

The Eye of the King:
Screenplay Adaptation as a Craft Tool

A Thesis Submitted to
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By
Nora A. Graves
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Dedication

This small work of scholarship and imaginative endeavor
is affectionately and gratefully dedicated to my father,

Richard A. Burger,

who, at 102, still keeps my feet
firmly planted on the ground and my eyes searching the skies.

Acknowledgements

I started my undergraduate career at the University of Iowa, thanking my lucky stars that I was born an Iowa farm girl and could pursue my dream of studying writing at the UI's flagship creative writing program, the Writer's Workshop, on in-state tuition. Some forty years later, I am profoundly grateful that life events took me in a different direction—one that eventually led to the MFA in Creative Writing at Liberty University. Every faculty member I have studied under at Liberty has added something substantial to my toolbox of writing skills and polished my writing style, but Dr. Sarah Rice, Dr. Durell Nelson, and Dr. Andrew Smith have my particular gratitude. If, in the future, I move from "writer" to "author," it will be in no small way because of their guidance and encouragement.

Luck, after all, has nothing to do with it. There is providence in the fall of a sparrow—and I am especially grateful to my Father in heaven for leading me to Liberty.

Abstract

Adaptation studies typically focus on a screenplay's fidelity to its original text within the constraints imposed by the new genre. This thesis approaches adaptation as a craft tool: a rich source of fresh authorial insight into characters, settings, and plotlines. Experimentation, not fidelity, is the goal of the self-adapter; adaptations are valued and deemed successful based on the new levels of complexity they uncover or add to an ongoing story. The author's screenplay adaptation of her original novel, *The Eye of the King*, served as a case study for testing the value of adaptation as a writer's craft tool. Re-telling the story to fit a shorter form, replace description with dialogue and action, and set in a contemporary time period more cost-effective to produce resulted in stronger characterizations, more purposeful shaping of plot events and speech, and increased authorial clarity and control in the communication of theme.

Section One

The Artist's Statement

Theological and Cultural Context of the Christian Artist's Work

An analysis of recent data (September 13, 2022) by the Pew Research Center suggests that, if current trends hold, Christianity will become a minority religion in the United States by 2070. In the *American Worldview Inventory 2021-2022*, George Barna cites statistical evidence that less than half of American pastors hold a biblical worldview; among these, the lowest statistics (less than 15%) describe teaching pastors and children's and youth pastors. Barna's research indicates that:

Among Senior Pastors, four out of 10 (41%) have a biblical worldview—the highest incidence among any of the five pastoral positions studied. Next highest was the 28% among Associate Pastors. Less than half as many Teaching Pastors (13%) and Children's and Youth Pastors (12%) have a biblical worldview. The lowest level of biblical worldview was among Executive Pastors—only 4% have consistently biblical beliefs and behaviors. (Barna)

My experience with undergraduate college students reflects these findings. In *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis cites our transition from a focus on personal evils to cultural evils as one of eight factors causing the decline of Christianity in western cultures. (One could argue that some of Lewis's

other eight factors, like a materialistic preoccupation with appearances, a sense of "safety in numbers," and the justification of individual immorality by shifting accountability to the influence of cultural, socio-economic, and psychological factors beyond our control, stem from this re-definition of evil as a cultural rather than an individual phenomenon.) In a general education literature course populated by 120-plus believing undergraduates per academic year (predominantly sophomores and juniors), Christian young adults display a marked sense of self-

complacency regarding their personal morality even while they passionately decry the unjust actions of others and profess a belief in Jesus as the savior of humankind. “Good” and “evil” are defined by the legislation we do or do not support and by our affiliations and the systems in which we participate or from which we descend rather than by the anger we harbor in our heart toward a brother or the self-centered prioritization of our own needs in relationships. In short, when evil and good are defined by cultural actions, humanity does not need a savior. We can save ourselves by constraining evil actions with legislation and re-directing and re-educating humans to replace evil actions with good actions.

How many of those who profess Christianity feel any need to be delivered from their human nature? For fifteen hundred years, a civilization birthed from a Christian worldview held its populace accountable not only for their actions, but for the thoughts and intents of their hearts. “I’m only human, just like everyone else” was not a justification or an excuse. “My father was a drunk and my uncle sexually violated me” was not a justification or an excuse. The spirit of Christ, invited to live in the human heart, began a process of transforming human nature itself that not only redeems and restores it but results in the emergence of an entirely different kind of human being: a new creation. The message was not “accept Jesus Christ into your heart and you will be saved and go to heaven when you die,” but “accept Jesus Christ into your heart and you will be born again and become someone different before you die.”

Paul labored like a woman in childbirth that Christ might be formed in each of the Galatian believers—not that he might see them in heaven, but because the Kingdom of Heaven had come to earth in all its glory in the person of Jesus, and, Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, could now indwell them. Around 400 AD, the Roman convert Prudentius extols in his

allegory *Psychomachia* “. . . that day when the flesh lost its nature and the power of God made for us a new flesh” (Clemens).

The Word of God [i.e., Jesus] has not become another thing by taking flesh. The majesty of God is in no way reduced by the limits of bodily experience. But mankind is raised to understand nobler things: God remains as he always is though he begins to be something that he was not; we are no more as we had been because we have been born again to a better condition. He gives of himself to men, without detracting from what he is; he has not been diminished by taking what is ours, but by adding What is his to what is ours he has elevated us to the height of his gifts. (Clemens)

Jesus is not the path to heaven; he *is* heaven. It is his nature God desires to reproduce in us, not a cleaned up, more virtuous version of our own, but Christ is to be in all and to be all (Col. 3.11).

The Artist and the Cross

Given the prolific presence of Christianity on the internet, Barna’s and Pew’s dire indicators of the current state and the future of Christianity in the United States seem questionable. A closer examination of this profusion of websites yields evidence that might support their conclusions and point to factors influencing their predicted outcomes. One encounters much theology, multifarious interpretations of scripture, counsel and encouragement for living, and a seemingly flourishing Christian media and arts industry. One can read about Christ, hear people talk about Christ, and watch people worship Christ. One may even, on rare occasions, encounter Christ.

But how is Christ formed in us?

Christianity has only one answer to this question: by the cross.

We die so that Christ, who gave his life for us, can live in us.

This kind of dying is not a media event. It does not happen by immersing ourselves in a Christian subculture, watching Christian films, reading Christian books, listening to Christian music, or arguing about and clarifying our theology.

It does not happen by attending worship services or singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

It does not happen by reading scripture.

While faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God, faith without works is dead.

The statistics reported by the Barna Research Group and the Pew Research Center reveal a Christianity in the United States that is dying. Is it a Christianity without works, a humanity confessing Christ but uninhabited by Christ?

Can art do more than represent Christ? Can the creative output of an individual writer, poet, painter, potter, cinematographer—critic—be inhabited by God in such a way that its audience encounters him in the artistic medium?

The trajectory of the life of Nicklaus Count von Zinzendorf famously shifted after he viewed Domenico Feti's portrait of the suffering Jesus, *Ecce Homo* ("Behold the Man") ("Ecce Homo"). The Latin inscription at the bottom of the painting translates "This have I suffered for you; now what will you do for me?," but it was not a statement about Christ or an idea about God that moved Zinzendorf as he surveyed Feti's work; the Holy Presence—the Spirit of the man who died for Zinzendorf—encountered him. "My zeal has not cooled," Zinzendorf stated fourteen years later as he prepared for his ordination into the Lutheran Church at Tübingen. "The love of Christ shall constrain me, and *His cross refresh me*" (von Zinzendorf, emphasis added).

Almost 140 years later, the hymnwriter Frances Havergal related a similar experience on seeing Feti's painting, hastening, in the midst of that encounter with Christ's spirit, to pencil some verses on a scrap of paper that later became the hymn "I Gave My Life for Thee" ("Ecce Homo"). The four verses of Havergal's original hymn end with the suffering Christ posing a series of questions to his beholders: "What hast thou done for Me?," "Hast thou left aught for Me?," "What hast thou borne for Me?," and "What hast thou brought to Me?" (Havergal). In a much later letter, Havergal testifies to another powerful encounter with Christ listening to a congregation sing "I Gave My Life for Thee" (Havergal).

Not every viewer of Feti's *Ecce Homo* encounters God. Zinzendorf and Havergal represent a minority. God's inhabitation of a work of art—whatever the medium or genre—is an act of his sovereign will. The artist does not create a manifestation of God, but he or she can create structures through which God can move in lesser or greater degrees to reach those who, consciously or subconsciously, are seeking him. To do this, the artist must die to his or her personal vision, to personal preferences and dreams, and to the need for personal recognition. Under these conditions, the artist's creative output is shaped by the cross, both through the artist's death to self ("He must increase; I must decrease"¹) and by the depth of the artist's re-creation of this way of the cross in his or her art.

"The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord," goes the proverb, "searching the innermost parts of the belly."² "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," declares Jesus, "for they will be filled." A little later, he warns his listeners: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven." Then he likens the kingdom of heaven to ten virgins, five of whom do not have oil to light their lamps. When they return from buying it, the

¹ John 3:30 (All scripture quotations are in NKJV unless otherwise noted)

² Proverbs 20:27

door to Jesus is closed. “Open to us!” they cry, but the bridegroom answers them, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.”³

The allusions are clear. An individual’s spirit is the Lord’s means for revealing what is in his or her belly: an autopsy of the stomach that finds the contents to be either Jesus (as in those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and the wise virgins whose lamps have oil) or those things that feed our human nature.

“... though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing,” warns Paul.⁴ The problem is not the lack of good actions—good works define the moral frame of Judaic, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and humanistic worldviews. The problem is that our good works require no dying, no crucifixion of the old nature. We do them in the power of our own flesh and, while they can express admirable qualities like courage and compassion—even selflessness, more typically they are a product of the very human desire to appear good in the eyes of others coupled with a utilitarian ethic.

According to Paul, the crucifixion of the old nature is necessary to becoming a new creation in Christ. “Do you not know,” he chastised the Romans, “that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with.”⁵

Without the dying of the old nature, however piecemeal that dying may be, there can be no room for Christ to fill. To be transformative, actions must cost us; they must empty us. Jesus

³ Matthew 5.6, 7.21, 25.11

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13.3

⁵ Romans 6:3-6

sums up this difference between good actions and actions that make us good (i.e., form him in us) when commenting on a widow dropping two coins into the Temple offering: “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.”⁶

She emptied herself. She followed the way of the cross. Jesus knew her. The lamp of her spirit cast light into her innermost parts and mirrored back to Jesus his own image: Jesus,

who, being in the form of God, did not consider it something to hold onto to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross . . .⁷

Actions that form Jesus in us are not the good actions that flow out of our abundance. They are actions that diminish us, actions that leave us depleted—impoverished of soul so that the soul of Christ might find a residence within us. Sometimes they are actions forced upon us by others: a spouse or parent abandons us, a close friend betrays us, an employer fires us. Sometimes they are the consequences of events beyond our control: a congenital disorder, a pandemic, economic downturns, hurricanes and earthquakes.

Vincent van Gogh, like the widow, was poor. His paintings were reviled in his lifetime, he suffered frequent bouts of mental illness, and he was ostracized from society. Van Gogh failed at every endeavor he attempted during his lifetime. At twenty-three, pursuing a call to ministry, he preached in a sermon at Turnham Green in Isleworth, England, that

Sorrow is better than joy . . . for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made

better. Our nature is sorrowful, but for those who have learnt and are learning to look at

⁶ Luke 21:3-4

⁷ Philippians 2:6-8

Jesus Christ, there is always reason to rejoice. It is a good word, that of St. Paul: as being sorrowful yet always rejoicing. For those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is no death or sorrow that is not mixed with hope—no despair—there is only a constant being born again, a constantly going from darkness into light. (Jethani 116)

Even though he failed miserably in ministry and abandoned formal religion, Van Gogh balked at the idea of depicting Jesus in his paintings, noting that while artists might succeed in depicting Christ's sufferings, no one could capture "the inner joy that led him to accept the Father's will" (Jethani 117). While roaming the fields around the mental asylum at Saint-Rémy in Provence, where he was seeking psychiatric treatment, Van Gogh saw in some contorted olive trees a representation of Christ's pain in the Garden of Gethsemane. They inspired him to attempt a metaphorical representation of Jesus, a painting that he "hoped would 'make people think' more than if he had depicted Jesus explicitly" (Jethani 117). In an intentionally marked departure from tradition, van Gogh set his painting in daytime. The shadows of the olive trees flow in reddened streams across the canvas to suggest blood, revealed by "a blazing golden sun" overhead (117). "Like so many of his paintings," writes Jethani, "this one is dominated by yellow, van Gogh's color of divine love. The trees writhing in pain stretch out toward the infinite joy of God" (118). Between the blood-stained earth with its suffering olive trees and the glorious golden sky, looms a range of shadowy blue mountains: the way of the cross.

Van Gogh understood the straight gate and narrow path that Christ traversed.

Vision for *The Eye of the King*

In his 1974 fantasy novel *Shardik*, Richard Adams portrays the responses of believers to the long-awaited return of the divine presence among them, manifested in a bear. Shardik is the Power of God, absent from his people for several thousand years. His second coming has been

long awaited; within the novel little children are taught to pray at bedtime, “May this be the night the Lord Shardik returns to his people,” but when he does return, no one can face his “refiner’s fire.”

In June 2014 I found myself sitting across from a 94-year-old man in his home in Whitchurch, Hampshire. How Richard Adams, the author of *Shardik* (but better known for his acclaimed classic, *Watership Down*) could feel like a failure puzzled me. As our discussion of the purposes and themes of *Shardik* intensified, the source of his discontent became more apparent.

He had been given a message—a clear message downloaded in the quiet moments when his mind wandered over the hills of the South Downs around his home—and he had failed to deliver it. Adams considered *Shardik* his most important work, yet it never reached his intended audience with its intended message or captured the reading public’s imagination or the critic’s notice like *Watership Down*.

He would rewrite it if he could, but time had run out.

An inquiry to his publisher while I was in England concerning difficulties in procuring *Shardik* for a literature course had resulted in this unexpected invitation to tea with Mr. Adams. My enthusiasm for his book caught his attention. As with artists, many writers depict human suffering and evil brilliantly, but Adams, like van Gogh, is more interested in the redemptive possibilities of our pain than the pain itself. The final chapters of *Shardik* have the same effect on me as van Gogh’s glorious golden sky. I had long considered *Shardik* literature’s final word on the subject of human brokenness redeemed.

But I left his house with his kiss on the back of my hand and a thought troubling my mind. Might there still be room in the genre for capturing an example of human failure and the

Lord's redemption? Was there another character somewhere in someone's imagination deeply in love with God who would betray him and through his or her moral and personal failure come to fuller oneness with him as had Adams's protagonist, Kelderek?

I do not have the chutzpah to consider myself that writer, but an image of a tree with huge branches overshadowing the entire universe repeatedly haunted my imagination, along with the refrain: "the Tree at the center of the universe." The image broadened and deepened into a scene with hooded figures rushing to where the tree, felled by lightning, was suddenly swallowed into the earth, leaving an eye-shaped pool of water behind. A young boy stepped out from behind an ancient ash, watching them, roots and twigs and leaves growing out of his hair. I recognized him at once. In an earlier generation, he was George MacDonald's wee Sir Gibbie, the mute Christ figure in one of MacDonald's most popular novels.

I sensed immediately he would have a more explicitly divine role to play in the story shaping itself in my mind: he would be an incarnation of the tree itself, the breath of life animating all my characters. All other characters would be measured by the degree to which they released control of their lives, denied themselves, and picked up their cross to follow him.

One would be set aside as a particular vessel for his presence. With that thought, I found my plot: what life events—what emptyings—produce a wise virgin whose lamp is full of oil at the return of her bridegroom?

How could a story of brokenness and repair and re-breaking—a story of not-so-happy endings and a story of ultimate failure—be told in such a way that God, should He desire to do so, might inhabit its telling?

Biblically, prophecy is the steadfast witness to God's otherness by those who have experienced it through encountering Him. In Revelation 19.10, prophesy is defined as "the

testimony of Jesus.” Isaiah describes what happens in prophecy: “Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will behold a far-distant land” (33.17).

Tertullian argued that the Holy Spirit is a distinctive manifestation of the full presence of God, as is Jesus (Gift 31). Once someone has encountered the manifested presence of God, the aesthetics of storytelling are no longer defined by human values and experiences: they are defined by the encountered otherness of God. We discover that our God is not moral or ethical or virtuous or beautiful: He is holy. His holiness defines all other things—the moral, the vicious, the beautiful, the lost, the found, the damned, the redeemed.

The human perspective becomes peripheral. One’s measure of the moral or immoral, beautiful or ugly, tasteful or tasteless is tied to the degree to which a particular work of art manifests God. This inhabiting is not related to dogmatic exposition or making statements about who or what God is and is not; that is *telling*. I write assuming that if I create a place where He can rest upon my art, He will *show* Himself to be present.

More importantly, given the apparent absence of this phenomena in a wide swath of the believers that constitute the church of our day (and hence the decline in Christianity registered in the data collected by Barna and the Pew Research Center), I strive to capture that process of dying to self that makes room for him to indwell us in ever greater degrees. When he inhabits our actions, our witness manifests his reality.

At best, His Presence can rest only slightly on actions that originate out of the abundance of our human nature. To capture that process of breaking and emptying that turns a man or a woman into a shell of a human being, and then portray that great infilling as the Holy Spirit of the Most High God oozes in like “oil—Crushed” and begins to form Christ in such a person is a

goal no writer could fully realize.⁸ Dostoevsky attempted it with Alyosha. Richard Adams came close with Kelderek. I have no illusions where my poor talents stand in comparison to theirs, yet this, their objective, is the objective that I, too, reach for, albeit as a lesser artist with hope only of doing it in a smaller way.

But even a small work by an artist with inferior gifts, when testifying of the power of the cross, can be used by God to accomplish significant transformations, as was Feti's *Ecce Homo* in the lives of both Zinzendorf and Frances Havergal. From one perspective, Zinzendorf's story, Havergal's hastily penned verses, and every performance of her hymn can be considered adaptations of Feti's painting. On another level, each of these, including Feti's *Ecce Homo*, may be construed as related adaptations of the greater story of Jesus and the cross that is our Tree of Life. Understood as such, the power of adaptations manifests in the way the interactions between them and each new adaptation will produce an ever-widening revelation of that story until the Lamb that was slain receives the full reward of his sufferings.

