to another exit.

RALPH

This way. Hurry.

They run out just as the ceiling collapses.

INT MOUNTAIN DAY

The mountain shakes and rains on them.

They run.

A light appears ahead.

They dodge falling rocks.

They see color in the light. It's the way out of the mountain.

A large rock falls on Valerie's foot. She YELLS.

The men stop and look back.

RAIMUND  
Princess.

Raimund goes back to help her.

She throws the crystal at him.

VALERIE  
Go. You have to save Edelstein.

Raimund pockets the crystal and runs to her.

RAIMUND  
Not without you.

Raimund shoves the rock off her foot. Valerie WHIMPERS.  
Raimund picks her up.

Ralph runs out of the mountain. Raimund follows with Valerie.

EXT MOUNTAIN DAY

They emerge from the mountain as the tunnel collapses.

RALPH  
The crystal. Where's the crystal.

RAIMUND  
Don't worry. I have it.

RALPH  
Where. Where.

Ralph picks around Ray's tunic. Raimund recoils.

RAIMUND  
Stop it. Go fetch some water.

RALPH  
I'm no dog.

RAIMUND

Your princess is in pain. Go fetch  
some water, and while you're at it,  
throw in some willow bark.

Ralph glares and leaves.

Raimund lays Valerie down in the grass. She winces.

Ray removes his cloak to tuck under her head.

VALERIE

You shouldn't be so hard on him.

RAIMUND

He did essentially cause the cave-  
in.

He examines her foot. It's broken. Raimund rips his cloak and  
shaves down a branch to make a SPLINT. He doctors her foot.

VALERIE

We have to take the crystal to  
Edelstein.

RAIMUND

We can as soon as you heal--

VALERIE

Now. We have to go now.

RAIMUND

We can't now. You can't walk on  
this.

VALERIE

I can do whatever I want.

She attempts to sit up and winces. Raimund helps her lie back  
down.

RAIMUND

You can do whatever you want, but I  
would suggest you rest.

He holds her hand.

They both notice at the same time. They release hands.

Valerie flushes and looks away. She fingers her necklace and  
tucks it back into her tunic.

Raimund smooths his hair. He pulls out and hands her the  
crystal.

VALERIE  
Commander, you've saved my life  
twice now.

RAIMUND  
It's my job, Princess.

VALERIE  
I should apologize for my behavior.

RAIMUND  
As should I.

VALERIE  
You were hardly wrong.

RAIMUND  
Just rude to your highness.

VALERIE  
Call me Valerie.

Raimund takes her hand and kisses it.

RAIMUND  
Yes, Valerie.

RALPH  
Water.

Ray and Val look at him.

Raimund rises, takes the flask, and offers it to Valerie. She  
drinks.

Behind his back, Ralph holds a stalk of lily of the valley.

A donkey BRAYS. The bray is smothered at its end.

VALERIE  
Albert.

They look up to see the thugs approach.

Raimund tucks the crystal into Valerie's bag.

He rises, draws his sword, and advances.

Swords CLASH.

Valerie bolts upright, draws her dagger, and attacks Murl.

Ralph nears her knapsack and eyes the bulge of the crystal.

Albert thrashes against his captor.

RAIMUND  
Seer. Some help would be nice.

RALPH  
Just one moment.

He reaches for the bag.

Valerie parries. She lacks the thrust of her broken foot.

Murl knocks her off balance, and she falls to the ground.

Albert BRAYS.

Murl swipes the dagger out of her hand and puts his blade to her neck.

Albert kicks his captor and runs to Valerie. He kicks the thug away.

VALERIE  
Good boy, Albert.

Valerie grabs her bag from Ralph's reach. She swings up onto Albert's back. She sways and balances.

Ralph clenches his fist and teeth.

Albert runs to Raimund and knocks aside his opponents.

RAIMUND  
Thanks.

They run into the forest.

EXT FOREST SUNSET

The group stops.

Valerie falls off the horse. Raimund catches her. He lays her down.

RALPH  
She doesn't look so good.

RAIMUND  
I thought the willow would help.  
Don't you have any healing balms.

RALPH  
I'm not exactly a healer.

RAIMUND  
Give us some space.

Ralph hesitates. He looks for Valerie's bag. It's slung around her body.

Ralph steps back.

Valerie takes Ray's hand. He jumps. Albert's jaw drops.  
She smiles. She's not very lucid.

VALERIE  
You're cute when you're mad.

Raimund drops her hand and stands.

RAIMUND  
I'm going to check on Albert.

Valerie HUMS, delirious.

Raimund walks to Albert, whose mouth is still open.

They look and MUTTER at each other.

Ralph nears.

RALPH  
Shall we give her more water.

They snap to attention.

Raimund takes the flask, kneels, and offers it to Valerie.

Valerie drinks. She settles.

Raimund rises. Valerie grabs his hand.

VALERIE  
Don't leave.

RAIMUND  
I'm not. I'm just going to check on  
some things--

VALERIE  
Don't leave.

RAIMUND  
I'm not leaving--

Valerie sits up and winces.

Raimund kneels back at her side. He helps her lie down.  
She grabs his arms and takes his hands.  
Albert approaches and nuzzles her face.  
She closes her eyes and relaxes her hold on Ray.  
Raimund mouths "Thank you" to the donkey.  
He disentangles his limbs from her, rises, and brushes the wrinkles from his tunic.

RALPH  
I never expected her to be so  
clingy.

RAIMUND  
No kidding.

Raimund separates and lies down.  
Ralph stares at Valerie's bag. He sneaks to it.  
Albert stares him down.  
His hand draws back.  
Albert steps on the bag's strap and lies down.  
Ralph extends a hand again. Albert rears to bite him. Ralph recoils.  
Ralph separates and makes a bed for himself.  
Albert curls around the bag and places his head next to Valerie.

EXT FOREST NIGHT

Raimund wakes. Albert's face nudges him.  
Raimund rolls over.  
Albert SNORTS urgency. He flips Ray over.

RAIMUND  
Go away.

Raimund pushes his face away and rolls back over.  
Albert turns and kicks Raimund. Raimund flails.

RAIMUND

What is the matter with you.

Albert swings his head to Valerie. His eyes are wild.

Raimund's eyebrows furrow. He rises and goes over to her.

Albert nudges Valerie. She doesn't move.

Raimund gets down and nudges her.

RAIMUND

Valerie.

No response.

He puts his ear to her chest.

RAIMUND

No.

He picks her up and runs.

Albert takes her bag in his mouth and runs after them.

EXT POOL NIGHT

They approach a pool of water.

Raimund carries her into the water. She doesn't move.

He lays her at the edge and cups water into her mouth.

RAIMUND

Come on, Valerie.

No response.

He pours more water into her mouth.

RAIMUND

Come on.

He pushes on her abdomen.

Her eyes flash open.

She leans over and COUGHS.

Raimund holds her and pats her back.

She VOMITS on his back.

He winces. Albert's nostrils flare.

EXT POOL SUNRISE

Raimund's shirt waves in the breeze as it dries. Valerie's bag sits nearby.

Raimund cooks fish over a fire.

Valerie leans against a tree. She opens her eyes and GROANS.

RAIMUND  
Guten morgen, Valerie.

Raimund brings her a fresh canteen, and she drinks.

VALERIE  
What happened.

RAIMUND  
You passed out.

VALERIE  
That's all?

Beat.

RAIMUND  
You hummed.

Her eyes go big. She remembers. She rubs her face.

Ralph nears.

RALPH  
You left without me.

RAIMUND  
Valerie got sick. She's okay now.

Ralph jumps. He searches and sees her. His face pales.

Raimund observes and narrows his eyes.

RALPH  
How fortunate. We should be on our way.

RAIMUND  
No. Valerie needs to rest.

VALERIE  
No, he's right. I've been idle long  
enough.

RAIMUND  
You nearly died last night.

VALERIE  
Don't be so dramatic. I'm fine.

She tries to stand and fails.

Raimund slings her bag around his body and helps her mount  
Albert.

RAIMUND  
You are the most stubborn human  
being.

RALPH  
Yes.

Ralph sees her bag. He gives it a long glance before he turns  
to go.

EXT CASTLE TOWER DAY

King Frederick looks out of a spyglass.

GUARD  
Any sign of her.

KING FREDERICK  
No. What of Dunric.

GUARD  
On the move. He'll arrive tomorrow.

The king puts down the spyglass.

INT CASTLE HALLWAY DAY

The king walks down the corridor. The guard has to jog to  
keep up with him.

KING FREDERICK  
Any word from the commander.

GUARD  
None. I'll take command until his  
return.

KING FREDERICK  
Good. Make certain the draftees are  
prepared for battle.