In the end, perhaps one picture is worth a thousand words, and van Gogh has said it best of all.

⁸ As poet Gerard Manley Hopkins describes the manifestation of God's presence in a world "... seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; [wearing] man's smudge and [sharing] man's smell" ("God's Grandeur").

Section Two
The Critical Essay

The Great Divide: Novels versus Screenplays

Vladimir Nabokov famously claimed that he wrote his entire novel *Laughter in the Dark* “as if it were a film” (Appel 258). Since the protagonist, Albinus, meets his nemesis, the seventeen-year-old Margot, at the cinema where she works, this choice of narrative approach could reflect Nabokov’s thematic concerns more than his artistic predilections. Given the disparaging aspects of Nabokov’s many comments on cinema in his interviews, a cynic might read *Laughter in the Dark* as a critical commentary on the relative merits of literature and film. Metaphorically, the aspiring actress Margot could be understood as representing this relatively young medium and Albinus the rich, mature tradition of established art forms. He is seduced by her superficial charms, but when he paves the way for her first acting job, Margot’s inherent inadequacies become obvious. Eventually, Albinus’s affair with her results in his blindness and her unbridled exploitation of his wealth. He attempts to shoot her, but she has the advantage of sight, overpowers him, seizes his pistol, and kills him with his own weapon (Nabokov).

The plot of *Laughter in the Dark* unfolds through short, intense chapters that, according to Appel, “mimic the conventions of a thriller” and “convincingly imitate a rapidly paced series of short takes” (259, 261). This mirroring of cinematic qualities in his prose is intentional by Nabokov, and the connection between technique and craft and thematic purpose in an artist of Nabokov’s caliber is certainly far from coincidental. It is undeniably literary. Nabokov expresses his condescension toward the film industry in the veiled sneer of an artist surveying the output of a successful marketing campaign. “The verbal part of the cinema is such a hodgepodge of contributions, beginning with the script, that it really has no style of its own,” he remarks to Appel in an interview. “On the other hand, the viewer of a silent film has the opportunity of adding a good deal of his own verbal treasure to the silence of the picture” (*Strong Opinions* 15).

Of course, Nabokov does not refer to the typical viewer of the silent film, but to himself, that rarified version of a human being who has a “verbal treasure” from which to draw and can appreciate “the subtle, artistic touches” in even Laurel and Hardy’s “most mediocre films,” such as the implications embedded in the “choice of a hand” as staged when Laurel confuses someone else’s hand with his own (*Strong Opinions* 15). It is the absence of the artistic that Nabokov decries in films, the banality that comes to define Albinus’s life after his capitulation to Margot’s charms. Nabokov’s own capitulation in allowing Stanley Kubrick to film *Lolita* in 1962 rested on Kubrick’s agreement that Nabokov himself would write the screenplay and Nabokov’s conclusion, after “seven or eight sessions with Kubrick,” that Kubrick was “an artist” (*Strong Opinions* 13). Of this process, Nabokov commented:

Turning one’s novel into a movie script is rather like making a series of sketches for a painting that has long ago been finished and framed. I composed new scenes and speeches in an effort to safeguard a *Lolita* acceptable to me. I knew that if I did not write the script somebody else would, and I also knew that at best the end product in such cases is less of a blend than a collision of interpretations. (13)

Later, in the above interview with Appel in 1971, Nabokov expands on what he means by “safeguarding” *Lolita* from a “collision of interpretations”: “I tried to give it some kind of form which would protect it from later intrusions and distortions. In the case of *Lolita*, I included quite a number of scenes that I had discarded from the novel but still preserved in my desk (214).

Nabokov spent six months in Hollywood drafting the screen adaptation of *Lolita*. In the end, Kubrick discarded many scenes and revised others, and his 1962 film adaptation became one of two versions known by their directors’ names, not by Nabokov’s. The tensions between Nabokov, his novel *Lolita*, the three screenplay adaptations of *Lolita* (by Nabokov, by Kubrick

and his associate James Harris, and by Stephen Schiff), and *Lolita*'s film versions (1962 and 1997, respectively) represent the crux around which most scholarly and critical debate concerning adaptations of novels have circled. In his succinct survey of this debate, Timothy Corrigan concludes that "most common discussions and debates about film adaptation seem generally to focus on the notions of specificity and fidelity" (31). Fidelity, continues Corrigan, is a measure of difference that evaluates the degree to which a work of literature has been accurately recreated and represented on screen. Specificity is also a measure of difference, but this difference is in genre-related formal structures and kinds of content. Corrigan stresses the ways in which these factors interact to complicate the process of producing and critically evaluating the adaptations of novels to movies, "since it implies a translation between 'languages' that will always be only approximate or, at best, capture 'the spirit' of the original text" (31). He notes:

Mediating the grounds between specificity and fidelity, moreover, are the different industrial and commercial structures that reinforce the textual differences dividing a literary work and its filmic adaptation, such as the technologies of production (print versus moving images, for instance) and the mechanisms of reception (reading versus viewing). To the degree that a film is faithful or not to the textual specificity of a literary work (the narrative voice and textual style, as well as characters, settings, and plots) or to the "spirit" of that original, cinematic adaptations will always measure the power of film – to assimilate, to transform, to distort, or to overcome – the specifics of that source material. (31-32)

In discussing the film adaptations of John Steinbeck's novels, André Bazin suggests that time will be the ultimate arbiter of such debates and makes his point by referencing the

devaluation of specific authorship to the appropriation of characters and themes for specific purposes in retelling medieval texts. “[A] critic of the year 2050 would find not a novel out of which a play and a film had been ‘made,’” claims Bazin, “but rather a single work reflected through three art forms, an artistic pyramid with three sides, all equal in the eyes of the critic” (50). He continues:

The "work" would then be only an ideal point at the top of this figure, which itself is an ideal construct. The chronological precedence of one part over another would not be an aesthetic criterion any more than the chronological precedence of one twin over the other is a genealogical one. Malraux made his film of *Man's Hope* before he wrote the novel of the same title, but he was carrying the work inside himself all along. (50)

Sarah Cardwell elaborates Bazin’s ideas by conceiving the various adaptations of a narrative as parts of a larger entity that she identifies as an “ur-text” (Cardwell). Each part has an individual integrity and unity that can be analyzed, evaluated, and appreciated on its own terms while also simultaneously analyzed, evaluated, and appreciated in relation to any or all other alternative versions of the story, and finally as a narrative “whole” (i.e., the ur-text that emerges across all versions). “The ur-text notion,” comments Joakim Hermansson, “with its web of versions, also invites the imagining of a greater whole, or design, as a result of the cognitive flicker of meanings from alternative narratives, which is of value when the construction of thematic meaning is in focus” (12).

Screenplays as Literary Art

Hermansson helpfully points out that most adaptation studies reference film versions of novels and not the screenplays from which the films spring (*Adapting Adulthood* 22). Thomas Leitch cites this as the first of twelve fallacies crippling the development of current adaptation

theory. Since movies are collaborative, film adaptations are assumed to be collaborative, but this assumption ignores or denigrates the existence of the screenplay, an adaptation in its own right. One could argue, Leitch suggests, that film versions of novels are twice removed from the source text: an adaptation that is the screenplay is adapted again into the movie. The collaborative nature of film adaptations does not typically represent the adaptative process the screenwriter utilizes, who works primarily as a single agent (Leitch 150).

Patrick Cattrysse, however, disagrees with Leitch. Cattrysse differentiates between “intermediary texts, which enjoy an independent status, such as novelizations or dramatizations, with a screenplay, which generally does not enjoy such a status” (261). In his descriptive analysis of the 1940s film noir genre, Cattrysse approaches the screenplay only as “a step in the production process,” noting that “the credits of film noirs do not always clearly distinguish between . . . the categories of ‘story’ and ‘original screenplay’ (181). The relative insignificance and obscurity of screenplay adaptations is underscored by the lack of acknowledgement in film noir credits. “[I]t is impossible to quantify how many movies were based on an original screenplay and how many were based on a previously existing text,” observes Cattrysse, who later emphasizes again that screenplays are only “one of many phases in a process whose ad hoc importance can be investigated empirically” (261). Hermansson notes that

Voters for the Best Screenplay category for the Academy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, and even the Writers’ Guild Awards rarely read the actual screenplays but evaluate them by watching the films. Thereby, they too fail to acknowledge the screenplays as works with values and qualities greater than those once afforded to them as subordinate blueprints for the films. (*Adapting Adulthood* 22-23)

But screenwriters and screenplays are “imperative” for film adaptations, Hermansson insists, and even Cattrysse agrees that “the screenplay remains an important source of information for obvious reasons” (261). Ted Nannicelli poses the possibility of including some screenplays as literary art on the same basis as we do plays. “[T]he art status of the theatrical script,” argues Nannicelli, “appears to depend on its status as a work of literature [rather than its performances, which can be works of art in themselves] [and] screenplays seem to be *possible* works of literature inasmuch as they, too, are verbal objects” (412).

Hermansson and Nannicelli echo Steven Price, who noted the striking absence of references to screenplays in the literature on adaptation studies. Occasionally screenplays might be analyzed (as Cattrysse does in deconstructing the intermediary texts informing film noir); more often a screenplay is referenced only in the crediting of a director or a screenwriter or as (what Noël Carroll calls it) a “non-detachable constituent” of a film (Nannicelli 406).

This persistent dismissal of screenplays as no more than blueprints or performance plans—“nothing more than a set of notes to a production crew,” as Esther Luttrell puts it—overlooks a potentially rich area of adaptation research (10). “The screenplay has not yet been fully recognized as a natural and integral part of adaptation, literature, or film studies,” proposes Hermansson (*Adapting Adulthood* 22). What little interest scholars have shown, says Price, is in the processes associated with staging the film’s events, settings, and dialogues (110).

In *Script Culture and the American Screenplay*, Kevin Boon analyzes representative screenplays from the perspective of Aristotle’s *Poetics* to demonstrate how they meet Aristotle’s criteria as art even in cases (perhaps especially in cases) like the 1996 film *Fargo*. Jerry Lundegaard is no Aristotelian tragic hero; as Boon points out, the literary art of the Coen brothers’ screenplay is vividly and ironically foregrounded in the ways Jerry’s character surfaces

in the text (e.g., in the scene where he fails to assert himself over his father-in-law in delivering the “ransom” money), a satirically brilliant reversal of the peripeteia required in Aristotelian tragedies.

Fargo is an original screenplay, but Boon addresses the artistic handling of these literary elements as they “migrate” (Hermansson’s term) from novel to screenplay in the adaptation process in terms of both fidelity and specificity (as in John Huston’s screenplay of Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* and the ideological opposition of Charles Lederer’s and Bill Lancaster’s very different screenplay adaptations of John W. Campbell’s short story “Who Goes There?”) (n.p.). In doing so, he doggedly maintains his focus on the screenplay as an independent “creative work of equivalent value” and not as a link between novel and film (n.p.).

Bazin’s attention, as Boon is quick to point out, is fixed on the film itself rather than the screenplay, but his conclusions apply equally to the screenplay apart from the film it spawns. If successful adaptations depend on filmmakers having “enough visual imagination to create the cinematic equivalent of the style of the original [novel],” then successful adapters must possess at least an equal quantity of this visual imagination as well (2). Moreover, since “[f]orm is at most a sign, a visible manifestation of style, which is absolutely inseparable from the narrative content,” then “. . . faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the equivalence in meaning of the forms” (Bazin 2).

Bazin goes on to clarify what he means by style and posit his evaluation of those elements most critical to successful adaptation.

. . . [T]rue aesthetic reality of a psychological or social novel lies in the characters or their environment rather than in what they call . . . style. The style is in the service of the

narrative: it is a reflection of it, so to speak, the body but not the soul. And it is not impossible for the artistic soul to manifest itself through another incarnation. (4)

The reason this incarnation is possible from one literary form (e.g., the novel) to another (e.g., the screenplay) is because “the work of art was not an end in itself; the only important criteria were its content and the effectiveness of its message” (5). Bazin identifies the aesthetics of any literary or cinematic work at least in part with those elements that can exist apart from a particular form (6). Consequently, the kind of simplification and condensation required when adapting a novel into a screenplay focuses on maintaining “main characters and situations” (6). Its success depends on “the talents of the screenwriter and the director [who must integrate] the characters . . . as much as possible into their new aesthetic context” (5-6). Unsuccessful adaptations (what Bazin calls “mediocre films”) fail not because of the new aesthetical requirements for simplification and condensation (“abridgement”) imposed on them by a different form (the specificity of the form), but because the characters are not fully integrated into their new environment (6).

Boon sees an association between the art of the screenplay and the art of poetry in this contraction of content and form required by a screenplay adaptation. Both depend on “concise and connotative” language (n.p.). He emphasizes the presence and artistic application of verbal texts in the “screenplays” (what might be more accurately identified as the precursors to screenplays) of film’s silent era when dialogue was supplied by title cards. Buster Keaton’s *Sherlock, Jr.* (1924) obviously relied on visual storytelling, but Boon calls attention to a title card reading:

By the next day the
master mind had

completely solved the
 mystery—with the
 exception of locating
 the pearls and finding
 the thief.

Boon notes that a verbal transitional device was unnecessary (the same end could have been served by a visual means), but the irony would have been impossible by any other means than a verbal text. It is, he emphasizes, “purely literary” (n.d.).

Hermansson argues that it is not the characters qua characters who are central to a successful adaptation but characters as the primary means of thematic development (*Adapting Adulthood* 48). Bazin’s “effectiveness” of message is inextricably bound in the characters’ integration from the novel into the new medium, be it the screenplay or the film. However, thematic equivalence allows for variation in interpretation; a screenplay may share a novel’s characters and hence its theme without communicating the same message. Hermansson demonstrates this in his analysis of screenplay adaptations of novels that share the theme of adulthood (“Adaptation of Adulthood”). Multiple versions of one character’s quest for identity as an adult provide multiple perspectives on what adulthood is and is not and together form a network of representations that Hermansson identifies with Cardwell’s mythical or imaginary ur-text: “a phenomenographic depiction of the ur-text and what it signifies.” He continues: “With this model, the always-incomplete image of the ur-text replaces the source text, not, however, as the starting point for the adaptation process, but always as the result of an analysis of the elements that the stories included add to the picture” (*Adapting Adulthood* 36). This model of the adaptation process is inherently non-hierarchical so that every story is simultaneously at the center

of attention while allowing every other version a similar place “since their contributions are regarded as equal in regard to the whole” (*Adapting Adulthood* 36). In this way, the model resolves the tension that arises from considerations of fidelity and specificity, a tension that Leitch almost vehemently eschews. The idea that “[d]ifferences between literary and cinematic texts are rooted in essential properties of their respective media” earned second place in Leitch’s list of twelve fallacies inhibiting the growth of adaptation studies (150). He cites its source in the misconception that literary texts, being primarily verbal, function to make assertions (i.e., create concepts) and cinematic texts (screenplay and film), being primarily visual, function to depict (i.e., create percepts) (151). Such confusion in thought spawned the misguided injunction against voiceovers in screenplays on the basis that they are “not cinematic depiction but merely description by literary assertion transferred to film” (Seymour Chatman as quoted by Leitch 151).

The idea that “Novels deal in concepts, films in percepts” is another of Leitch’s “pernicious” fallacies and clearly connected to the discredited (in his eyes) theory of specificity (156). Leitch explains the reception of literary content as concept (rather than percept) as a function of rereading, “. . . and of a specifically analytical kind of rereading . . . with each rereading converting more percepts to concepts” (158). Attributing this difference to the media through which the content is encountered (novels as opposed to screenplays and film) assumes that, while novels are reread, movies are watched only once, itself a questionable conclusion (158). The ability to derive concepts from percepts is an exercise in what Leitch calls “educated guesswork” on the part of the reader/viewer; it presupposes gaps in all of the versions of a story, whether visual, verbal, or aural—constructed differently but functioning to the same end: as engines of audience engagement (158). “What determines the success of a given work is neither

the decision to withhold nor the decision to specify a character's thoughts,” concludes Leitch, “but the subtlety, maturity, and fullness of the pattern that emerges from thoughts and actions specified or inferred. These are not criteria on which any particular medium has a monopoly” (158).

Adaptation Studies as a Craft Tool

Such gaps reflect the very nature of the ur-text model for adaptations. By definition, it exists in incompleteness with theoretically infinite space for another perspective that brings more fullness to the story it tells. In this sense, one adaptation becomes the source of another, and that adaptation may in turn influence a new rendering of the adaptation from whence it sprang or inspire a third adaptation that influences the first source text. All versions would be approached as intermedial texts with the original, the “authoritative” text being the ever-evolving, constantly being revealed ur-text.

Cattrysse describes the process by which this model is already being realized among writers. He describes the emergence of a new “hybrid” of author/screenwriter in the film noir movement of the 1940s and 1950s when studios not only purchased movie rights but hired the authors of these works to draft the screenplays. Many of them coupled screenwriting with their fiction writing.

“Today,” Cattrysse observes wryly, “hybrid author-screenwriters continue to bet on more than one horse when they develop the same project simultaneously as a novel and a screenplay. Whichever project is sold first may serve to promote the other” (256). Not all of these authors undertake the screenplay adaptation of their work. Self-adaptation, when an author adapts his or her novel for the screen, is less common in the cinema, according to Cattrysse, but “with the emergence of convergence culture, the hybridized author-screenwriters from the 1940s have

evolved into multiplatform writers and producers: now projects are specifically developed for simultaneous production in multiple media” (256).

Cattrysse cites the 2011 production of *The Adventures of Tintin* as an example. From the project’s beginning, the screenplay adaptation of two of Hergé’s comic books paralleled its simultaneous adaptation as a novel (with translated versions), a computer game, and merchandise ranging from “coloring books, puzzles, quizzes, postcards, toys . . . and T-shirts . . . featuring Tintin, his little dog Snowy, Captain Haddock, [and] scenes from . . . the comics, the film adaptation or the game” (261-262). Certainly no studio has more effectively exploited this model than Disney. The question begs to be asked: Do all of these artifacts—one might argue “texts”—form an ur-text?

Related to this idea, Cattrysse describes a 2005 study by Alexie Tcheuyap of selected French-speaking African authors who adapted their novels into screenplays in order to reach illiterate audiences with messages concerning gender and political issues (*De l’écrit à l’écran. Les réécritures filmiques du roman africain francophone*—“From Writing to Screen: Filmic Rewritings of the French-speaking African Novel”—as discussed in Cattrysse 301, 317). Like Hermansson’s ur-text on adulthood emerging from novel-to-screen adaptations, Cattrysse’s discussion suggests that novels, screenplays, and films can all be credibly understood as adaptations of a source text (the “previously formulated political message”) which informs the features (characters, plots, theme) of both the novels and the films (317). His observations return us to Hermansson’s identification of characters as the primary, even necessary, conveyers of theme.

For Cattrysse, the self-adaptations of these African authors’ novels into screenplays holds scholarly interest because self-adaptation, while an uncommon adaptational practice, is emerging

in unusual forms, enabled by ready access to multimedia (317). “Authors [will] try their hand at more than one medium at a time by developing a project simultaneously aimed at two or more media, such as a screenplay (for a long feature or a made-for-TV movie), a novel, and . . . a game,” he notes (317).

What differentiates these “hybrid authors/screenwriters” from those associated with film noir in the 1940s and 1950s or with the multi-modal movie projects systematically implemented by studios like Disney is that they are freelancers simultaneously drafting alternate versions of their work for different media outlets. Cattrysse explains that “Although each author will have idiosyncratic working methods, this tactic, unlike the first type of ‘self-adaptation’ [that exemplified by the author/screenwriters of film noir or the African authors from Tcheuyap’s study], alternates the function of T1s [the source text] and T2s [the adaptation] throughout the writing process.” He expands:

To write a screenplay and a novel ‘at the same time’ does not mean that the author literally writes the novel and the screenplay at the same time but rather that the work is undertaken alternately on the novel and the screenplay. The author may work on the novel in the morning and turn to the screenplay in the afternoon, or vice versa. In that case, both book and script become each other’s source text and target text, and one writing process exercises its source-modeling force upon the other. Since both novel and screenplay are designed in phases (e.g. synopsis, treatment, step outline, screenplay), previous writing phases may function as a model C [the ur-text], common to both novel A and screenplay B. Furthermore, whoever has coached (screen)writers knows that, along the way, writers make corrections or change their minds, deciding to go in different directions . . . This means that whatever text A, B or C is conceived of as a T1 for a T2, it

must be studied as a dynamic entity that is very likely to have changed under the influence of other models or T1s. (318)

The thread that weaves these versions into a coherent whole are the characters, who both remain the same and become different people as they migrate from version to version and back again. Hermansson's adoption of the sociological model of migrant populations is most helpful, providing a real-life point of comparison for understanding the bi-directional movement of character transformation and development across adaptations (*Adapting Adulthood*, Chapter 4). "Like real life migrants," says Hermansson, "after all their self-doubts, most of the characters return to what they might have perceived as a core of their narrative self-identities, once they realise that the ideals of the social world are based on a widespread collective, cultural code" (*Adapting Adulthood* 72). In other words, when adaptations are considered as a whole, the various regenerations of characters in each new story world would be observed manifesting a set of behaviors and traits—habits and personality—that readers and observers would recognize as unique identifiers of that character no matter what story world he or she inhabits. It is through these sets of "static facts, dynamic expressive acts, habits, and traits" that theme is communicated (*Adapting Adulthood* 45).

"If characters were merely designed fictional beings, without thematic content," points out Hermansson, "they would only randomly communicate anything of value to the audiences, and their design qualities would be of a mere decorative value" (*Adapting Adulthood* 46-47). As "symbols and symptoms of phenomena in the real world," however, "they perform thematic functions" (*Adapting Adulthood* 71). Consequently, the most important question to ask during the process of adapting a novel to the screen (or vice versa) is "What happens to the

representation of themes?” Construed using Bazin’s terminology, the question becomes “What happens to the main characters and the situations they are in?”

According to Hermansson, “[E]ach version of a story produces distinct lines of reasoning about the thematic constitution and significance of a theme since every adaptation is affected by its discursive environment” (*Adapting Adulthood* 83). Because a theme is constituted differently in every version of a story, “adaptations offer particularly multi-layered grounds for reflection, since they offer more than one narrative version of a subject . . . [and] they also accentuate that thematic understandings are inherently provisional, always in transition, subject to discursive exchanges (*Adapting Adulthood* 83-84).

Although Hermansson holds that the mode of thematic representation is what changes most when a novel is adapted to a screenplay, he recognizes that novels, screenplays, and films still draw from a common box of tools for creating and developing character. “As long as characters speak in films,” Hermansson avers, “it is not exclusively a literary prerogative to express thoughts and feelings verbally. Voice-overs and overt narrators may also fill the role of a literary, verbal narrator” (84).

According to Uri Margolin, characters can be represented by “dynamic mimetic acts” and “static mimetic elements” (206). Dynamic acts may be verbal, mental, or physical. Habits and customs, traits and personality, names and demographics constitute static mimetic elements (206). In the hands of the self-adapter, moving between different modes of representation to tell the same story, they offer powerful tools for exploring themes—sometimes for identifying one’s themes and certainly for clarifying them—by observing one’s characters migrate from one story world to the other.

Self-Adaptation as Thematic Discovery, Recovery, and Vision

Aside from the pecuniary and opportunistic ends motivating the self-adapters that Cattrysse describes, the process of adaptation (and particularly of self-adaptation if the practice is to be useful as a craft tool) must focus on Bazin's "main characters and situations" understood as Hermansson's "symbols and symptoms of phenomena in the real world" that most importantly function to communicate theme (Cattrysse 256; Bazin 6; Hermansson 71). The adapter attends to the changes—additions, deletions, modifications—in characters' verbal, mental, and physical dynamic acts as they migrate from one medium to another, forced now by the requirements of the screenplay form to identify and distill the most thematically load-bearing content into a representation concordant with that environment and next to apply those deeper thematic insights into a more purposeful shaping of the narrative content of the novel.

During this ongoing interchange of roles of novel and screenplay from source text to adapted text to source text again, the larger and more comprehensive ur-text emerges. Characters reveal themselves more fully and the "real world" phenomena they inhabit manifest with a breadth and depth more congruent with reality. Even Margolin's "static mimetic elements"—a character's habits and customs, traits and personality, names and demographics—may morph under the incisive light of a more complete thematic revelation as the writer's thematic assumptions are tested, questioned, and qualified in the adaptation process (206). This thematic clarification in the writer's mind may present itself as discovery of theme (the crystallization of discrete ideas driving content creation into a unified vision), recovery of theme (the removal of tangential or extraneous content that obfuscates theme), and/or development of theme (content revision that intensifies thematic presence). "As you play with a story's shape," advises Robert

McKee in *Story*, his seminal text on screenwriting, “its intellectual and emotional spirit evolves” (8).

In addition, expanding thematic explorations simultaneously into alternative directions between two textual modes can reveal unsuspected implications of a theme as it relates to setting or character or authorial and cultural assumptions, especially when such “static” elements as period and place, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural and ideological commitments are approached as experimental variables in the adaptation process. If the self-adapter accepts the possibility of the existence of an ur-text of which his or her original works are simply facets, adaptations supply more than tools for crafting story; they fuel the writer’s vision.

“Designing story tests the maturity and insight of the writer,” asserts McKee, “his knowledge of society, nature, and the human heart. Story demands both vivid imagination and powerful analytic thought . . . Craft is the sum total of all means used to draw the audience into deep involvement, to hold that involvement, and ultimately to reward it with a moving and meaningful experience” (19, 22). Elsewhere, McKee observes that

All fine films, novels, and plays, through all shades of the comic and tragic, entertain when they give the audience a fresh model of life empowered with an affective meaning. To retreat behind the notion that the audience simply wants to dump its troubles at the door and escape reality is a cowardly abandonment of the artist’s responsibility. Story isn’t a flight from reality but a vehicle that carries us on our search for reality, our best effort to make sense out of the anarchy of existence. (12)

For the Christian writer, whether of novels or screenplays or both, the ur-text we ultimately adapt is the gospel, the story of a fallen world and its redemption through one man’s

obedience to the Father he loves. Although the man dies, his story is not an Aristotelian tragedy, but as Dante rightly calls it in his adaptation of that ur-text, a “Comedy.”

And in the marriage of novel and screenplay through the adaptation process, a greater marriage is glimpsed: the ur-text that emerges across all versions and invites the imagining of a greater whole or design, that “cognitive flicker of meanings” that illuminates the final and great marriage feast of the Lamb.

Section Three

The Creative Project

THE EYE OF THE KING

Written By

Nora Graves

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAINOUS COASTLINE - DAY

A black limo snakes along a twisting, rugged coastline highway. Storm clouds roll inland from the sea. LIGHTNING flashes and reveals the face of WINIFRED RANDALL (WINI), 21, a dusky but bronzed beauty with large gray-green eyes, staring at the dreary landscape through the rain-spattered rear passenger window. Beside her, in shadows, sits GRETA RANDALL (early 50s) -- stern, stiff, impassive, her hair still naturally brunette with distinctive gray "racing stripes" framing her dark face.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. WINI'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

LIGHTNING FLASHES through window and reveals face of YOUNG WINI, 8, sleeping face up in bed.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

TWO HIT MEN dressed in black slip surreptitiously through wood. SOUNDS OF LAUGHTER AND VOICES drift through trees. The men crouch as they wind their way toward the voices, rifles at sides. A child's LAUGHTER grows LOUDER, draws near. Young Wini bursts through trees. One hit man straightens, lifts rifle to shoulder, aims at her, FIRES.

INT. WINI'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Wini SCREAMS, jerks up in bed, CRIES. A boy, YOUNG BEL, 12, steps out of shadows -- his golden tan, honeyed highlights in light brown hair give him a golden glow. He is a mute and cannot speak, but his honey-colored hazel eyes brighten visibly as he communicates with Young Wini telepathically.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

It's okay, Wini. I'm here. I saw.

Young Bel slips onto bed beside Young Wini. She wraps her arms around his neck and buries her face into his shoulder, WEEPING. Young Bel holds her and pats her back.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

It'll be alright, Wini. No one's going to hurt you.

LIGHTNING FLASHES and illuminates Bel's eyes glowing in the dark.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BACK SEAT OF LIMO - DAY

LIGHTNING FLASHES. The CRACK OF THUNDER makes Wini jump as she gazes out the rear passenger window. Greta looks at her.

GRETA

Is something wrong, Winifred?

WINI

It's my birthday, Aunt Greta. What could be more wrong?

Greta studies Wini's face briefly and resumes her forward stare. A FLASH OF LIGHTNING shows the straight line of her mouth, her stony expression. Wini rests her forehead against the window glass and gazes bleakly at the gray landscape.

WINI

Why does it always have to rain on my birthday?

ANOTHER LIGHTNING FLASH.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. WINI'S NINTH BIRTHDAY PICNIC - DAY

SOUNDS OF CHILDREN'S SHRIEKS and LAUGHTER. LORD HENRY RANDALL, 30s, blindfolded, snatches first at Young Wini, then at Young Bel, who both elude him. He lifts an edge of the blindfold, catches sight of his wife, LADY ROWENA (early 30s), and slips it back over his eyes. He catches her in his arms and pulls the blindfold down about his neck.

HENRY

Caught you -- fair and square --

ROWENA

You peeked, Henry. I saw you.

HENRY

Wini -- did I cheat?

YOUNG WINI

(laughing)

Yes, Daddy, you did. I saw you!

Henry turns back to Rowena.

HENRY
(suddenly earnest)
If I did, I promise you, Rowena, I will
never cheat again.

Rowena lays a finger gently across his mouth.

ROWENA
Dare I trust you, Henry?

HENRY
I swear on the Eye -- never -- again --

Henry punctuates his last two words with two kisses on her lips. He folds Rowena tightly into his arms and kisses her parted mouth long and deeply.

Young Bel signs to Aunt Greta (40) who sits on a lounge chair beneath an umbrella, wearing sunglasses and a scarf wrapped loosely about her head and neck.

GRETA
Yes, Bel, we can serve the cake now.

Greta signals a servant, THOMAS, 30s, who stands behind her in the shade of some trees, hands clasped behind his back.

GRETA
Thomas, have Bailey bring the cake.

Thomas nods and slips into the trees, where a black limo is parked in the shade several yards away.

YOUNG WINI (V.O.)
Mamma and Daddy look so happy...

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)
I told you he never really loved Lady
Diana...

Henry relaxes his hold on Rowena and holds his palm to the sky.

HENRY
I think it's going to rain.

Greta rises from her chair and signals to Thomas, who carries a large cake, and BAILEY (40s), who carries a small table. The sky darkens.

The treetops begin tossing in the wind. Raindrops fall faster.

GRETA

That won't be necessary. We're going back to the house for cake and ice cream.

A SHOT rings out from the trees behind them. Bailey flings his arms into the air and topples to the ground. Thomas spins around. A SECOND SHOT. Thomas sinks to the ground. The cake smashes upside down into the grass.

HENRY

Down!

His voice is drowned out by a LIGHTNING CRACK. A THIRD SHOT rings across the clearing. Rowena gasps and clutches her breast. Henry whirls around and sees her body slither to the ground.

HENRY

No!

ANOTHER SHOT and Henry's body lifts, rises, and falls next to Rowena's. Wini SCREAMS. Another LIGHTNING CRACK and Henry and Rowena's figures disappear behind a gray curtain of pelting rain.

Greta grabs Young Wini by her dress collar.

GRETA

This way. Quick!

TWO MORE SHOTS ring out. One shot hits a tree; the second the ground.

YOUNG WINI

No! No! No!

Greta seizes one of Wini's arms, Young Bel the other. They run, dragging Wini into cover. Greta trips and falls flat. Bel stops to help her but she waves him on.

GRETA

Forget me, Bel. Take Wini and run!

WINI

No! I won't leave you, Aunt Greta. I won't leave Marma and Daddy!

Bel stares at Greta. Then he jerks Wini around and runs, pulling her kicking and flailing behind him.

YOUNG WINI

Let -- me -- go!

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

No, Wini. I will never let you go.

Bel stops to catch his breath. Wini collapses to the ground, **WEEPING**. She digs her fingers into the rain-soaked earth.

YOUNG WINI

Marma! Daddy!

Lightning **FLASHES**.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BACK SEAT OF LIMO - DAY

LIGHTNING CRACKS. Wini shudders and looks over at Greta.

WINI

I don't know why we had to leave for Ketteringas today.

GRETA

Because it is your birthday, you're now twenty-one, and you are the heir of the great Eye of the King.

WINI

I am not going to be "the great Eye of the King."

GRETA

You inherited his gift. It is your duty to use it.

WINI

I swear, Aunt Greta, if you so much as hint to the King that I have the Eye, I will cause you such grief, you will never hold your head up in Ketteringas again.

GRETA

I think I deserve better from you than that.

LIGHTNING flashes accompanied by a **THUNDERCLAP**.

WINI

Just stop nagging me about the Eye.

GRETA

But it's your duty. The Eye isn't yours to do with as you please. It belongs to the whole country of Kettering.

WINI

One's duty only leads to the grave -- and an early one at that.

GRETA

The grave is everyone's final end.

WINI

Can't I live a little first? I want to be happy, Aunt Greta, to have a home and a family like everyone else.

GRETA

But Winifred, you are not like everyone else. You are the Eye.

WINI

You are confused, Aunt Greta. I am not the Eye.

GRETA

Then I am not the only one who is confused about that.

(pauses)

It isn't like Bel to forget your birthday.

WINI

I told you. He's punishing me.

GRETA

Bel would never "punish" anyone, Winifred.

WINI

He refuses to talk to me.

GRETA

(perks up)

Talk? What do you mean?

WINI

(wary)

I mean I haven't had a text or an email from him in weeks.

GRETA

You hear from him in other ways. Don't think I don't know. He only signs when I'm present.

WINI

Really, Aunt Greta, you know Bel can't utter a sound except a laugh or the occasional gurgle.

Another LIGHTNING FLASH illuminates Greta's face.

GRETA

What did you argue about?

Wini goes back to staring out the window.

WINI

The Eye.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Greta pulls off her gloves and sorts through a stack of opened letters on a table near the door. Wini sheds her raincoat onto an armchair and heads for the fireplace.

GRETA

That's odd.

WINI

What's odd?

GRETA

I was certain we would hear from Bel.

WINI

He's punishing me.

Greta's irritation grows as she searches the mail a second time. She GROANS and shakes a letter at Wini.

GRETA

A letter from Mrs. Halifax! Really -- the audacity of that woman.

WINI

Johnny Haelstrom's mother?

GRETA

Lord Haelstrom, Winifred. Johnny came into his inheritance years ago.

WINI

Oh, no, Auntie. You don't mean...?

Wini slumps onto the sofa and stares at Greta with an open mouth.

WINI

We agreed to break the contract, didn't we?

GRETA

I notified her lawyers of our intent, but I've heard nothing back.

Greta goes to Wini and sits beside her.

GRETA

She insists on Johnny's proprietary rights as your contracted fiancé to present you to the King tomorrow.

WINI

I refuse to be any man's property -- especially Johnny Haelstrom's.

GRETA

Until the contract is officially annulled, we must abide by its terms.

WINI

I am not the Eye, Auntie.

GRETA

So you keep saying, but wishing does not make a thing so.

WINI

I will make it so!

GRETA

You are still a Randall, and no Randall may marry outside the designated family lines.

WINI

Why didn't you marry Johnny's father? The Haelstroms are one of the Ancient Three.

GRETA

That is none of your business.

WINI

But I know you loved him. The Eye showed me. Bobby Haelstrom made you promise you would never dance with anyone but him...

GRETA

That's enough, Winifred.

WINI

And then he kissed you. Why didn't you marry him?

Greta rises to her feet.

GRETA

This has been a difficult day for both of us. Tomorrow will not be much better. I am going to bed.

(kisses Wini's forehead)

GRETA

I suggest you do the same.

Wini watches Greta's back as she leaves and then turns and stares into the fire.

FLASHBACK - INT. DRAWING ROOM - LITTLE EYE - NIGHT

Two figures, Wini and BEL, 24, square off, silhouetted by the light of a dying fire. Shadows shroud the room. Light and shadows from the fireplace flicker across their faces. Bel is uniformed in red. He bears the insignia of a medical officer on his sleeve.

WINI

(defiantly)

I will never be the Eye of the King and you can't make me, Bel Randall!

BEL (V.O.)

My god, Wini, do these men's lives mean nothing to you?