GUARD  
Yes, your highness.

The king rounds a corner and enters a room.

INT CASTLE LIBRARY DAY

Noblemen stand and MUMBLE over the map. The pegs have  
multiplied.

They turn to look for signs of hope in the king's face.

Their faces fall, and they return to the map.

The king joins them and draws a big X over a field.

EXT FOREST DAY

The men walk while Valerie rides Albert. Raimund carries her  
bag and holds it close. Ralph eyes it.

They arrive at the fallen bridge and stop.

RAIMUND  
(to Albert)  
I don't suppose you can jump over  
it.

Albert droops his ears.

Valerie SQUEAKS and grabs her neck. Her voice is gone.

Raimund lifts her and sits her on the bank of the river.

RAIMUND  
Take it easy.

He pulls out a canteen and leans over the river to fill it.

Ralph approaches Valerie and offers the poisoned flask.

RALPH  
You need the water.

Valerie reaches for the flask.

Raimund looks back and jolts up. He knocks the flask away.

Its contents spill out. Lily of the valley berries roll on the ground.

RAIMUND  
It's poisoned.

Valerie raises a brow.

Ralph summons squirrels that carry the berries away.

Valerie follows Raimund's gaze and sees only the flask and wet ground.

RAIMUND  
There were berries. He--

Ralph glares and points his staff at Valerie.

RAIMUND  
I was mistaken. Trick of the light.

Raimund hands her his canteen, and she drinks.

VALERIE  
Thank you. Let's go on.

RAIMUND  
You really should rest.

Ralph BLASTS a tree, and it CRACKS and falls across the river.

RALPH  
We should go.

RAIMUND  
She's exhausted.

Albert paws the wood. He steps onto it and steps off.

VALERIE  
I can rest while you help him  
across.

RAIMUND  
Valerie.

VALERIE  
I will not sit by while Edelstein  
is destroyed.

Raimund acquiesces and helps Albert across.

Ray returns to carry Valerie across and place her on Albert's back.

EXT SWAMP DAY

They cut through the swamp vines. It's slow going.

Ralph notices newts and scurries after them.

He falls behind Raimund and Valerie.

RAIMUND  
Ralph poisoned you.

VALERIE  
You shouldn't think that. He's been nothing but helpful to us.

RAIMUND  
He nearly killed us in the mountain. All he wants is the crystal.

VALERIE  
He doesn't want or need the crystal. We need it to defend Edelstein.

RAIMUND  
Why would he help you get it.

VALERIE  
Maybe he wants to protect Edelstein.

RAIMUND  
Or he wants the power for himself.

VALERIE  
That's ridiculous.

Raimund steps in front of Albert and looks her in the eyes.

RAIMUND  
I'm serious. We can't let him have it.

VALERIE  
I don't plan on it.

RAIMUND  
Good.

He scratches Albert's head, and the donkey nuzzles against his hand.

Valerie tilts her head in surprise.

VALERIE  
Raimund.

RAIMUND  
Yes.

VALERIE  
I'm glad you came with us. Even if  
it was forced.

RAIMUND  
Me too.

They lean in to each other. Are they going to kiss?

SHOUTS heard.

Dunric's thugs surround them.

Ralph runs toward Raimund and the bag. Vines overwhelm Ralph. He blasts them and continues.

Raimund draws his sword and parries enemy blows.

Valerie holds on while Albert kicks thugs into the swamp.

Ralph reaches for Raimund's bag...

One thug hits the donkey's leg, and he collapses. He falls on Valerie's broken foot, and she SCREAMS in pain. Albert rolls off of her.

RAIMUND  
Valerie.

He runs to her and defends her body.

Ralph clenches his hand and teeth. His body writhes.

The thugs overcome Raimund. Burl knocks his sword out of hand and points a blade to his neck. Ray raises his hands and gets on his knees.

Ralph BLASTS the thugs.

VALERIE  
Ralph.

He approaches Raimund and grabs for the bag. Raimund fights and pulls it. They're in a tug-of-war.

RALPH  
Give me the crystal.

RAIMUND  
No. It's not yours.

RALPH  
It's not yours either.

RAIMUND  
I'm keeping it for Valerie.

RALPH  
I can keep it for Valerie.

RAIMUND  
You won't give it back, traitor.

The bag rips. The crystal falls between them.

Raimund lunges for it. Ralph BLASTS him away and picks it up.

Valerie turns on her side to view the scene.

Ralph grins as the crystal glows in his hand.

RALPH  
Finally. I've waited forty years  
for this.

He lifts it to the sky and LAUGHS. He fuses it into the head of his staff.

Raimund rolls to his feet.

VALERIE  
What are you doing. That's to save  
Edelstein.

RALPH  
Actually, it's to destroy  
Edelstein. And Dunric. At the same  
time.

Raimund sprints at him.

Ralph releases a BLAST from his crystal-staff.

The blast knocks Raimund into a tree. He falls to the ground unconscious. The tree CRACKS.

Ralph CACKLES.

RALPH (CONTINUED)

Did you see that. It's even better than I imagined. Why lead a kingdom when you can have the whole world at your fingertips.

VALERIE

You used me.

RALPH

You were quite useful. But now you're not. Oh no, what do I do with you now.

His staff summons six gators that glow with the crystal.

RALPH (CONTINUED)

Sorry, but I have a meeting with your Daddy and Dunric, and I can't have you interfering.

He soars away.

The gators approach Valerie. She draws her dagger.

The tree CRACKS and leans toward Raimund's body.

Valerie GRUNTS and pushes herself toward Raimund.

Albert BRAYS. He struggles to rise. His leg collapses. He flails and gains ground.

The gators close the gap. They HISS and open their mouths to strike her.

Valerie turns and wields her dagger.

Albert bites and kicks them. They HISS and attack him.

VALERIE

Albert.

He BRAYS.

The tree CRACKS. It falls toward Raimund.

Valerie gets her good foot underneath her and pushes off with it. She grabs his body and rolls them aside just as the tree falls.

The CRASH of the tree jolts the thugs back to consciousness. They jump when they see the gators.

EARL  
Good golly gators.

The gators and Albert thrash.

The thugs regain their swords, attack the gators, and defeat them.

The thugs catch their breath.

They turn to see Valerie and Raimund.

PEARL  
Should we kill them.

MURL  
Leave them. Let's warn Dunric. The  
magician has the crystal.

They set off.

Valerie crawls over to Albert. She sees his wounds.

VALERIE  
Albert. What have I done. I was  
trying to save us all, but it's  
going to destroy everyone.

She throws her arms around his neck.

He places his head on her back and blows her hair.

He nuzzles her face and pushes her away.

He BRAYS.

VALERIE  
How can you say that. I can't leave  
you.

He BRAYS.

VALERIE  
No, Albert. No. I can't even walk--

He BRAYS.

She stares at him.

He touches his nose to her necklace.

She places a hand on her necklace and unties it.

She returns to Raimund's body and ties the necklace around his wrist.

VALERIE  
Auf widersehen. I'll see you soon,  
Mama.

She crawls to pick up a branch and uses it as a crutch.

She hobbles after the thugs.

VALERIE  
Wait.

Albert BRAYS.

EXT CASTLE DAY

King Frederick dons his armor, mounts a horse, and gallops off.

Horsemen gallop after him and carry banners.

Trumpeters SOUND and ride after them.

The royal army marches.

EXT BATTLEFIELD DAY

Dunric's army waits.

Frederick exits castle grounds and rides onto the plain.

Dunric sits on his horse between banner-horsemen.

He trots forward to meet Frederick in the middle of the field.

Royal armies march and stop at a distance. Dunric's army dwarfs them.

DUNRIC  
I want a fair fight, Frederick. No  
crystal.

FREDERICK  
We have no crystal, Dunric.

DUNRIC  
Likely story. If you surrender it  
to me, I will let your little  
village stand.

FREDERICK  
We will surrender nothing.

They stare each other down.

Dunric turns and rides back to his army.

Frederick returns to his army. He looks his men in the eye.

KING FREDERICK  
Stand strong. God be with you.

He turns to face the enemy.

Trumpeters SOUND. Men ROAR. Armies rush toward each other.

EXT SWAMP DAY

Raimund's eyes flutter and open.

He tries to rise and winces.

He raises his tunic. Bruises paint his body. He GROANS.

Albert snaps to attention and BRAYS.

RAIMUND  
Albert. Where's--

He looks around. He hears the sounds of battle and sees the necklace around his wrist.

RAIMUND  
No.

He pulls himself to a stump and to standing. Albert limps over to him and sniffs his body.

Raimund looks over Albert's leg and SIGHS.

EXT SWAMP DAY

Raimund wraps the donkey's leg with bark and vines. Albert tests the leg and SNORTS.