WINI

No one could have saved them. What does it matter whether anyone else knows what the Eye shows me?

BEL (V.O.)

Would it have made any difference to you if you'd known that I was with them?

WINI

What -- what do you mean?

BEL (V.O.)

I was there, Wini, with the medical detachment. Do you want to know what it was like for me -- all those shattered bodies coming through my surgery?

Wini backs away from Bel and bumps into a side of the fireplace.

WINI

No -- no -- please don't share that with me.

Bel grabs Wini's arm and twists her around to face him in the firelight. He locks eyes with Wini. A twitch appears in his left jaw. Wini's eyes never leave his face as she begins to writhe back and forth.

WINI

No, Bel, no. Please -- I'm begging you. Don't show me these things.

BEL (V.O.)

You could have kept some of these men alive, Wini.

WINI

Stop it! I've seen enough people die. I don't want to see any more.

Bel lets her arm drop.

BEL (V.O.)

You don't see at all.

He turns and grabs his scarf from the sofa arm.

BEL (V.O.)

You know what it's like to grow up without a father. Why would you let someone else's father die?

He wraps the scarf around his neck and picks up his cap.

BEL (V.O.)

How would your father feel about you rejecting the gift he stewarded so well?

Wini burrows her forehead into a bent arm braced against the fireplace mantel, weeping.

WINI

Enough! Go away, please -- just leave me alone.

BEL (V.O.)

Gladly.

He puts on his cap.

BEL (V.O.)

Goodbye, Wini.

He leaves. The door latch CLICKS SOFTLY behind him. Wini collapses against the mantel. Her body shakes with sobs.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DRAWING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Wini stares into the fire. A log in the fireplace SNAPS in two, releasing a HISSING NOISE and a SHOWER OF SPARKS.

INT. BALLROOM - THE WINGED PALACE - NIGHT

WOMEN in gaily colored dresses, MEN in tuxes and military uniforms crowd the dance floor. CLIQUES OF MEN AND WOMEN in elegant dress clutter the perimeter. On one end LEONIDAS and his QUEEN CONSORT, ISABELLA, both early 50s, sit on a raised dais. Directly behind and to the right of the king stands SIMONIDES HALFORD, COUNT NICHOLAI, 40s, dressed in black. Behind and on either side of him stand assorted LADIES and LORDS in waiting. FOOTMEN guard the short steps leading onto the platform.

Simonides's gaze drifts to Wini, who stands awkwardly near doors that open into the adjoining banqueting hall. He studies her intently. Aunt Greta and MRS. HALIFAX, 50, stand next to her. They watch the passing dancers and exchange occasional remarks.

Mrs. Halifax dips her fan in the direction of an approaching couple whirling their way across the outer edge of the dancers.

MRS. HALIFAX

That is the niece of the Grand Marchant: Arabella Cornwallis. She is a poetess and considered quite the wit among the younger set at court. I will have Johnny introduce you, Lady Randall. You are certain to be great friends.

Wini flashes Greta a doleful glance.

WINI

But I will bore her, Mrs. Halifax. I am not much of a wit myself and poetry is totally beyond me.

MRS. HALIFAX

Your father was a poet, was he not? Johnny is always quoting lines from the great Eye of the King.

JOHNNY HAELOSTROM, 24, appears with drinks and winces as he hands Wini a glass. He presents a striking figure -- blonde, blue-eyed, handsome -- a real head turner dressed in the red uniform of a Ketteringan officer.

JOHNNY

You've put your foot in it now, Mother. The last time Wini heard me quoting her father's poetry, she cracked a bowl of goose fat over my head.

WINI

You were not quoting him, Johnny Haelstrom. You were misquoting him. You thought yourself very funny.

JOHNNY

Not nearly so funny as you, after I rubbed your face in the drippings.

MRS. HALIFAX

Johnny! Your manners!

WINI

And punched me in the eye...

Johnny ignores his distressed mother and lifts his glass to Wini in a toast.

JOHNNY

It didn't do you any harm. You were always a pretty little thing, Wini, but now you are absolutely breathtaking.

Wini glares at him.

WINI

I wish I could return the compliment, but unfortunately, I see no change in you at all.

MRS. HALIFAX

I assure you, Lady Randall, he is very much changed. He is teasing you...

Johnny continues to ignore the older women and surveys Wini in silence as he sips his champagne.

GRETA

I may be mistaken, but I think that is my niece's point, Mrs. Halifax.

Johnny sets his glass on a nearby table, takes Wini's untouched champagne from her, and sets it next to his. He takes Wini by the hand.

JOHNNY

Come, Wini. It's too soon to fight. Let's give it another hour or two before we put on the gloves. Do you dance?

Greta returns a sly look from Wini with a barely perceptible nod. Wini gives Johnny a hesitant, demure smile.

WINI

A little. We don't have many opportunities for dancing in the country.

Johnny pulls her toward the dance floor.

JOHNNY

I thought not. Don't be shy. I'm the best dancer in Ketteringas. I'll cover for you.

Wini flashes Greta a covert smile.

WINI

If you promise to watch out for me.

Johnny leads Wini to the edge of the dance floor. He slides one hand around her waist and takes Wini's hand in the other. An opening appears in the swirl of figures coming toward them, and he whisks Wini into the dance.

Wini bites her lower lip to keep a straight face. Johnny takes it easy at first with simple steps and a slower pace, but Wini follows him effortlessly. His eyes narrow suspiciously and he speeds up and introduces more difficult moves. Wini follows him flawlessly. He experiments with a complex series of turns and spins and slides her to his side with arms crossed and steps parallel. Wini doesn't falter once. He swings her back to face him.

JOHNNY

A little! Wini, you're wonderful! Where did you learn to dance like this?

WINI

One picks these things up -- even in the country.

Johnny draws her near in a tight spin.

JOHNNY

It's like -- our bodies are perfectly synchronized --

They turn, swirl apart, and come near again.

JOHNNY

I didn't know what to expect after all these years -- but I certainly did not expect this!

Wini frowns and looks down. Johnny slows their pace.

JOHNNY

What is it? Did I say something wrong again?

WINI

No -- no. It's only that you've surprised me, too.

JOHNNY

I wanted things to be different. It's so awkward, having your aunt and my mother around. They've never liked each other.

They complete a spin.

JOHNNY

And in spite of my best intentions, I always get off on the wrong foot with you.

WINI

There's nothing wrong with your feet now.

JOHNNY

I stepped on your toes earlier.

Johnny guides them through a sudden crush of dancers.

JOHNNY

Y'gods, Wini. What did I do to make you curl up in your seat and glare at me like that in the car?

WINI

I wasn't glaring at you. I wasn't even looking at you.

JOHNNY

You were pretending not to see me, but you had me in your crosshairs all the way here.

WINI

Perhaps I didn't like the way you looked at me while Aunt Greta and your mother talked. It made me feel -- undressed.

JOHNNY

A man likes a few curves in his future wife.

Johnny runs his eyes over Wini's figure appreciatively.

JOHNNY

You were such a skinny kid, I didn't know what to expect.

Wini missteps for the first time. Johnny covers for her and tries to pull her closer, but she resists and draws away.

WINI

Surely you're not thinking of going through with this contract? We've never gotten along.

JOHNNY

I think we have as much chance at happiness as any other contracted couple -- more than most.

Wini keeps her eyes on the floor.

WINI

I'm not suited for life at court. I want to stay in the country, at Little Eye.

JOHNNY

You mean you want out?

Wini nods. She doesn't look at him.

JOHNNY

Does your aunt know how you feel? Is she -- supportive?

WINI

She understands.

Johnny spins Wini a few times and pulls her back to him.

JOHNNY

It won't be easy. There's already been a considerable exchange of property -- mines in the East Grayling, ships at Littlebridge, my father's farms at Pilmilco. It will take a long time to sort it all out.

WINI

So Aunt Greta says.

JOHNNY

I'm not in a hurry, Wini. I think we should give ourselves a chance to get to know each other again before we rush into a dissolution.

WINI

There's nothing hasty about this. I'm not
marrying you, Johnny Haelstrom.

He pauses briefly with her outstretched hand in his and searches her
eyes.

JOHNNY

Is there someone else?

Wini looks at the floor. He studies her for a moment and resumes
their dance.

JOHNNY

(after a silence)

I've not had a chance to tell you how sorry
I was about your parents. I may have
parodied his poetry to tease you, but I
admired your father greatly.

WINI

Let's not talk about him.

JOHNNY

I was at the funeral. You always had some
boy with you. A distant relative I suppose?

WINI

You mean Bel. He is a Randall now, but he's
no relation -- my father's ward.

JOHNNY

Ah, yes.

He spins her gently.

JOHNNY

I remember hearing something about Lord
Randall taking on a guardianship. Does he
live with you at Little Eye?

WINI

He's a doctor in General Marlbury's division
-- a medici auxiliarias. He's just been
posted to the Brindle Stryd.

JOHNNY

(whistles softly)

The Brindle Stryd!

WINI

What do you know about it?

JOHNNY

Men are dying by the scores -- some say hundreds. The Carpartian invaders are clearly being armed by another force.

They dance in silence. Johnny slows their pace and simplifies their steps. He stares in the air over Wini's shoulder.

JOHNNY

I'm taking reserves to Little Hay soon. I haven't been told when.

WINI

Is that near the Brindle Stryd?

JOHNNY

Not so near that I can take messages to your lover, if that's what you're asking.

Wini trips over Johnny's feet. He catches her and she recovers, but her face is brick red.

WINI

He's not my lover, Johnny. Right now, he's not even speaking to me.

JOHNNY

He will be. I can see it in your eyes. I know you too well.

Johnny draws Wini to his breast. She stiffens and pulls away.

JOHNNY

Relax, Wini. I only want to enjoy what time I have left with you. I won't try anything.

He pulls her gently back to him. Wini holds herself rigid at first, but Johnny picks up the pace of their dance, shifting their steps so that their legs intertwine and their thighs press together. Wini surrenders herself to the joy of the dance and relaxes against him.

JOHNNY

(softly against her ear)

Remember the turret on the old city wall?
When we climbed out the window to hide from
your aunt?

WINI

I remember I almost wet my pants when you said you were going to leave me there to feed the bats.

JOHNNY

I was a tease. It's only because I liked you so much. Remember sitting on the rooftop, watching the fog roll in?

WINI

"Fog and light, dancing together." That's how you described it. You've always had a way with words.

JOHNNY

And you were the light dancing in my eyes...

Johnny kisses the top of her ear, kisses the hollow of her ear, kisses the upward curve of her jawline just beneath her ear. Wini catches her breath and jerks away.

WINI

You promised you wouldn't try anything!

Johnny steps back, LAUGHS, and swirls Wini into a spin.

JOHNNY

Can I help it if your ears are irresistible?

He rolls her back into his arms.

JOHNNY

If things get out of hand, it's entirely your fault, Winifred Randall. You should keep your ears covered in the presence of gentlemen.

Johnny spins her again and cuts off Wini's retort. He steers them into the middle of a throng of dancing couples.

JOHNNY

Shall we show these people how to dance?

Wini LAUGHS and Johnny whirls her through a tight cluster of dancers, picking up speed and scattering them in all directions. Heads start turning to watch them and other couples slow and move out of their path. Greta stands with her back against a wall and watches them as they whirl out of sight. Her eyes narrow.

EXT. RANDALL FAMILY CEMETERY - LITTLE EYE - NIGHT

Wini stands in the dark at the foot of her father's grave. A bird's song rings out in the night followed by the haunting NOTES OF BEL'S HAVA PIPE (like a pan pipe).

WINI

Bel?

The sounds of CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER echo in the distance. The sounds CRESCENDO as the children draw nearer. The adult Wini watches as Young Bel and Young Wini crash through the trees and spill into the clearing.

Young Wini tumbles into the long grass of the clearing and rolls to her back, LAUGHING. Young Bel dances jigs. Suddenly he stops and points to the night sky.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Look, Wini! It's about to happen!

YOUNG WINI (V.O.)

What's about to happen?

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

The xeiba -- the tree at the center of the universe. It's about to appear.

Bel PLAYS A RIFF on his pipe and runs to tug Wini to her feet. He pulls her to the center of the clearing.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Stand here, like this... Close your eyes and don't open them until I tell you.

Bel tilts Wini's head so she faces straight upwards.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Now -- look!

Wini opens her eyes. Streaks of light appear in the sky. Their numbers and sizes increase until light falls from the sky like rain.

YOUNG WINI

Oh! -- oh! -- oh!

Young Wini cups a palm as if to catch the falling lights like raindrops. The entire clearing glows as if on fire. Wini LAUGHS and spins around with raised arms.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Come -- dance with me, Wini!

They grab hands and twirl in wild circles, LAUGHING and spinning faster and faster. Wini loses her grip. Both children are flung to the ground. The lights fade.

YOUNG WINI (V.O.)

They're going.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

They've left their light in us.

He rolls onto his back. They lie end-to-end, holding hands. Wini twines her fingers through Bel's; his tighten around hers.

YOUNG WINI (V.O.)

Aunt Greta thinks you're an Elderstar.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Not me. You're the Elderstar -- an Elderstar princess.

YOUNG WINI (V.O.)

You will never leave me, will you?

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Look up, Wini. Look at the sky.

Faint glimmering lines of light pulse against the black sky and slither downward like long, bony fingers. The shape of a huge tree emerges, branches bent with clusters of stars like fruit.

YOUNG BEL (V.O.)

Don't be afraid. It's the xeiba -- the father of the Elderstar.

Bel's hand slips from Young Wini's. Young Wini merges with the adult Wini, who tries to hold onto Young Bel as hard as she can, but he slips from her grasp and disappears.

WINI

No! You can't go. You promised you'd never leave me.

Wini WEEPS. The coils of light plunge into the earth and erupt from it again in the shape of huge roots snaking across the ground toward Wini.

Wini SCREAMS. The roots plunge into the earth mounded over Henry Randall's grave and CRACK it open. The wind picks up. Dark clouds roll across the sky. Lightning FLASHES in the distance followed by a faint THUNDERCLAP.

SHARP BANGS shake the lid of the casket. The roots lift it out of the ground on their backs, like a sprouted seedpod. The lid cracks open. King Leonidas sits up. Wini GASPS and jerks backwards.

WINI

Where is my father!

LEONIDAS

I've been searching for him everywhere. He's not here.

Leonidas's stretches out his arm and points a finger at Wini.

LEONIDAS

You're hiding him from me!

WINI

I don't know where he is. I thought he was here.

Leonidas leans closer and shakes his finger in her face.

LEONIDAS

Where is he, Lady Randall? Where is my Eye?

WINI

(sobs)

I don't know, Your Majesty.

LEONIDAS

You lie. You have him! Give me back my Eye.

The skin splits down the back of his pointer finger, across the back of his hand and up the length of his arm. His flesh slides to the sides and hangs from his shoulder in a fold of muscles and ligaments that look like an empty sleeve. Only the bones are left. They glisten pinkish cream.

His uniform rends in half the length of his body cavity. Cloth, skin, and flesh fall away exposing his viscera. Wini recoils, her gaze arrested by the pulsations of his heart. Blood seeps from the ascending aorta and trickles down over his heart's outer wall. His heart beats slower.

LEONIDAS
 (gasping)
 Where -- is -- my -- Eye?

Wini SCREAMS. Leonidas's right eye has slipped from its socket and slides down his cheek in a gelatinous mass of blood and pus. His other eye is staring at her chest where a ring dangles from a chain around her neck.

LEONIDAS
 You -- have it --

Leonidas points at the ring with a bony finger. His bones are whitening and withering.

LEONIDAS
 My -- Eye --

Wini looks down at the ring. It changes into an eyeball. The iris rolls upward and glares at her, its pupil swelling and filling it. Wini tears the chain from her neck and throws it at Leonidas.

WINI
 Take it! Take it! It's yours!

She drops to the ground, WEEPING.

WINI
 It's yours... it's yours... It was never
 mine to keep.

Leonidas catches the chain in his skeletal hand and pushes the eye into his socket. The flesh slides back over the exposed organs and bones and the cloth of his uniform closes over his skin. He closes his eyes, SIGHS, and relaxes back into the coffin. Wini looks up at him. The figure in the coffin is not Leonidas but Henry, her father. His right eye suddenly flies open. It rolls in its socket until it locates her, winks, and closes. The roots slide the lid over the coffin, wrap around the top, and pull it back into the grave. The earth closes over the top.

INT. WINI'S BEDROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Wini lies on her side in bed. Her eyes fly open. Her clock reads 3:00 AM. She flicks on a lamp and sits up. She swings out of bed, goes to her jewelry chest, and sifts frantically until she pulls out a small ring on a simple gold chain.

She holds the ring up - rotates it in the lamplight - slips the chain

over her head and studies her reflection in the mirror. The ring glistens.

INT. DINING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - DAY

Greta sits at the head of a long table with her elbows propped, opening an envelope with a letter opener. A plate with the remains of her breakfast is pushed to one side. A stack of mail sits on the other. Greta looks up at Wini as Wini enters the room and frowns.

GRETA

Well?

Wini steps to the sideboard and inspects its contents. She takes a plate and begins gingerly filling it.

WINI

Well, what?

GRETA

What do you think of him?

WINI

Of who?

GRETA

You are being deliberately obtuse, Winifred Randall. You know exactly who I mean.

Wini sets her plate on the table and settles into the chair on Greta's right.

WINI

What do you think?

GRETA

I think he is the reincarnation of his father, and you are walking on the edge of a precipice.

WINI

He knows I want to break our contract.

GRETA

What did he say about it?

WINI

It doesn't matter what he says. I am not marrying him.

GRETA

Don't delude yourself, Winifred. Bel is forbidden you, even if he has the Eye, too.

Wini EXCLAIMS but Greta silences her with raised hand.

GRETA

You know the rules. Johnny's a fine specimen of a man, and it is obvious he is smitten.

Greta sets the letter opener and letter down.

GRETA

Unfortunately, you've drawn someone else's attention, too.

WINI

Whose?

GRETA

The Palace rang this morning. It seems that Simonides Halford would like to call on you -- today.

WINI

The Palace? Simonides Halford?

GRETA

Simonides Halford, my dear niece, is the half-brother of our king, on the wrong side of the sheets, of course.

WINI

I don't understand --

GRETA

Leonidas's father paid Lord Halford a huge sum of money to marry Simonides's mother and provide his son with a veneer of legitimacy.

WINI

And the King --?