RAIMUND  
Can you do it.

Albert BRAYS.

RAIMUND (CONT'D)  
Good boy.

Raimund swings onto his back. Albert walks before he trots and runs.

EXT        BATTLEFIELD        DAY

The armies battle. Frederick and Dunric alike fell men.

At the field's edge, the thugs and Valerie see. They YELL and call out. Nothing is heard over the sound of BATTLE.

Valerie hobbles toward the battle. The thugs grasp her.

EARL

What are you doing. You can't go out there.

VALERIE

We have to stop them. They'll destroy themselves before Ralph even gets to them.

PEARL

You'll get killed before you stop anyone.

Valerie looks around. A trumpeter fights with a sword in his right hand and a trumpet in his left.

VALERIE

Give me your sword.

EARL

No way.

Burl hands over his sword.

Valerie throws the sword at the trumpeter's feet.

He trips, and the trumpet flies out of his hands. Unfortunately, it lands not far from the battle.

Valerie hobbles toward it. Murl tries to follow her. Earl holds him back.

PEARL

Don't. It's certain death.

They turn and watch Valerie.

Valerie hobbles near the fray. She dodges attacks again and again. She nears the trumpet.

A soldier thrusts a sword at her. She uses her branch to block. He fights her. She hops on one foot and blocks his thrusts.

Another soldier joins him. Valerie blocks both and swings their blades to the side.

She hobbles to the trumpet. The soldiers lunge at her.

She drops to the ground, rolls to the trumpet, and blows-- it SHRIEKS.

Men stop and cover their ears. Valerie SHRIEKS the trumpet again.

Frederick and Dunric see her.

KING FREDERICK

Valerie.

Dunric throws a soldier aside and gallops toward her.

Frederick spurs his horse forward.

Valerie notices the kings--

VALERIE

Wait. Stop. We're in danger.

Dunric accelerates and prepares to strike. The thugs surround Valerie. Dunric halts his horse.

DUNRIC

Betrayal.

EARL

It's not betrayal.

PEARL

We need to band together.

DUNRIC

Nonsense. Get out of the way.

VALERIE

A magician took the crystal. He's going to destroy us all unless we take it back.

DUNRIC

Lies. She's just stalling battle.

VALERIE

I'm telling the truth. We need to work together.

DUNRIC

Why would I ally with Edelstein after generations of battle.

VALERIE

Because we need your help.

Someone CLAPS.

The soldiers part. Ralph walks forward. His staff glows with the crystal.

RALPH

Touching. Really.

DUNRIC

The crystal. Get him.

Soldiers lunge toward Ralph. He BLASTS them and examines his fingernails.

RALPH

I was hoping to sit and watch the show, but you ruined it for me, Princess. I'll just have to ruin it for you.

He summons glowing men. They multiply into an army.

He CACKLES.

FREDERICK

Impossible.

RALPH

Kill them.

The summons advance and mow through human soldiers.

Dunric's horse rears, and he retains control.

Frederick gallops to Valerie, picks her up, and puts her on his horse.

VALERIE

Dad. Stop.

KING FREDERICK

You need to get to safety.

VALERIE

No. Put me down. We have to fight him.

KING FREDERICK

I'm not losing you too.

VALERIE

Dad.

A donkey BRAYS. Raimund and Albert burst from the forest.

KING FREDERICK

Commander.

Raimund sees them and runs to them.

RAIMUND

Your highness.

KING FREDERICK

Commander, take the Princess to safety.

The king lifts Valerie and puts her on the donkey.

RAIMUND

Yes, your highness.

VALERIE

We have to get the crystal. He's going to destroy us all.

KING FREDERICK

You will get to safety. I will fight for us.

VALERIE

You can't fight him. The crystal's power is too strong. You have to take it from him.

KING FREDERICK

Be safe. God be with you.

VALERIE

Dad. No.

The king gallops back to the fray.

Dunric thrashes at the summons surrounding him.

Raimund spurs Albert away from the battle.

VALERIE  
We have to go back.

RAIMUND  
We have to follow orders.

VALERIE  
We won't have orders if we don't go  
back. You know that. They don't  
stand a chance.

RAIMUND  
I know.

VALERIE  
Then take us back.

RAIMUND  
A soldier's first rule is to follow  
orders.

VALERIE  
A queen's first rule is to protect  
her people.

She turns to slide off the donkey.

Raimund grabs her arm and turns Albert back to the battle.

RAIMUND  
I like your rule better. You'll  
need this.

He hands her the necklace. She ties it around her neck.

They gallop back to the fight.

Raimund draws his sword and hands it to Valerie.

RAIMUND  
I'll steer. You fight.

VALERIE  
I have never liked you more.

Summons outnumber humans. Raimund ducks as Valerie swings and  
destroys several summons. Valerie evens the odds.

Ralph sneers and raises his arms to the sky. The summons turn  
to giants. They make the humans look like mice.

Ralph swings his staff. A summon clubs Valerie and Raimund  
off Albert.

Raimund rolls to his feet, dodges attacks, picks up a fallen blade, and attacks summons.

Albert bites and kicks summons.

Valerie stands on her good foot and attacks oncoming summons.

The summons multiply around her and push her back. They knock her to the ground.

Ralph parts through the summons to stand over her body.

She holds the blade up.

Ralph waves a hand. The sword flies out of her grasp.

Valerie scurries backward with her good foot.

Ralph BLASTS the foot. Valerie CRIES out.

KING FREDERICK

Valerie.

The king gallops her way and bowls over summons.

Raimund cranes his neck over and around the horde of summons. He swings out, destroys several, and moves in her direction.

Ralph steps on Valerie's foot. She winces and CRIES.

RALPH

Valiant effort, Princess. Too bad  
it was all for naught. I'll enjoy  
watching you and your family die.

He aims the staff into her face. The crystal's glow reflects off her wide eyes.

The staff crackles near her chest...

Frederick's horse bowls over the surrounding summons.

Ralph turns. Frederick knocks the staff out of his hand. It flies and lands beyond reach.

RALPH

No.

Ralph scrambles for the staff.

Valerie winces and GASPS and claws closer.

Raimund breaks through the horde and tackles Ralph. They flail as Raimund tries to pin him down.

RALPH  
Get off me, you fool.

Valerie crawls closer to the staff and reaches out. It's still beyond reach.

Albert reaches the fray, kicks away summons, and fixates on Valerie. He runs to Valerie and pushes her forward.

Her hand clasps the staff.

She thrusts the staff to the ground. It doesn't break. It sends shock waves up her arm.

Earl grabs the staff from her hand and runs.

VALERIE  
Stop.

She crawls. Albert leans down. She hugs his neck and hoists herself on his back. They run after Earl.

Ralph breaks Raimund's hold and runs after them.

Summons slow in confusion and part for Earl.

DUNRIC  
Earl.

Dunric appears in front and waves to Earl.

VALERIE  
Earl, give it back.

Earl stops and shuffles back and forth. He bites his lip. Earl throws the staff toward Dunric--

VALERIE  
No.

Ralph leaps and catches it. He raises his arms, and the summons grow. Soldiers dodge their footsteps.

Albert runs, dodges footsteps, and jumps over fallen bodies.

A summon's step shakes the earth. Valerie loses her hold on Albert and falls off.

RAIMUND  
Valerie.

He runs to her defense.

VALERIE  
The staff won't break.

RAIMUND  
We can't defeat them.

VALERIE  
We have to destroy the crystal.

RAIMUND  
How.

Valerie looks down at her ring. It sparks an idea.

VALERIE  
Take me to Ralph.

RAIMUND  
That's a death wish.

VALERIE  
So be it.

RAIMUND  
I will not take the princess to her  
death.

VALERIE  
It's an order, Raimund.

Raimund scoops up Valerie and runs. He dodges summons' steps  
left and right.

The thugs come alongside and guard them.

EARL  
I shouldn't have taken it from you.

VALERIE  
It's okay. You were doing what you  
thought was right.

MURL  
I thought you were the toughest,  
Burl, but these guys eat your  
lunch.

Burl GRUNTS, swings, and chops off a summon's leg. The summon  
falls and knocks over several other summons like dominoes.

MURL  
I stand corrected.

PEARL  
What's the plan.

Valerie spies supplies and points them out. The thugs grab them as she speaks.

VALERIE  
Bow. Arrows. String. Go there. Set me down.

RAIMUND  
You're right in the path--

VALERIE  
It won't take long.

She holds out her arms for the supplies. The thugs extend them out.

Summons knock the thugs away. The supplies fall.

Raimund goes to grab them. A summon swings at him. Raimund parries and fights.