GRETA

The relationship has never been officially acknowledged, but Leonidas openly treats Simonides as a royal brother and expects his subjects to do the same.

WINI

What could such a man possibly want with me?

GRETA

He is a widower, Winifred. His wife, the Countess Nicholai, died a few years ago and left him no heirs. His interest in calling on you so soon after your presentation at court suggests only one thing --

Wini's chair SCREECHES as she jerks it back from the table.

WINI

But the law forbids marriage between royals and any of the family lines of the Eye.

GRETA

Simonides knows that. I cannot fathom what he is about.

WINI

I don't suppose you could tell him I'm not at home?

GRETA

One does not tell a member of the royal family 'no,' Winifred. This was not a request. It is a royal command.

WINI

Oh.

Greta looks at the clock on the mantelpiece.

GRETA

His secretary said the Count will arrive promptly at 4. I must see to the kitchen. We will need to lay out a tea fit for a king. Meanwhile, Winifred, I suggest you go for a long ride and try to catch a bad cold.

The clock on the wall CHIMES.

EXT. BLUFFS OVERLOOKING RIVER - DAY

Wini sits beneath a lone oak tree, her back propped against its trunk. Her mare grazes nearby. She chews on a long blade of foxtail and studies the river below her.

The SOUND of HORSE'S HOOVES signals the approach of Johnny Haelstrom. He is hatless but uniformed. The wind tosses his blonde hair.

JOHNNY

Mind if I join you?

WINI

How did you know I was here?

JOHNNY

Baxter said you went for a ride. Where else would you be?

WINI

My father always loved this view.

Wini waves toward the bottom of the ridge.

WINI

There's an old well down there, hidden in the curve of the Ketteringa. It's where he used to play as a boy.

JOHNNY

I know. "The coldest, clearest, cleanest water in all Kettering" he used to say.

Johnny dismounts and tethers his horse beside Wini's.

JOHNNY

You forget. I brought your father a skin of that water the day you and your mother left for Little Eye.

WINI

I will never forget that. I wanted to give him a goodbye gift, but Aunt Greta wouldn't let me out of the house. Please, sit down.

Johnny drops to the ground at her side.

JOHNNY

Life is always the sweetest when it seems the most uncertain.

WINI

What do you mean by that?

JOHNNY

I'm being deployed. My men are headed to Little Hay. We leave today.

WINI

Oh -- ! I'm so sorry.

JOHNNY

I thought you might be relieved.
It's made me think about our contract --
made me think about you.

WINI

I don't want to hear talk of dying.

JOHNNY

But it's not really about dying. It's about
living... about the things that make life
worth living.

He reaches for her hand.

WINI

Johnny, don't...

Wini pulls her hand. Johnny tightens his hold.

JOHNNY

No, let me have my say. Today of all days,
hear me out.

WINI

Only because you are leaving.

JOHNNY

Kettering's borders are being pushed on
every side and Leonidas doesn't know what to
do about it. It's been twelve years since
your father's assassination and Simonides
Halford wants to push our country into a
full-blown war -- an all-out quest for
imperial glory.

WINI

Simonides Halford?

JOHNNY

The king's half-brother. If he has his way,
he will plunge us into bloodshed,
conscription, and economic disaster...

WINI

What has all this to do with me?

JOHNNY

Don't you see? Since your brother died, and
your father has no male heir, it falls to
you to produce the next Eye -- to you -- and
me.

WINI

(snatches hand back)

I can't believe you're capable of saying
such a thing -- of even thinking it.

JOHNNY

It's why we were contracted in the first
place -- why the descendants of the Ancient
Three and the Randalls have always tolerated
these restrictions on our marriages.

WINI

I might as well be a cow -- a piece of
livestock --

JOHNNY

Don't talk nonsense. Kettering cannot
survive without an Eye.

WINI

The Eye -- the Eye! Why does everything
always come down to the Eye?

JOHNNY

Because it's protected us for three thousand
years. Kettering may be a small country, but
stronger nations have come and gone, and
we're still here, free and independent.

WINI

I won't listen to any more of this.

JOHNNY

Can't you see this is not about you and me?
That there's something bigger, grander at
stake?

WINI

I am not going to marry you, Johnny. My
lawyers are already drawing up the
dissolution papers.

Wini gets to her feet. Johnny stands up beside her.

JOHNNY

Don't think you are going to marry your
medici auxiliarias. I made my own inquiries.
He was a street urchin in Littlebridge. No
one knows who his father is. His mother was
a barmaid. He might share your bed, Wini,
but he will never be your husband.

Wini strikes at his cheek. Johnny catches her hand midair.

WINI

You know nothing about who he is.

JOHNNY

I know all I need to know.

WINI

You are wrong! I have proof Bel is descended
from the Elderstar -- and my father does
have an heir, alive and well and here in
Kettering.

JOHNNY

The Council will never accept an
illegitimate Eye.

WINI

You need to go now.

JOHNNY

I haven't finished. You said you'd hear me
out.

WINI

I've heard all I can bear to hear.

JOHNNY

No, Wini. I want to cut a deal with you. I may never come back, but if I do, I'm ready to cooperate with you.

WINI

Cooperate? How do you mean?

JOHNNY

I will sign your dissolution papers -- no legal haggling over property rights -- but you must do something for me in return.

WINI

What?

JOHNNY

Let me kiss you goodbye.

Wini INHALES SHARPLY.

WINI

You've gone mad.

JOHNNY

Something to remember you by when things get -- intense --

WINI

You're incorrigible!

JOHNNY

I'm serious. I've never been more serious in my life. You'll keep the Haelstrom properties at Pilmilco.

WINI

I don't want your father's farms.

JOHNNY

Then I'll give you back your mother's land at Rainfall. We'll call it even.

WINI

But I've never been kissed before.
I don't want you to be my first. I've been dreaming of Bel's kisses since I was thirteen years old.

JOHNNY

I'm not asking you to give up your dreams.
I'm asking to kiss you goodbye. It's bitter
enough consolation for someone who's loved
you since you were five... But if you say
no, I'll still release you from our contract
when I return -- if I return.

WINI

You always get the best of me, Johnny -- in
every fight -

Johnny traces the outline of her ear, her jawline, her chin with one
finger. He tilts her chin up.

JOHNNY

Not this time, Wini. You've won this battle.

He bends his head. He kisses the corner of her mouth.

JOHNNY

You should feel sorry for me.

He wraps his arms around her and draws her into a deep, long kiss.
Wini's hands creep up the sides of his arms, over his shoulders, and
about his neck. She starts to return his kisses, kiss for kiss.
Passion explodes between them. Wini's body melts into his. Their
kisses grow in intensity and urgency. Johnny presses her into the
tree trunk, his kisses now trailing down her neck and into the hollow
of her throat.

WINI

No -- no -- that's enough.

Wini twists her head to one side and pushes Johnny away.

JOHNNY

(breathing heavily)

Wini, I -- I --

She slips free of the tree trunk, breathing rapidly. Johnny steps
toward her but she blocks him with her hand.

WINI

Stop. Don't come any closer.

JOHNNY

But -- you were kissing me back.

WINI

I was not!

JOHNNY

We were together in everything: every kiss -
- every touch -- every breath -- like we
were dancing.

WINI

Something is wrong.

JOHNNY

The only thing wrong is you denying what
just happened between us. My god, Wini, the
earth was moving under our feet.

WINI

That's -- that's not possible. I don't love
you. I love Bel.

JOHNNY

Wini...

WINI

Goodbye, Johnny.

Wini throws the reins over her mare's head and swings into the
saddle. She sidles up to Johnny.

WINI

Take care of yourself. I don't want anything
to happen to you, but don't delude yourself.
Whatever happened just now means nothing to
me.

She turns to ride away.

JOHNNY

Wini, wait!

Wini stops and looks back at him. Johnny removes a waterskin from the
saddle on his horse. He hands it up to Wini.

JOHNNY

For you. The coldest, clearest, cleanest
water in all of Kettering.
A parting gift.

WINI

I -- I -- Oh, Johnny. I never knew what a romantic fool you are.

She leans down and brushes his lips with hers, spurs her horse around, and speeds away. Johnny stands beneath the oak tree and watches until she is out of sight.

INT. WINI'S BEDROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - DAY

Wini bursts through the door into her bedroom, sees Greta, and freezes. Greta catches Wini's reflection in the mirror above Wini's vanity.

GRETA

I was beginning to think you were not coming back.

WINI

I lost track of time.

Greta eyes Wini's disheveled hair, her swollen lips, a red mark at the base of her neck, her shirt hanging loose.

GRETA

A rough ride?

WINI

Don't be coy. You know exactly what happened. It wouldn't surprise me if you put him up to it.

Wini stands beside Greta and jerks the hairpins from her hair. She vigorously brushes her hair. Greta contemplates Wini's reflection in the mirror.

GRETA

"Him"?

WINI

Johnny Haelstrom. His regiment has been deployed to Little Hay, and he rode over to -- to say goodbye.

GRETA

By the looks of you, he did a little more than say goodbye.

Greta locks eyes with Wini in the mirror. Wini sags onto the vanity's stool.

WINI

I am so, so humiliated, Aunt Greta. He wanted a goodbye kiss, but I'm afraid I gave him more than that.

GRETA

More?

WINI

He was ready to break the contract, no strings attached, but now I'm afraid I gave him hope.

GRETA

Do you have feelings for him?

WINI

I don't know what I feel. I thought I hated him as a child but now I -- I'm not so sure. Is it possible to love two men at the same time?

GRETA

If one of the men is a Haelstrom and the woman is a Randall, I am living proof it's possible.

WINI

What do you mean?

GRETA

I was in love with a Haelstrom.

WINI

-- you promised him you would only dance with him, forever and ever --

GRETA

But I was never contracted to Johnny's father. I was contracted to Perry Montrose, your mother's cousin, and I thought I loved him.

Greta sits down next to Wini. Both stare into the mirror.

GRETA

I did love him. And then I danced with Bobby Haelstrom, and he kissed me, and I forgot all about Perry until it was too late.

WINI

Aunt Greta!

GRETA

I gave Bobby Haelstrom more than a kiss. He promised me he would marry me, so I broke my contract with Perry Montrose -- and broke Perry's heart with it.

WINI

I -- I don't believe you...

GRETA

Don't hold your breath, Winifred. It gets worse. Bobby was contracted to Johnny's mother, and in the end, he needed her money more than he needed me, so he married her. But that didn't stop us.

WINI

Aunt Greta! No! You didn't!

GRETA

It was only until Johnny's mother found out that we talked of ending things, but Bobby couldn't stay away from me, and I -- I didn't want him to.

WINI

What happened?

GRETA

When Johnny was born, Edith gave his father an ultimatum: if he didn't end things with me at once, she would divorce him, sue for half his property, and take the baby and her money with her. Even then, Bobby couldn't choose between us.

WINI

What did he do?

GRETA

He owned property in the East Grayling where the Hetteringae were fighting. He requested his regiment be posted there, and in the midst of the battle, made sure a bullet found his heart.

WINI

Oh, Aunt Greta -- I'm so sorry!

GRETA

I know Edith thinks he was only a casualty of war, but she didn't know him the way I knew him.

WINI

Poor Aunt Greta...

GRETA

(SNORTS)

I was a callous, selfish woman who thought only of herself. Poor Aunt Greta indeed! You mean Wicked Aunt Greta.

Greta gets up and stares out the window.

GRETA

I've had only one purpose in life since then: to keep you from making the mistakes I made. You are like the daughter I never had. The Randalls are not good at love. I wanted it to be different for you.

Wini goes to Greta and kisses her cheek.

WINI

If I'm as good as you, I'll be satisfied.

GRETA

There are no doubts about Bel's character.

WINI

You mean he's too good for me?

GRETA

Bel is too good for any of us, but that is not what I meant. I mean you have the benefit of his voice -- in here --

Greta taps the side of Wini's forehead with her finger.

GRETA

-- and you have the Eye. If you heed them,
Winifred, I see no reason why you cannot be
both good and happy.

Greta spots Wini's ring on its chain, exposed in the open V of her blouse. It gleams in the sunlight.

GRETA

What are you doing with your father's ring?
It was returned to Leonidas after his death.

WINI

Daddy's ring?

GRETA

This is the ring of the Eye. He wore it on
his little finger.

WINI

I remember now. I had forgotten it.

GRETA

How did you come by this ring?

WINI

Leonidas gave it to me at Daddy's funeral.

GRETA

The King gave it to you?

WINI

He was sorry for me, I think. He said if I
needed him, I could show this ring to a
guard and I could see him right away.

GRETA

By law, he can confer it on only one person.
Winifred --

Greta grabs Wini by the elbows and spins her around.

GRETA

-- this can mean only one thing: Leonidas
knows. He has already recognized you as his
Eye.

WINI

But I never agreed to anything.

GRETA

Your father must have told him.

WINI

Then why haven't I been sent for? Why hasn't he summoned me to his council chamber?

GRETA

(frowns at her watch)

I forgot Count Nicholai. He will be here shortly and you are completely unfit to greet him. We'll talk later. Hurry, my dear, find something suitable to wear. I will see to the tea things and do my best to occupy our royal guest until you arrive.

Greta exits the room and closes the door behind her. Wini gives the ring in her hand a final look, drops it down the neck of her shirt, and begins to change.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - DAY

Greta holds a teacup. Simonides Halford, across from her, drums his fingers on his chair's arms. A tumbler of whiskey sits next to him.

GRETA

-- and Winifred has only just arrived at court, Your Highness. She has much to learn.

SIMONIDES

Young Haelstrom seems eager enough to be her teacher. Under his expert tutelage, I have no doubt your niece will soon be the most practiced coquette in our court.

GRETA

I hope Lord Haelstrom's influence will do nothing of the sort. Besides, Winifred tells me he left Ketteringas today.

SIMONIDES

Deployed to support the left flank of our troops at Little Hay. I gave the orders myself. I do not wish to appear rude, but I do have another pressing engagement this --

Wini appears in the doorway. Simonides's whiskey is suspended in midair. His eyes never leave Wini. He drains the glass with a soft, satisfied GRUNT, then rises from his chair.

GRETA
(rising)
Your Highness, my niece, Lady Winifred
Rosalyn Alexandra Randall.

Wini curtsies. Simonides takes her hand.

SIMONIDES
I am charmed, Lady Randall.

Greta starts to sit down again.

SIMONIDES
My apologies, Miss Randall, but I must ask
you to leave. It is imperative I speak with
Lady Randall confidentially.

GRETA
Nothing of a personal nature, Your Highness?

SIMONIDES
As much as I admire your niece, I am here on
business.

GRETA
Winifred, I am confident you will bring
honor to our family name in every way
possible.

WINI
You may rely on me, Aunt Greta.

Greta curtsies and leaves. Simonides's eyes sweep over Wini.

SIMONIDES
Please, Lady Randall, sit down.

Wini sits down. Simonides takes a tin of peppersticks (herbal cigarettes) from his breast pocket.

SIMONIDES
May I?

Wini nods. Simonides lights up, inhales deeply - exhales, eyes on the rising smoke.

SIMONIDES

Lady Randall, you cannot help but be curious.

WINI

I confess I am puzzled, Your Highness.

SIMONIDES

It is about my brother --

WINI

Your brother?

SIMONIDES

The King.

Wini's hands fly to the chain around her neck. Simonides tracks her movement. She drops her hands into her lap.

WINI

What -- what business could the King possibly have with me?

SIMONIDES

I thought perhaps you could tell me that.

WINI

I don't understand.

SIMONIDES

Leonidas had a disturbing dream last night. He was in a casket -- your father's casket, to be exact -- pounding to be let out. When the coffin's lid opened, you were there -- with something around your neck.

Wini INHALES SHARPLY.

SIMONIDES

I'm sorry. Did you say something?

WINI

I should call that a nightmare, not a dream.

SIMONIDES

I would hardly call any dream with you in it a nightmare.

WINI

Has His Majesty sent you to find this object
-- whatever it is?

SIMONIDES

His Majesty knows nothing of my visit. I am
here on a whim -- a hunch of my own -- Lady
Randall, what is that around your neck?

WINI

I don't understand.

Simonides stands. He slips two fingers beneath the chain around her
neck and pulls slowly upwards until the ring is exposed against her
skin. Wini CATCHES HER BREATH.

SIMONIDES

This -- What is this?

WINI

I -- I --

SIMONIDES

May I?

Simonides does not wait for her to reply. His fingers brush against
the cleavage of her breasts as he takes the ring into his palm and
studies it.

SIMONIDES

A ring, Lady Randall?

WINI

I am hiding nothing, Your Highness.

Simonides lets the ring slip through his fingers and watches it slide
down between her breasts.

SIMONIDES

I can see that.

WINI

You err if you think I have anything of the
King's. That ring is my father's. It belongs
to me.

SIMONIDES

I am certain that it does.
I am in your debt, Lady Randall. You have
rendered me a great service, and I am not
one to forget a debt.

He takes her hand, kisses its back and leaves. A moment later,
Greta's head emerges from behind the door.

GRETA

Is he gone?

WINI

Only just.

Wini sinks onto the sofa, pulls the ring out, and studies it. Greta
enters.

GRETA

Don't keep me waiting, Winifred. What did he
want?

WINI

I think, Auntie --

She looks up at Greta and they lock eyes.

WINI

-- I think I have just been found out.

EXT. A WALLED POND - LITTLE EYE - DAY

Young Wini stands beneath a willow on the banks of the pond at Little
Eye. The sunlight is blinding; she shades her eyes with her hand.
NOTES FROM BEL'S HAVA PIPE play in the distance. Lady Rowena stands
just beyond the canopy of the willow on the pond bank. An aura of
bright white light surrounds her. The colors of her face and clothes
are very pale, washed out by the light's intensity. She holds out a
rosebud to Young Wini.

ROWENA

I said we are going to draw a rose. Are you
telling me that in two days, when this bud
has fully opened, it will be a rose, but
that it's not a rose now?

YOUNG WINI

I guess it depends on how you think about
it, Marma.

ROWENA

They say one drop of the oil from a Fusche de la Rozinda can raise the dead. Its bud has enough fragrance to heal you, Wini.

Young Wini takes the bud and smells it.

YOUNG WINI

The scent is not very strong.

ROWENA

It must be crushed to release its fragrance.

Rowena takes the bud from Wini and rubs it slowly between her thumb and fingers until it pulls apart into a disintegrated pile of green sepals and crushed petals.