Valerie crawls toward the supplies. A summon raises a foot to stomp her out.

Albert BRAYS. He leaps and bites the summon.

Valerie grabs the bow and strings it. She rolls out of the path of a falling summon. She looks for the arrows--

Bits of broken arrows peek out from under the summon's body. Valerie touches the broken pieces.

Ralph spots her and BLASTS near her. She scuttles back. She puts the bow around her neck.

VALERIE  
Albert.

The donkey runs and dives as she mounts him. The pair dodge Ralph's BLASTS.

A BLAST hits near Albert. He stumbles and falls. Valerie tumbles and CRIES out.

Ralph CACKLES as his staff CRACKLES to strike Valerie.

Frederick rides through summons and throws a rock at Ralph. Ralph angers and turns his attention to BLAST Frederick.

Valerie rights herself and catches her foot. She touches the splint. Her eyes widen. She unwraps the splint. She ties strips of bandage to the end of the stick like feathers.

Ralph BLASTS near Frederick again and again. His shots hit closer and closer.

She rips off her necklace and ties the ring on the stick as an arrowhead. Valerie bounces the arrow and ensures its balance.

Summons circle around Frederick, Raimund, and Ralph. The staff CRACKLES. Ralph approaches Raimund and Frederick, who stand frozen.

RALPH

You pesky little babes have tried my patience. But now there's nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and no one to help.

Valerie takes the bow from her neck and notches the makeshift arrow. She sees the group through the summons' legs.

She has one shot.

Ralph's staff CRACKLES. He points it at the men.

RALPH

Say goodbye.

Valerie pulls back the bow. She lines up the staff's crystal, her ring, and her eye.

Valerie releases the arrow. The arrow flies true and splits through the crystal.

Light breaks out.

Everyone shields faces and eyes except Ralph. He approaches the light.

RALPH

It's so beautiful.

He extends a hand. The light burns him, and he CRIES out. The light consumes him. He is destroyed.

The light fades. The summons dissipate.

The humans look around at each other.

Raimund examines the staff and ring, which now have no crystals. He thrusts the staff on the ground, and it SNAPS in two.

Frederick rides to Valerie, dismounts, and embraces her.

KING FREDERICK  
I thought I lost you.

VALERIE  
Can't get rid of me that easily.

Raimund jogs to them and holds out Valerie's crystal-less ring. Valerie releases her dad and takes the ring as tears brim her eyes.

VALERIE  
Mama's ring.

KING FREDERICK  
It's just a ring, Val. You used it the way she would have wanted.

VALERIE  
It's gone.

RAIMUND  
Maybe not.

Raimund reaches into his tunic and pulls out the crystal shard from the mountain.

A sword is DRAWN. The group turns to see Dunric hold a sword to Frederick's back.

DUNRIC  
Hold it. Hand over the crystal.

Raimund closes the crystal in his fist.

KING FREDERICK  
Dunric please.

VALERIE  
Dad, it's okay.

Raimund supports her arms to stand. Albert nears, and Raimund lifts her onto his back.

Valerie holds a hand to Raimund. He places the crystal in her hand. She tosses the crystal to Dunric. He catches it and raises his sword to attack.

VALERIE

Wait. We could have commanded the power of the crystal long ago. We could have crushed your kingdom with a single blow.

DUNRIC

Too bad you didn't--

VALERIE

But such an empire comes with tyranny, lust, and evil. If you would like such an empire, have at it. Have all your eyes lust for. But you will be consumed like the magician.

DUNRIC

Our families have fought for generations, and you expect me to make peace at the drop of a helmet. My father died at your hand.

VALERIE

And my mother died at yours.

Dunric lowers his sword.

VALERIE

I understand you want to avenge his death, but it only comes with more killing. Instead of avenging the dead, we need to honor the living. Honor the life that your father bravely lived.

Dunric places the crystal in Frederick's hand.

DUNRIC

Your daughter is wise, Frederick. I would be honored to ally with such a future queen's kingdom. (to armies) Sheath your swords. We're done here.

The group smiles. Frederick hugs Valerie.

KING FREDERICK

Your mother would be so proud. I love you, Valerie.

VALERIE

I love you, Dad.

KING FREDERICK  
Commander, lead us home.

RAIMUND  
Yes, your highness.

INT CASTLE BALLROOM DAY

The ballroom is again decorated for celebration. Nobility  
CHATTER.

GUARD  
Princess Valerie.

The nobility HUSH.