ROWENA

Now smell it.

Rowena drops the crushed bud into Wini's hand. Wini takes a tentative sniff. She inhales deeply.

YOUNG WINI

It's heavenly, Marma. What did you do to it?

ROWENA

I opened its heart to you. Don't let your thinking be limited by what you can and cannot see.

Rowena kisses the top of Young Wini's head.

ROWENA

Be a see - er, Wini. Be the Eye.

A white light appears in the area of Rowena's sternum and grows to such brilliance, it swallows up her figure, and she disappears. Young Wini's eyes trail after her fading mother and then look down at the bud in her palm. The bud morphs into the King's ring, its chain dangling between her fingers.

YOUNG WINI

How I think about things is limited by what I can and cannot see.

Young Wini rotates the ring in the sunlight. She tips it sideways. A flash of sunlight reveals a tiny inscription formed by the scrollwork in the outer edge. Wini pulls it near and squints one eye.

YOUNG WINI
(reads)

"Whoever sees me sees the Eye of the King."

Her gaze moves to the polished mirror-like surface of the ring's inner band where her face is reflected in the sunlight.

INT. WINI'S BEDROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Wini INHALES SHARPLY and wakes up. Her eyes fly open. She glances at the clock next to her bed. It reads 1:10 AM.

BEL (O.S.)
Wini.

WINI
Bel?

Bel stands outlined in the door. She moves to go to him.

BEL (V.O.)
No, don't get out of bed.

Bel closes the door behind him with a soft CLICK.

BEL (V.O.)
Move over, Wini. Make room for me.

Wini pulls the blankets to her chin and slides to one side. Bel sheds his coat and boots. He slides next to Wini - stretches his legs with a SIGH.

WINI
What is it? Why are you here?

BEL (V.O.)
I've been promoted to *medici secundias* --
for "exemplary courage and selfless
commitment to the safety of others under
fire."

WINI
What did you do?

BEL (V.O.)
I don't really want to talk about it. Leonii
missiles struck a children's hospital. I've
brought 21 of them to Ketteringas with me.

WINI

Twenty-one?

BEL (V.O.)

Mmm. Twenty-one children. I don't want to talk about it. Let's have a share in what you've been doing instead.

WINI

No, please -- don't go there.

Bel sits upright.

BEL

So -- he made his move, did he? And you enjoyed it. You wanted more!

WINI

I did not!

BEL (V.O.)

You little liar.

Bel forces her to look at him.

BEL (V.O.)

You can't hide what his touch did to you. I felt the electricity the moment I entered your memory.

WINI

It should have been you that lighted that fire. It could have been you. You've wanted to kiss me for a long time. Why didn't you?

Bel traces her lips with his finger.

BEL (V.O.)

I promised Aunt Greta.

WINI

We were children then. You had just come to Little Eye. Things are different now. She thinks you have the Eye --

BEL (V.O.)

I don't have the Eye, Wini.

WINI

I know.

She takes his fingers and kisses each tip.

WINI

You don't have the Eye...

She gently spreads his fingers apart.

WINI

...because you are the Eye.

Wini punctuates each word with a kiss at the base of each "v" formed by the spread of his fingers. Her lips trail across his palm to the inside of his wrist.

WINI (V.O.)

I know everything now.

BEL (V.O.)

(huskily)

Not quite everything.

Wini trails kisses up the inside of his arm.

WINI (V.O.)

You stay hidden but I hear your pipe -- in every vision -- in every dream.

She slips her arms around his neck and pulls his head toward hers, reaching for his lips.

WINI (V.O.)

All my seeing -- it comes from you.

She kisses him. Bel's hands slide to her waist.

BEL (V.O.)

What do you see now, Wini?

WINI (V.O.)

I see you making love to me.

Bel pushes her onto her back. He pins her arms lightly to the mattress above her shoulders and gazes down at her.

BEL (V.O.)

Wini, do you have any idea what will happen if we proceed? We share each other's minds, and that means whatever one of us feels, the other feels, too. On top of your own passion, you will be filled with mine, and on top of my passion --

He kisses her mouth slowly, intentionally.

BEL (V.O.)

I will be filled with yours.

Bel kisses her again, slowly and deeply.

BEL (V.O.)

We will unleash a tidal wave. Even the Eye himself can't see where that will take us.

WINI (V.O.)

I have waited all my life to be fully one with you.

Bel GROANS and pulls her to him passionately. His lips trail behind her ears, down her neck. Wini's eyes open wide, large and round. She draws in a LOUD, SHARP BREATH.

WINI

Bel! I -- I --

Her fingers pull frenziedly at the buttons of his shirt and slip down his chest. Bel freezes. He abruptly pulls away and rolls to his back, panting.

BEL (V.O.)

No, Wini -- We are trespassing.

He sits up, swings his feet to the floor.

WINI

You are the Eye -- how can this be trespassing when you are already in me?

BEL (V.O.)

Illegitimacy overturns the foundations of a kingdom. It is even more dangerous in an Eye than a king.

He replaces his boots, stands, slips his coat on.

BEL (V.O.)

I want you to have my children, Wini. Too much rests on us doing this right.

Wini lies motionless. He leans over and kisses her tenderly.

BEL (V.O.)

I will give you dreams, my love. For now, you must be content with that.

Wini's eyes follow him as he leaves. Tears stream down her cheeks. The latch CLICKS shut behind him.

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - DAY

Greta and Bel are at breakfast. The clock on the wall CHIMES the hour. The door opens and Bel and Greta look up at Wini.

GRETA

You're late.

WINI

I had a rough night.

GRETA

You know about Bel's news?

WINI

News?

GRETA

His promotion to medici secundias --

WINI

Oh -- that.

GRETA

He will be the youngest medici secundias in Ketteringan history. Surely it merits more than an "Oh, that"? Winifred, what is wrong with you?

Bel signs to Greta. She looks at Wini.

GRETA

Why didn't you sleep well?

WINI

Just some uncomfortable dreams, Aunt Greta -
- nothing serious.

GRETA

From the Eye?

Bel SNORTS. Wini glares at him.

WINI

It's hard to tell where they come from. They
were -- confused.

BEL (V.O.)

I thought I was being quite explicit. Here,
Wini, let me clarify. This is what my body
does at the sight of your breasts --

WINI (V.O.)

Stop that! Not in front of Aunt Greta.

GRETA

Do I have a part in this conversation?

Bel signs to Greta. She slides her chair back and stands.

GRETA

Then I will leave you to your private jokes
and see what business Baxter has for me
today.

She drops a kiss on the top of Bel's head.

GRETA

It is good to have you home, dear. Don't go
away again too soon.

Greta leaves.

WINI

That was not funny!

Bel stands and pulls Wini to her feet.

BEL (V.O.)

I was paying you back for Johnny.

WINI

But -- Bel --

BEL (V.O.)

Shh, Wini -- I'm teasing.

Bel kisses her.

BEL (V.O.)

Don't be angry. Come to the hospital with me. You can meet the children.

WINI (V.O.)

You'll never leave me, will you?

BEL (V.O.)

Wini, I am the Eye. You can hide from me, deny me, reject me, but you can never be rid of me. Come on. I have rounds to make.

They leave. The clock on the wall CHIMES the hour.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Greta enters, switches on a light, and stops. Wini huddles on the sofa, her head cradled in her arms.

GRETA

Why, Winifred, what is wrong?

WINI

I never knew what a self-centered, pampered little twit I was until today.

GRETA

What has happened?

WINI

It's -- Bel. He's gone. A field hospital was struck by a missile near Little Hay. They lost a medic and he's the replacement.

GRETA

I thought we would have him here at least a little while longer.

WINI

(stifles a SOB)

How can you grow up with someone and then find out you don't really know them at all?

GRETA

What do you mean?

WINI

Those children at the hospital -- he can't speak a word to them, but they adore him. He's trained an entire unit of deaf and mute medics and nurses. They sign to communicate.

GRETA

These things don't surprise me. Bel was always compassionate, even as a child.

WINI

I wanted him to fill my empty places -- take the edge off my loneliness -- I never cared about what he could give someone else. When he tried to get my attention, I pretended he wasn't there and pushed him away -- and now he's gone --

GRETA

What are you talking about, Winifred? You have never pushed Bel away --

WINI

But I hated the Eye.

GRETA

What does the Eye have to do with Bel?

WINI

Auntie, the Eye is Bel.

GRETA

(SNORTS)

Nonsense. You're overwrought.

WINI

But it's true. I knew the moment he stepped into my room last night. His hava pipe -- it's always playing -- in every dream -- every vision.

GRETA

The Eye has been in our family for seventy-five generations. Bel was just a boy when he came to us.

WINI

I don't know how it's possible, but it's true. He admitted it. I've hated the Eye ever since it showed me those men in the trees and then let Marma and Daddy die. If it had shown me them, I could have saved them.

Wini chokes back a SOB and throws herself into Greta's arms.

WINI

And now, when I could confront the Great Eye Himself and ask him why -- why he let them die -- all I want to do is throw myself at his feet and beg him to forgive me for being such a selfish, stupid, short-sighted fool...

GRETA

Is it possible? Can it be?

A quiet KNOCK sounds at the drawing room door.

GRETA

Yes?

JAMES, a footman (30s), appears.

JAMES

A car -- from the Palace, ma'am.

GRETA

From the Palace?

JAMES

Yes, ma'am. It's come for Lady Randall.

WINI

Who is sending for me from the Palace?

JAMES

It's His Highness, Count Nicholai. He is waiting below. He says to tell you that the King needs his Eye.

Wini jumps to her feet. Greta rises slowly behind her.

WINI

Tell Mary to bring me a coat -- quickly!

James leaves.

WINI

It's my vision. The King is ill.

GRETA

I would not be so certain.

Greta rings the bell. James's head reappears in the doorway.

GRETA

Have Mary bring my coat, too.

WINI

Why do you need a coat?

GRETA

Because I am coming with you.
I've heard too many stories about Simonides
Halford to trust him with my niece in the
back of a royal limousine.

WINI

Aunt Greta! I can take care of myself.

MARY appears with the coats.

GRETA

I do not doubt that, Winifred, but it cannot
hurt to have reinforcements -- especially
now that he knows you are the Eye.

WINI

Then come if you must.

They leave.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, FIELD COMMAND, LEIGHBOURNE - NIGHT

SUPER: Kettering Field Command, Three Days Later

NINE MEN in red uniforms sit around a large oval table littered with
laptops, tablets, and phones. Simonides Halford stands at the head. A
screen along one wall displays a map of Kettering. A loud RAP at the

door is followed by the appearance of LIEUTENANT DONALDSON.

DONALDSON

Lady Randall has arrived, Your Highness.

Chairs SCOOT AGAINST THE FLOOR. Necks crane.

SIMONIDES

Show her in, Lieutenant.

Wini appears in full uniform, a bright blue and yellow eye surrounded by five stars on her upper sleeves. Simonides dismisses the lieutenant.

SIMONIDES

May I introduce you, gentlemen, to Lady Winifred Randall, daughter of the late Lord Henry Randall and heir to both his title and his office as --

(pauses)

-- the Eye of the King.

More SCRAPING NOISES from chairs as men stand -- all except Lord Halford (70s) and James St. Clare (40s).

SIMONIDES

Lady Randall -- Lt. General Dalglish, Commander of Special Forces --

DALGLISH nods stiffly.

SIMONIDES

Lord Covington, Chief of Navy; Lt. General Tinsdale, Chief Engineer; General Berg, Territorial Defense; the Marchand of Helmsley, Sea Guards; the Marshal of Molines, Air Force; Lord Halford, Air Assault; Major General James St. Clare, Cyber Security; and I believe you already know our Chief of Ground Forces, Lord Marlbury.

Some men nod stiff acknowledgement; some only stare. LORD HALFORD studies the nails of his right hand. ST. CLARE consults his phone. NIGEL MARLBURY (early 50s) immediately goes to Wini. The left side of Marlbury's face is deeply scarred and he wears a patch over his left eye.

MARLBURY

Lady Randall!

WINI

General Marlbury! How genuinely happy I am to see you!

MARLBURY

The pleasure is certainly all mine. Your father often spoke of you.

WINI

I did not know he talked of me at all.

MARLBURY

He was my nearest and dearest friend. We were boys together.

WINI

I have heard much about your adventures.

SIMONIDES

If you would take your seat, Lady Randall, we will continue our discussion.

Marlbury offers his arm and seats her next to him.

SIMONIDES

Lord Halford, you were saying...

HALFORD

It's the placement of the ground-to-air missiles that concerns me. The Carparti are going to come from the north, across the Grand Pitterns.

MOLINES

But the Leonii will strike from the west, Halford --

HALFORD

They've exhausted their resources. They don't dare risk another offensive without reinforcements.

Wini studies the map. She freezes. Marlbury follows her gaze.

BERG

But our border defenses are weakest there...

WINI
(interrupting)
What is between the sea and those mountains?

All faces jerk toward Wini.

WINI
Do not look at me that way, gentlemen. Who occupies that territory?

HALFORD
(drily)
It's the Hlafward, Lady Randall -- the breadbasket of Kettering. Any schoolgirl could tell you that.

WINI
Then that proves I'm no schoolgirl, Lord Halford.

She pushes back her chair and goes to the map on the screen.

WINI
These mountains here, the Dreskills, enclose the Brindle Stryd on the south and the southeastern coast of the Sea of Amat.

HALFORD
Please, Simonides, must we?

SIMONIDES
She has earned our hearing, Lord Halford. Our King lives because of Lady Randall's hasty intervention. Please, continue, my lady.

Wini surveys the men facing her. Only Marlbury is attentive.

WINI
Your enemy is preparing a strike through the Gap of Amat and into the Hlafward.

Chairs CREAK as men jerk upright. Only Marlbury, Simonides, and James St. Clare remain unmoved.

WINI
They will cross the Sterne and drive up its left bank all the way to Ketteringas.

Halford SLAMS the tabletop with his fist.

HALFORD

Damn it, this is going too far.

Simonides silences the room.

SIMONIDES

Lady Randall, we have seen no action south of the Dreskills. The threat comes from the Leonii and the Carparti in the north. They fight to annex the Brindle Stryd.

MARLBURY

Unless that is not their primary objective, Your Highness.

SIMONIDES

What do you mean?

MARLBURY

They do not need to control the entire Brindle Stryd to control access to the gap at Stonyridge. From there, troops have unobstructed access to the plain of Ketteringas.

ST. CLARE

That would expose their right flank.

MARLBURY

Not if a second offensive was launched south of the Dreskills. If troops pushed up from the Sterne, our forces would be enveloped. Ketteringas itself could fall.

HALFORD

You're as crazy as she is.

MARLBURY

Perhaps the objective isn't annexation. Perhaps the objective is conquest.

HALFORD

You are as crazy as she is.

ST. CLARE

Let me take care of this, Halford.

Wini re-seats herself.

ST. CLARE

The Carparti and the Leonii together have neither the numerical strength nor sufficient air support to sustain two offensives. More importantly, Marlbury, they have no access to the south. The Sea of Amat lies between them and the Dreskills.

WINI

I do not know how, but I assure you, General St. Clare, they are going to do this. You must meet both threats or you will be defeated.

HALFORD

Simonides, when are you going to stop subjecting us to these adolescent fantasies? She may share some of her father's abilities, but this is no substitute for Lord Randall.

Wini CATCHES HER BREATH and stiffens, staring at a simple golden band on Halford's left index finger. Marlbury follows her gaze to Halford's ring and stiffens, too.

MARLBURY

If others were in alliance with the Carparti and Leonii, the numbers and arms might support a second offensive.

ST. CLARE

Are you thinking of someone in particular?

MARLBURY

The Hetteringae are south of the Dreskills. And if there were Ketteringans in the south prepared to aid and abet an invading force...

COVINGTON

--but that would be treason --

MARLBURY

More like a full-scale rebellion, Lord Covington. Lord Halford, your wife is from the Hlafward, is she not?

HALFORD

What has my wife to do with this?

MARLBURY

She owns considerable land there -- along with her brother. Isn't that right, St. Clare? Didn't you and your sister inherit most of the Hlafward from your uncle?

Halford pales and half-rises.

HALFORD

Are you accusing me of treason?

MARLBURY

Not at all, my lord. I would simply like to question your wife. Your Highness, would it be possible to get Lady Halford on a video call?

SIMONIDES

General Marlbury, you can hardly be unaware of how your line of questioning affects me. The Lady Diana is my stepmother.

Lord Covington COUGHS discretely into a fist.

MARLBURY

If Lady Randall is truly her father's heir, we cannot afford to dismiss anything she says without a thorough investigation. I only wish to make inquiry -- I imply nothing.

SIMONIDES

Lord Halford, where can we reach your wife?

HALFORD

I -- I cannot say, Your Highness. She is not at home.

SIMONIDES

Then where is she? Surely, sir, you know the whereabouts of your wife.

HALFORD

You know Diana, Simonides. She is not an easy woman to keep up with.

SIMONIDES

Where is she, sir?

HALFORD

In -- in the Hlafward -- I do not know where.

SIMONIDES

General? Do you know the whereabouts of your sister?

ST. CLARE

I have less contact with her than her husband.

SIMONIDES

You leave me no choice but to detain you, gentlemen, for further questioning. We shall dismiss and reconvene later.

Chairs SCRAPE as men stand, gather belongings, and file out.

SIMONIDES

Berg, Marlbury, Dalglish, I will need your assistance. Lady Randall, I will speak with you later.

Wini turns to leave. Marlbury stops her.

MARLBURY

(low voice)

Tread lightly, Lady Randall. Give him no more information than is necessary to satisfy his curiosity.

Wini nods and leaves.

INT. WINI'S BARRACKS - LEIGHBOURNE - NIGHT

Wini reads a book, curled on a small white couch. The room is dimly lit. The rear of the room opens into a small kitchen.

A SOFT KNOCK startles her. A digital clock on the hall table reads "1:35 AM." The KNOCK is repeated. Wini opens the door to reveal Simonides standing outside.

WINI

Your Highness!

SIMONIDES

Lady Randall. I apologize for the lateness of the hour, but it is imperative I talk with you.

He enters. Wini closes the door.

SIMONIDES

I trust my aide has seen to your comfort?

WINI

Captain Le Clerc has been most attentive.

SIMONIDES

May I sit down?

WINI

As Your Highness pleases.

Simonides seats himself on the couch.

WINI

May I get Your Highness a drink?