The doors open. Valerie rides Albert.

Albert CLOPS into the ballroom.

Karla GASPS and approaches them.

She fixes a braid on Albert's mane and winks at Valerie. They  
smile.

Albert ascends the platform and kneels near her seat.

Guards approach and ease her into the seat. Frederick sits  
next to her.

The MUSIC starts. Nobility glide to the dance floor.

DUNRIC  
I love these cookies.

Dunric inhales cookies like the cookie monster. Karla swats  
his hand away from the platter and saunters away.

Dunric watches her hips sway, grins, and follows her.

Earl, Murl, Pearl, and Burl wear flamboyant dress and pick at  
their collars. Ladies flock to them and GIGGLE.

Raimund approaches Valerie and bows.

RAIMUND  
A word with the princess, your  
highness.

KING FREDERICK  
Of course, Commander.

Frederick stands, winks, and joins the guests.

Raimund ascends the platform and bows.

VALERIE  
You don't have to bow.

RAIMUND  
Allow me to show you honor.

VALERIE  
If you must.

Raimund gets on his knees so she doesn't crane her neck.

RAIMUND  
You know you're a great fighter.

VALERIE  
I suppose.

RAIMUND  
You'll make an even better leader.

VALERIE  
Thanks.

Raimund reaches into his belt and pulls out a RING.

RAIMUND  
I know it's not great, but it's  
still your mom's band. And of  
course the crystal.

Valerie embraces him.

VALERIE  
It's perfect.

RAIMUND  
May I.

VALERIE  
You may.

He slips the ring on her finger.

Perfect fit.

VALERIE  
Raimund, thank you. Truly. I wish I  
could dance with you again to make  
up for last time.

Raimund stands.

RAIMUND  
We still can.

VALERIE  
But my feet--

RAIMUND  
Don't worry about that. Do you  
trust me.

VALERIE  
As your Princess I am obliged to.

RAIMUND  
As my Princess?

She smiles and pushes him.

VALERIE  
Hush.

He scoops her out of her seat.

She GASPS in surprise and LAUGHS with delight.

Raimund carries Valerie down the platform and spins around  
the floor.

KING FREDERICK  
What do you know. You can lead a  
girl to the party and make her  
dance.

Frederick leans down and kisses her forehead.

RAIMUND  
To be fair, she asked me to dance.

VALERIE  
I did not.

RAIMUND  
Totally did. Out of the blue.

VALERIE  
I did not. Plus, you gave me a  
ring.

RAIMUND  
It was your mother's--

VALERIE  
You wanted to send me to a nunnery.

She clasps a hand over her mouth. The men stare at her.

KING FREDERICK  
Eavesdropping again.

VALERIE  
It's hard not to hear his big  
mouth.

RAIMUND  
Hey.

The king LAUGHS.

KING FREDERICK  
I can't wait til you have children.

VALERIE  
Dad.

KING FREDERICK  
I didn't say with whom.

He winks and walks away.

The couple flushes and avoids each other's gaze.

Raimund sets her back in her seat.

RAIMUND  
You'll make a fine mother.

He turns to walk away.

Valerie grabs his arm, cranes up, and kisses him.

VALERIE  
And you a fine father.

RAIMUND  
Is this a proposal.

VALERIE  
Raimund.

RAIMUND  
You're proposing to me. Gosh,  
Princess, I don't know what to say.

VALERIE  
You know full well I wasn't--

RAIMUND  
You so were.

VALERIE

Stop.

She punches him.

He falls to the ground.

RAIMUND

Ouch.

VALERIE

I'm so sorry. Sorry. I didn't mean to.

RAIMUND

Another kiss might make it better.

VALERIE

Another punch might make you stop.

He laughs and rises.

He bows, takes her hand, and kisses it.

Albert BRAYS.

RAIMUND

What.

Valerie GIGGLES.

VALERIE

I'm taken by an ass already.

RAIMUND

I'll be waiting. The stars are out tonight.

He leaves.

King Frederick joins Valerie.

KING FREDERICK

I can't tell if you love or hate each other.

VALERIE

It's a little bit of both.

KING FREDERICK

I won't tell him you're head over heels.

She pushes him.

He LAUGHS.

KING FREDERICK

You'll be as beautiful a bride as  
your mother.

VALERIE

I hope I'll be half the woman she  
was.

KING FREDERICK

You already are. She shines through  
you.

She beams.

THE END.

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