SIMONIDES

A drink would be most welcome.
Scotch and water, please.

WINI

My cellar is a bit bare, Your Highness. I've only just arrived. Would cabernet do?

SIMONIDES

Cabernet will do quite well, Lady Randall.
Thank you.

In the kitchen, Wini fills two wineglasses. She returns, hands one to Simonides, and, at his cue, sits next to him.

SIMONIDES

Do not look at me that way. Always, even as a child, people eye me with suspicion and distrust.

WINI

I did not realize I was looking at Your Highness in any particular way.

SIMONIDES

What did you see when you looked at the map of Kettering?

WINI

I don't really know. Seeing isn't the same as knowing. I saw blood spurting over the King's heart, but it was his physician who diagnosed the aneurysm. Perhaps Lord Halford is right. I am no substitute for my father.

SIMONIDES

I do not doubt your abilities. We have uncovered enough evidence of a conspiracy to place both Halford and St. Clare under house arrest, but that will not stop the rumors.

WINI

Rumors?

SIMONIDES

That I am behind this coup.

WINI

I -- I do not know what to say. I did not know that Lord Halford was your -- father.

SIMONIDES

Are you ignorant, then, of his connection to you as well?

WINI

To me?

SIMONIDES

My mother died when I was eight. No one thought Lord Halford would remarry, but then, after twenty years a widower, he suddenly weds the Lady Diana. Do you not know the story behind this hasty marriage?

WINI

I do not.

SIMONIDES

You were a child. I suppose you were not aware of your father's range of interests in women.

WINI

His "range of interests," my lord?

SIMONIDES

To be blunt, my stepmother was your father's lover.

Wini's wineglass lands on the coffee table with a THUMP. Wine sloshes over its edges and onto the tabletop.

SIMONIDES

A child was born to my father and stepmother less than eight months after their marriage -- a marriage that brought great wealth to my father: a collection of rare and valuable gemstones once owned by the Elderstar. One can only guess at the source of such a collection. Only the Ancient Three and the Randalls have access to the treasures of the Elderstar.

WINI

Please, no more. I don't want to hear about my father and the Lady Diana. The affair was over when my father and mother reconciled.

SIMONIDES

I understand your pain. I was disinherited after the birth of this so-called brother of mine -- deprived of titles, land, privileges that, as Lord Halford's legal firstborn, were rightfully mine. There is no love lost between this "father" of mine and myself. If I find enough evidence to have him court-martialed, I will do so, and that snake St. Clare with him.

WINI

So it is true. This warfare is not about borders -- it's about who will rule in Ketteringas.

SIMONIDES

Expect civil war. The rebels know they have been found out. A major offensive is imminent.

Simonides glances at the clock and catches sight of Wini's reflection

in the mirror above it. He stands so that they are looking into their reflections, side by side.

SIMONIDES

I must re-join my staff. We have no more need of you tonight, but I will send for you if we do. I ask two things of you, Lady Randall.

WINI

What is that, Your Highness?

SIMONIDES

As the Eye of the King, that you will work with me to secure the king's victory.

WINI

There can be no question of that.

SIMONIDES

-- and that as his surrogate on the field of battle, I will command your loyalty.

WINI

As the King's representative, there can be no question of that, either.

Simonides raises her hand to his lips.

SIMONIDES

Thank you.

His lips linger on the back of her hand. He turns and departs. Wini stares after him, rubbing the back of her hand.

INT. WINI'S BEDROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

MISSILE FIRE. Wini's eyes pop open -- she jerks upright. More MISSILE FIRE and EXPLOSIONS. The MISSILE FIRE grows louder. An EXPLOSION overhead RATTLES her window glass. A second EXPLOSION shakes the walls. SCREAMS from offscreen. Wini pulls on a wrapper and rushes into the hall. PLASTER litters the floor. Dust fills the air like smoke.

A THIRD explosion throws Wini against the wall. More SCREAMS.

GRETA (O.S.)

Winifred!

WINI

Aunt Greta! Aunt Greta, where are you?

Another EXPLOSION -- a direct hit. The ceiling and walls crumble behind Wini. Rafters splinter and fall in front of her. Clouds of plaster dust obscure her vision. She falters, CHOKES, covers her lower face, and stumbles toward Greta's bedroom.

WINI

Aunt Greta!

A loud MOAN comes from behind a door hanging on one hinge. Wini pulls herself through the opening and freezes. The ceiling has collapsed. A huge beam pins Greta, face up, to the floor. Wini GASPS and rushes to Greta's side, cradling her head in her lap, WEEPING. Greta's eyes roll upwards to meet hers.

GRETA

Win -- i -- fred, I --

Greta's eyes roll back into her head; her body goes limp.

WINI

(SOBBING)

No -- no! Not you, Aunt Greta. You can't leave me!

Wini clasps Greta's head to her heart, WEEPING. The SOUND OF BEL'S HAVA PIPE plays in the distance.

WINI

No, no, please Bel, not this -

INT. WINI'S BARRACK - LEIGHBOURNE - NIGHT

Wini sits up in bed. She stares into the darkness, WEEPING.

WINI

Tell me it's just a dream. Please, Bel, don't let it happen.

SIRENS followed by MISSILE FIRE and EXPLOSIONS. Wini's bedroom windows RATTLE; the walls shake. More MISSILE FIRE. Someone BEATS at her front door. Tears stream down her face.

WINI

Promise me you won't let it happen.

MISSILES fall like rain followed by A VOLLEY OF EXPLOSIONS. The floor

shakes beneath Wini's feet. Objects CRASH from the shelves. The BEATING ON HER ENTRANCE DOOR intensifies.

LE CLERC

Lady Randall! Lady Randall!

Another LOUD EXPLOSION. SIRENS. Wini's bedroom windows SHATTER. She leaps out of bed, puts on slippers and a robe. The BEATING on her front door continues. Her bedroom door is jammed. She pushes and POUNDS and rams her shoulder into it. The door gives. Wini weaves through the debris and opens her front door. MICHAEL LE CLERC (50s) stands in the hall.

LE CLERC

Lady Randall, you must come with me -- quick!

Wini turns back into her rooms.

LE CLERC

There's no time. The entire base is under attack.

Another EXPLOSION shakes the floor. Dust falls through ceiling cracks. Le Clerc pulls her down the hall.

WINI

No, Le Clerc. I must have clothes.

LE CLERC

There is no time.

He dodges a falling section of plaster, pulling Wini behind him. He jerks to the left. The halls are full of people, in uniforms and nightclothes, running. They merge into the stream of bodies, pass a set of elevators. Le Clerc jerks Wini to the right.

A metal stair door is propped open. Le Clerc pushes through the crowd, dragging Wini into the stairwell and down the steps along the rail. A heavyset man in uniform slams Wini into the rail. She gives a soft OOF and her hand flies out of Le Clerc's. Le Clerc immediately grabs it again and pulls her behind him.

LE CLERC

This way!

The crowd forks at the next landing. Le Clerc drags Wini down two more flights of stairs. The stairwell is deserted. At the bottom he pulls her down a long narrow corridor, brightly lit. A lieutenant

emerges from a door and strides past. Le Clerc types a code into a door's lock at the hall's end. The door opens; he pushes Wini inside.

LE CLERC

You'll be safe here, Lady Randall.

WINI

Where am I?

LE CLERC

Count Nicholai's private bunker.

WINI

How long will I be here?

LE CLERC

We are under attack. Rebel forces have launched an offensive here, an offensive at Little Hay, and an offensive on Ketteringas.

WINI

On -- Ketteringas?

LE CLERC

I will see about the recovery of your things and have a uniform sent to you. In the interval, the Count requests you treat these quarters as your own and make yourself as comfortable as possible.

Le Clerc salutes with right fist over his heart and leaves. Wini lowers herself onto a couch and sits motionless.

WINI

An attack on Ketteringas. Oh, my Eye, my sweet Eye, where are you when I need you the most?

INT. SIMONIDES HALFORD'S BUNKER, LEIGHBOURNE - DAY

Wini sleeps on the couch beside an untouched tray of food on the floor. She is in uniform. The door swings open to reveal Simonides, one hand on the latch. He sees Wini's sleeping figure and SIGHS. An AIDE hovers behind him.

SIMONIDES

Never mind, Thompson. I don't need you. Report to Le Clerc. Tell him I will need dinner for two.

The Aide salutes, fist to heart, and leaves. Simonides enters the room, removes his jacket, tosses it over the back of a chair and throws his cap on the chair's seat. He removes a pepperstick from his shirt pocket, lights it, and leans back against the chair, watching Wini.

Wini's nose wrinkles. She stirs. Her eyes open. She lies still, her eyes roving around her surroundings. She sees Simonides's uniform over the back of the chair and abruptly sits up.

WINI
Simonides.

SIMONIDES
I'm here, Winifred.

WINI
What's happened?

SIMONIDES
The rebels are repulsed from Leighbourne and Ketteringas, but they have secured their hold on Little Hay. They control the gap at Stonyridge.

WINI
General Marlbury's division was stationed there.

SIMONIDES
He suffered enormous losses.

WINI
Where are his troops now?

SIMONIDES
The wounded are here. The rest have been sent to reinforce Ketteringas.

WINI
Then Marlbury's medici -- they are here -- safe?

Simonides nods. Wini breathes a DEEP SIGH OF RELIEF and sinks into the sofa cushions. Simonides studies her in silence, grinds out the butt of his pepperstick in an ashtray, and draws his chair to her side.

SIMONIDES

Winifred, I must ask you to remember that you are the Eye of the King, and as such, a soldier and a ranking officer in our military.

He takes her hands in his.

SIMONIDES

Soldiers have no time for grief in warfare. What I must tell you is very difficult for me to say, but it will be more difficult for you to hear. Do you understand me?

WINI

She's dead, isn't she? My Aunt Greta is gone.

SIMONIDES

You know? Did the Eye show you?

Wini's face crumples. Her body shakes. She opens her mouth but all that comes out are HALF-CHOKED SOBS. She collapses into Simonides's arms.

SIMONIDES

Winifred.

Simonides pulls her to her feet and wraps her in his arms. Wini clings to his neck, burying her face into its crook. Simonides cups a palm over her head and draws her closer.

A sudden KNOCK sounds and the door swings open to reveal Le Clerc with a dinner tray. Marlbury stands behind him. At the sight of Simonides and Wini wrapped in each other's arms, Le Clerc starts and almost drops the tray.

LE CLERC

Excuse me, Your Highness!

Simonides waves him away.

SIMONIDES

Not now, Le Clerc.

Marlbury and Simonides lock eyes. Simonides tightens his hold on Wini possessively and draws her trembling body harder against his. Wini's face is hidden against Simonides's neck. She does not see Le Clerc or Marlbury.

Le Clerc hastily closes the door in Marlbury's face. Simonides kisses the top of Wini's head. She WHIMPERS. Her arms tighten convulsively around his neck.

EXT. EMERGENCY FIELD HOSPITAL, LEIGHBOURNE - DAY

Rows of modular medical barracks line the fields. NURSES and MEDICS SHOUT directions as CASUALTIES are unloaded from an incoming stream of trucks; a SCREAM from a WOUNDED SOLDIER pierces the air. Wini winds her way between the trucks, searching faces. She sees the back of a MEDICI SECUNDIAS bent over a stretcher and quickens her steps.

WINI

Bel!

The secundias ignores her, straightens and addresses a NURSE. Wini's face falls and she backs into HAMISH MCTAVISH (late 50s), carrying one end of a stretcher, his uniform ragged.

HAMISH

Hey! Watch where yer going!

Hamish recovers. The WHITE-COATED MEDIC on the other end grimaces.

WINI

I'm so sorry.

Hamish mouths the words "Damn woman tripped me." His partner nods and they move off.

WINI

Wait! Just a minute!

Hamish jerks his head toward Wini and mouths "Stop." His partner looks at Wini, nods, and stops.

HAMISH

I ain't got time for niceties, Ma'am. This boy needs a doctor, quick.

WINI

Just tell me where I can find General Marlbury's medici.

HAMISH

In hell!

Hamish signals his partner to proceed.

WINI

What do you mean?

HAMISH

They've all gone to hell, Ma'am. Ther ain't none of them left.

WINI

That can't be.

A NURSE emerges from a nearby barracks and signs to Hamish and his partner. Wini stares from her to Hamish's partner.

WINI

Is he deaf?

Hamish nods.

WINI

Where is the rest of his unit?

HAMISH

If yer meaning his corporal, he's in M4.

Hamish gestures at a building several doors down. Wini spins around and walks briskly away. Hamish's eyes trail after her.

INT. MEDICAL BARRACKS, LEIGHBOURNE - DAY

Wini's silhouette appears in the doorway, framed by daylight. Cots line both sides of the building. A NURSE tending a soldier glances up, sees Wini, and quickly comes to her.

NURSE

Ma'am?

From somewhere in the back, a SOLDIER GROANS on his cot.

NURSE

Can I help you?

WINI

Your corporal -- I was told I could find your corporal here.

The soldier in the back GROANS again, then SHOUTS.

NURSE

Corporal Mace is in a meeting. Is there something I can do for you?

WINI

I'm looking for a *medici secundias*, Dr. Randall. I -- I thought your corporal might help me find him.

NURSE

I'm not from Corporal Mace's unit. I was dispatched here from Lord Covington's *medici*.

The soldier's GROANS shift into SHOUTS accompanied by A LOUD THUMPING. The nurse whirls around and waves at CAMMIE, a young girl in uniform behind her.

NURSE

Cammie, run! It's Lord Haelstrom.

NURSE

(turning back to Wini)

I'm sorry, Ma'am. I have a patient I must attend to.

The nurse turns to follow Cammie but Wini stops her.

WINI

Did you -- did you say -- Lord Haelstrom?

NURSE

Yes, Ma'am. You must excuse me -- I must run.

The YELLING intensifies. CAMMIE'S VOICE is heard PLEADING with Johnny Haelstrom in the background.

WINI

I'm coming with you.

Wini runs after the nurse to the back of the building where a bed is cordoned off by curtains hung on either side. Cammie is struggling to roll Johnny, poised lengthwise on the edge of the bed, back into his cot. Wini GASPS. Johnny's right leg is missing from his thigh down.

JOHNNY

Let go of me, damn you, let go!

The nurse comes to Cammie's aid. They roll Johnny onto his back and secure him to the bed with two belts.

JOHNNY
(YELLS)
Damn you! Let me go!

He struggles helplessly against the belts.

NURSE
(to Cammie)
Get me 7.5 mg of midazolam, quick.

Wini stops Cammie.

WINI
No, let me have a try first. I'm a friend.

The nurse steps away and motions Wini into her place.

JOHNNY
I'll be damned in hell before I lie here and rot.

Johnny twists and turns. Wini rests a hand on his arm. He tries to jerk away.

WINI
Johnny -- it's me, Wini.

JOHNNY
Wini.

Johnny lies motionless, his arms bound to his sides.

JOHNNY
Wini, what are you doing here?

WINI
I'm -- in service --

Johnny's eyes sweep over her uniform and fasten on the blue-and-yellow eye surrounded by five stars on the arm of her jacket.

WINI
I told you my father had an heir.

JOHNNY
You?

Wini motions to the nurse to remove the belts. The nurse hesitates. Wini's motions became insistent. She reluctantly releases the clamps and the belts fall away.

JOHNNY

You are the Eye of the King? How long have you known?

WINI

Since I was eight.

JOHNNY

Why didn't you tell me?

WINI

It's a long story. For now, promise me you'll stop fighting the nurses.

Wini gestures at the belts with her head.

WINI

I cannot stand seeing you trussed up like a pig.

JOHNNY

My life's over, Wini. I'm useless to anyone. Everything's finished.

WINI

Don't be stupid. Nothing's changed that really matters. You're alive, aren't you?

JOHNNY

I'll never dance with you again.

WINI

But it can't stop us from fighting. That's the real fun, isn't it?

JOHNNY

No, Wini. I want to die. I'm trying to die -
- only he won't let me.

WINI

Who?

JOHNNY

Your medici secundias -- your father's ward.
The mute doctor.

WINI

Bel? You've seen Bel?

JOHNNY

He's the one who took my leg off.

WINI

Bel saved your life?

JOHNNY

I knew who he was the moment I saw him--and he knew me, too. It was like you were suddenly there -- standing in the air between us. And I thought I heard him speak, but his mouth never moved.

WINI

What -- what did he say?

JOHNNY

It's not important now. But I knew then he wasn't going to let me die. I didn't have a choice. And it's been that way ever since. No matter how much I want to die, how hard I'm trying to die, his will keeps me alive. He won't let me die.

WINI

Where -- where is he now, Johnny? Do you know?

JOHNNY

Oh my god, Wini. You haven't heard? No one's told you?

WINI

Told me what?

JOHNNY

I thought it was strange -- you talking about him -- so calm and peaceful --

WINI

Stop beating around the bush, Johnny. Where is Bel now?

JOHNNY

He -- he's gone, Wini. They're all gone.

WINI

Gone? What do you mean -- gone?

JOHNNY

They'd just loaded us in the trucks. We were pulling out. He and a group of other medici were walking back into the building when a - a missile struck and -- and they were all gone. Just like that. Only a hole in the ground where they were standing.

WINI

I don't believe it. You were hallucinating.

JOHNNY

I'm sorry, Wini. I'm so sorry.

NURSE

(to Cammie)

Fetch the guards --

Wini SCREAMS. The nurse calls "GUARDS!" TWO GUARDS seize Wini by the shoulders. She struggles against them but they overpower her and carry her out of the building, twisting and turning. SOLDIERS stare after her from their beds. Johnny stares stonily at the ceiling. A tear rolls down his cheek.

INT. KING'S BEDCHAMBER, WINGED PALACE, KETTERINGAS - DAY

SUPER: "Two Weeks Later"

Wini stands rigidly in front of King Leonidas, her head bent, her eyes on the floor. An enormous, latticed window frames the king's figure. He clasps his hands behind his back. Wini is dressed in black. Dark shadows ring her eyes; her face is haggard. The King is pale and thin. Outside a heavy rain blankets the view of Ketteringas and the countryside beyond.

LEONIDAS

I sent for you, Lady Randall, because we have a conundrum.

WINI

I am at Your Majesty's service.

LEONIDAS

My brother, as you know, negotiates with the rebels at Little Hay. But he has embarked on another negotiation as well -- with me.

WINI

A negotiation -- with you?

LEONIDAS

He has petitioned for the hand of my Eye in marriage.

Wini INHALES SHARPLY.

WINI

But that's impossible. Our law forbids marriage between an Eye and the royal house.

LEONIDAS

In the eyes of the law, Lady Randall, Simonides is Lord Halford's son.

WINI

Even so, I am bound to marry a descendant of one of the Ancient Three.

LEONIDAS

Ah, that is precisely why we have a conundrum. Perhaps your ladyship is unaware that my brother's mother, the Lady Elayne, was an Irenii.

WINI

An -- Irenii?

LEONIDAS

The Irenii were the first of the Ancient Three.

WINI

But I -- I am already contracted.

LEONIDAS

Any claim from an Irenii has precedence over the claims of a Montrose or a Haelstrom. Are you -- open -- to my brother's proposal?

WINI

I -- I do not know how to answer without causing Your Majesty offense.

LEONIDAS

You began proceedings to dissolve the contract with Lord Haelstrom. You were planning on marrying your father's ward -- the young secundias killed at Little Hay.

WINI

With respect, Your Majesty, I wonder at your needing me. It seems you have plenty of eyes to do your seeing.

LEONIDAS

My eyes can tell me you were found in the arms of my brother in his private rooms. They cannot tell me what is in my brother's heart nor what is in yours.

WINI

Your brother's heart is hidden from me as well, but I can tell you what is in mine.

Wini kneels.

WINI

If I have done something to make Your Majesty doubt my allegiance, I can only reassure Your Majesty that my heart -- what is left of it -- is wholly your own. I pledge my life to the service of my king and to the faithful execution to the fullest degree possible of my duties as his Eye.

Leonidas motions for Wini to rise.

LEONIDAS

It is no secret my father loved Simonides best, but he could never recognize the relationship officially. A king of Kettering must not transgress the Eye's ancestral lines -- to admit to fathering a child with Lady Elayne would have cost my father his crown. Legally, my brother's petition for your hand is quite strong. He thinks I can force you into marrying him.

WINI

With all due respect, Your Majesty, I do not want to marry your brother.

LEONIDAS

With all due respect, Lady Randall, you must not marry my brother. It is a conundrum, as I have said.

The sky darkens. A strong wind drives the rain in sheets against the window.

LEONIDAS

Perhaps, Lady Randall, it is a good thing your contract with Lord Haelstrom is not dissolved after all.

WINI

I do not follow Your Majesty.

LEONIDAS

Were you to marry quickly, without my knowledge and before my brother returns, our conundrum would be solved.

WINI

Marry?

LEONIDAS

Lord Haelstrom.

WINI

But I have no wish to marry. You do not understand, Your Majesty. Any desire I might have had for such things is quite -- dead.

LEONIDAS

You are the one who does not understand, Lady Randall. The Eye may be the Eye of the King, but the Eye must never be the King. You must be out of my brother's reach.

WINI

Have I no choice then?

LEONIDAS

You are entitled to a month of mourning. In the face of all you have lost, it is little enough to give you. But I do not wish to see Lady Randall again, although Lady Haelstrom would be most welcome to assume her duties as my Eye.

WINI

I understand Your Majesty now.

Wini curtsies and bows her head. She backs from his presence and leaves. Leonidas turns back to the window and contemplates the falling rain.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - DAY

Windows are boarded up. Tarps seal off a gaping hole in the outside wall and a hole in the ceiling. Wini pushes through the drawing room doors and stops abruptly at the sight of Marlbury sitting on the sofa. He stands at her entrance. She moves quickly across the room to greet him.

WINI

Lord Marlbury! There is no one I would rather see.

MARLBURY

Lady Randall.

Marlbury kisses her hand perfunctorily, stiff and distant.

WINI

Why, my lord, what is it? Have I done something to offend you?

MARLBURY

It is only that I am come on a very difficult task, Lady Randall. I have some things I need to return to you.

WINI

(INHALES SHARPLY)

Oh --

MARLBURY

I was asked to deliver one particular item
directly into your hands, should
circumstances require it.

Marlbury removes Bel's hava pipe from a bag slung across his
shoulder.

MARLBURY

I believe this is yours now.

Wini takes the hava pipe and collapses into an armchair. She puts the
pipe tentatively to her lips, blows out some weak notes, and promptly
breaks into tears. Marlbury is immediately on one knee at her side.

MARLBURY

Lady Randall -- Winifred -- I should not
have come so soon.

WINI

He tried to teach me how to play this thing
when we were children. I was never any good
-- No one could play it the way he could
play it.

MARLBURY

If there is anything I can do...

Wini waves him away, WEEPING. Marlbury rises and goes to the
fireplace. He studies a couple of miniature portraits on the mantel.
Wini composes herself and looks up at him.

WINI

They are of Bel and me. I was eleven and he
was fifteen. My aunt had them commissioned.

MARLBURY

I recognized him, but I did not know you.
For a young woman celebrated for her beauty,
as a child you were rather --

WINI

Plain?

MARLBURY

Unremarkable.

WINI

I was never concerned about appearances,
Lord Marlbury, perhaps because I had no need
to attract the attention of the man I loved.
He loved me from the inside out, from the
very beginning.

She looks at the hava pipe in her lap.

WINI

It is cruel to think I will never hear his
music again. The sound of this pipe would
take me to another world, where everything
was calm and green and growing --

MARLBURY

It was like being transported into the heart
of a tree, where all one's thoughts and
experiences were filtered through the tree's
life.

Wini looks at him in surprise.

MARLBURY (CONT'D)

You forget, I knew Bel well as a child. It
was I who brought him to your father's
attention.

WINI

I do forget. I never think of Bel's life
before he came to us. It seemed he had
always belonged to our family.

Wini traces the patterns in the chair's upholstery.

WINI

You were such a part of my father's life. I
remember him telling of a well where the two
of you would hide as boys and never be
found.

MARLBURY

The coldest, clearest, cleanest water in all
of Kettering.

WINI

You were always my father's dearest friend,
weren't you, Lord Marlbury?

MARLBURY

I like to think so.

WINI

You probably knew all his deepest, darkest secrets.

MARLBURY

I do not know about that.

Wini stands beside Marlbury in front of the fireplace.

WINI

Even after he reconciled with my mother -- when he ended his affair with the Lady Diana -- he always seemed to be trying to make up for something.

MARLBURY

What is troubling you, Lady Randall?

WINI

It's not just me. There are others concerned as well, but I have no one to ask but you. Diana has fled the country and she is the only one who really knows.

MARLBURY

Knows what? What more is there to know about that unfortunate affair?

WINI

Is Lady Diana's son my half-brother?

MARLBURY

Who put such an idea in your head?

WINI

That hardly matters.

MARLBURY

You may put all such thoughts to rest. The Lady Diana had no interest in children until she saw the opportunity of seizing Halford's wealth from Count Nicholai. You are your father's only living child.

WINI

But Lord Halford's Elderstar gems -- surely it is all too obvious that only a Randall had access to those?

MARLBURY

That is quite a different story.

WINI

Whose story is it then, if not my father's?

MARLBURY

I am sworn to secrecy, Lady Randall. Do not press me.

WINI

You cannot absolve my father of guilt unless you tell me all.

MARLBURY

Then perhaps you will answer a question for me first?

WINI

If I can.

MARLBURY

Who suggested this to you?

WINI

You will tell me the story behind the gemstones?

Marlbury nods.

WINI (CONT'D)

Simonides Halford. Both of his father's marriages were accompanied with a sudden acquisition of great wealth and the birth of a baby, several months premature. The marriage to Lady Diana was solemnized only weeks after my parents' reconciliation.

MARLBURY

Simonides! I should have known. It did not take long for you to fall in with his plans.

WINI

I beg your pardon! Lord Marlbury, if I did not know better, I'd say you meant to insult me.

MARLBURY

I saw you myself, Lady Randall, in his arms in his private quarters.

WINI

He told me my aunt was dead. When the ground gives way beneath your feet, you grab at any branch you can find to keep from falling.

MARLBURY

He is a clever one, that brother of our king -- playing both ends against the middle.

WINI

What do you mean?

MARLBURY

It is obvious, isn't it? He instigates the rebellion with Halford and the St. Clares, and then plays them false. When the King strips Halford of his lands, who do you think will receive them?

WINI

But no one suspected a rebellion until the Eye revealed their plans.

MARLBURY

It felt like I was beside your father again, the way you stiffened when you saw that map and fastened your eyes on Lord Halford's ring. No doubt you gave our dear Count alarm. He could not control what the Eye showed you, but he could suppress it by keeping you in his bunker.

WINI

I thought he was protecting me.

MARLBURY

As the Eye, you should have been with us.

Marlbury steps back and scrutinizes Wini.

MARLBURY (CONT'D)

The thought has crossed my mind, Lady Randall, that perhaps he means a more permanent solution to the problem?

WINI

What kind of solution?

MARLBURY

To be the husband of the Eye -- and the father of the next heir?

WINI

Now you do insult me.

MARLBURY

Genetics is a powerful tool, my lady. You cannot deny the gift you carry in your DNA.

WINI

The King has already addressed your concerns. He has all but ordered me to finalize my contract with Lord Haelstrom.

MARLBURY

Has Simonides already asked for your hand? Is he really as bold as that?

WINI

I am to marry Lord Haelstrom as soon as possible without the King's knowledge.

MARLBURY

How does Lord Haelstrom feel about this?

WINI

Lord Haelstrom does not yet know.

MARLBURY

Then perhaps I can be of service. He is one of my officers. I shall visit him this very evening.

Marlbury picks up his hat and tucks it under his arm.

MARLBURY

I am sorry for your losses, Lady Randall. I will do whatever I can to help you. You must never hesitate to call on me.

WINI

But, Lord Marlbury, you haven't kept your side of our bargain.

MARLBURY

Our bargain?

WINI

The gemstones -- if it is not my father's story, whose story is it?

MARLBURY

I suppose since you are to be the next Lady Haelstrom, you have twice the right to know.

WINI

What does that have to do with it?

MARLBURY

Because it is your aunt's story -- your aunt and the former Lord Haelstrom. Are you certain you want to hear it?

WINI

Aunt -- Greta?

MARLBURY

A child was involved, but it was your aunt's child, not your father's -- a little girl. Your aunt seemed to blame her for Lord Haelstrom's death.

WINI

Go -- on.

MARLBURY

After her birth, the child was entrusted to Lord Halford for discrete placement where her identity would never be known. The gemstones were to provide for her care and education. Halford rather specialized in that kind of service to the aristocracy.

WINI

What happened to the little girl?

MARLBURY

She died. Your aunt wanted nothing more to do with the jewels -- they were her inheritance from your grandparents' estate - and Halford was told to keep them.

WINI

I -- see.

MARLBURY

I must go, my lady. Are you going to be all right?

WINI

You have relieved me of one burden and given me quite another, but yes, my lord, I will be all right. Thank you.

Marlbury bows and leaves. Wini picks up the hava pipe and sits down. She begins to WEEP.

INT. WINI'S BEDROOM - WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

Wini lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. She throws her covers off, swings out of bed, puts on her slippers and a wrap, grabs a flashlight, and slips out of her bedroom.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Wini passes through the hallway with the flashlight. Most of the plaster is gone, leaving only wooden lath. A large drop cloth covers the door to Greta's study. Wini slips behind it.

INT. GRETA'S STUDY AT WINDERMERE HOUSE - NIGHT

A tarp covers a hole in the ceiling. A clear vinyl tarp covers the window next to Greta's desk. The light from a full moon shines through it.

Wini frantically searches the drawers of Greta's desk, pulling out papers, scanning their contents, and stuffing them back into the desk. She pulls folders from a filing cabinet, rifles through them, shoves them helter-skelter back into its drawers. Her frustration and urgency intensifies.

She prowls through the shelves of the large bookcases lining the walls, yanking out a book here, a book there, shuffling through their pages. She returns to the desk and sits down, cradling her head in her hands.

A bird call sounds in the night. Wini looks up and sees Greta framed in the moonlight, standing in front of the window.

WINI

Aunt Greta!

GRETA

So it's you, is it? Since when have you been responsible for anything but your own pleasure?

WINI

What are you talking about?

GRETA

Are you going to sit there for the rest of your life, wallowing in your grief?

Wini rises to her feet.

WINI

But I'm not wallowing in my grief. I'm doing my duty, Auntie, like you taught me. I am the Eye!

GRETA

No one else suffers like you, do they? No one else could possibly hurt as much as you. Do you even see the grief and pain others bear because of your selfishness?

WINI

Please, Aunt Greta -- stop it!

GRETA

Or do you just not care?

Greta steps toward Wini, but Wini realizes Greta is not looking at her. A YOUNG WOMAN (late 20s), heavy with child, is curled up on the floor in the opposite corner. The woman clutches her ears between her hands and slumps against the wall. Wini cannot see her face.

GRETA

You killed him with your selfishness. Nothing is as important to you as your own pain.

The young woman WAILS, RETCHES, and covers her ears.

GRETA

Damn everyone else with your unhappiness. If you can't be happy, why should anyone be happy? Kill them all, why don't you?

The young woman twists and turns against the corner walls, CRYING OUT and SOBBING.

WINI

Stop it, Aunt Greta! Stop it!

Wini shields the young woman with her body and faces Greta.

WINI (CONT'D)

Can't you see she's suffered enough? Whatever wrong she's done, she's helpless to make it right. You're going to crush the life out of her!

GRETA

Then you help her, Winifred. This is all I know how to do.

Wini turns to the young woman sobbing on the floor.

WINI

I don't know who you are or what you've done, but you are not alone. I'm here now, and I'm going to help you.

Wini begins to hoist the young woman to her feet. The woman looks up at her with tear-streaked cheeks and Wini recognizes Greta's familiar gray eyes.

WINI

Aunt -- Greta! It's you!

Wini whirls back to look at Greta by the window but Greta is gone. When she turns back, the young Greta has melted away too. Wini stands alone in the moonlight. The HAUNTING SOUNDS of Bel's HAVA PIPE drift into the room on the night air.

WINI

Bel! You haven't left me!

Wini slides to the floor and rests her head against the wall, eyes closed. She listens to the music. A few solitary tears trickle down her cheeks.

WINI

I'm not alone.

INT. THE HAELOSTROM MANOR HOUSE, MARSHALL-IN-THE-FIELDS - DAY

Wini waits in a chair in the front hall. The Haelstrom's residence is built on a grander scale than Windermere House, with high, sweeping ceilings, wide halls, lots of windows, and huge, graceful colonnades. At the SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, Wini looks up. Hamish McTavish approaches in a corporal's uniform.

HAMISH

If yer ladyship will follow me, His
Lordship's ready to see yer.

WINI

We've met before, haven't we?

HAMISH

Aye, ma'am. Iffen I'd knowed who yer was,
I'd have taken better care of yer.

WINI

You were the man helping the deaf medic.

HAMISH

I was. An' yer was lookin' fer Medici
Randall. Yer was his lady, I hear.

WINI

I was.

Hamish pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and hands it to Wini.

HAMISH

It's a cruel world, there's no mistakin'
that. Yer ain't had time to recover from yer
loss and they is hurryin' yer off to marry
another.

WINI

How do you know so much?

HAMISH

Yer Ladyship may be the King's Eye, but I'm
Lord Marlbury's eye -- leastways, one of
'em.

WINI

Lord Marlbury's eye?

HAMISH

In case yer hain't noticed, ma'am, he only has one. I keep remindin' him he's better off with me -- two eyes fer the one he's lost ain't such a bad trade, do yer think?

WINI

I think, Corporal --

HAMISH

(mock salute)

McTavish, ma'am. But you should call me Hamish. Everyone else does.

WINI

I think, Hamish, there is more to you than meets the eye.

Hamish grins and winks at her.

HAMISH

Maybe there is and maybe there isn't. His Lordship's waiting, ma'am.

Wini returns his handkerchief. They resume their walk through the great hall. She stops him again.

WINI

I don't suppose Mrs. Halifax is at home?

HAMISH

No, ma'am. Mrs. Halifax took flight the minute them missiles started landing in Ketteringas. It's only His Lordship here now.

Wini SIGHS in relief. She follows Hamish a few more steps and stops him again.

WINI

What kind of mood is His Lordship in?

HAMISH

Yer donna want ter know. It's not good.

WINI

He gave me a black eye once.

HAMISH

Yer ain't afeared he's gonna give yer another one, air yer, ma'am? You keep startin' and stoppin' like this an' we'll never get outta the hall.

WINI

No -- no. I'm not afraid of that.

Wini motions him onwards and trails behind him past a series of large, ostentatious portraits. Hamish stops in front of a small single door tucked behind the base of a huge open staircase to the second floor. He knocks softly on the door before he opens it and ushers Wini in.

HAMISH

Lady Randall, yer Lordship.

The door opens into a smallish room converted from a study into an apartment. A bed is pushed against a wall lined with bookcases, a desk to one side and on the other, a small sitting area facing the windows overlooking the Ketteringa River.

Johnny sits in an armchair with his back to Wini, one leg resting on a coffee table. A tumbler of whiskey sits on a small round table beside him. Johnny looks over his shoulder at Wini.

JOHNNY

You won't feel slighted if I don't stand.

He dismisses Hamish with a nod. Wini skirts the seating area and faces Johnny.

JOHNNY

Well, is Marlbury with you? Shall we get this over with?

WINI

Get what over?

JOHNNY

This farce of a marriage. Marlbury said last night that, as my general, he could officiate.

Wini circles around the coffee table.

WINI

Really, you never fail to annoy me, even when I'm feeling charitable towards you.

JOHNNY

Is that what you're bringing me, Wini -- charity? I thought I was the magnanimous one, sacrificing myself to keep the Eye from becoming Simonides Halford's puppet.

Wini sits next to Johnny.

WINI

What happened to all your brave speeches about it being our patriotic duty to produce an heir?

Johnny reaches for his whiskey and takes a long draught.

JOHNNY

Things have changed since then.

He nods at the stump of his thigh, the empty pant leg dangling from the chair.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

If it's an heir you want, you're better off with Simonides.

WINI

You don't happen to have an inexpensive vase or bowl or pot somewhere near, do you? Because I'm about to break something over your thick skull.

JOHNNY

It's true, Wini. Nothing you can say will make any difference. I'm not even half a man. I've lost more than my leg -- I've lost my nerve.

WINI

What do you mean by "nerve"?

Johnny slowly, deliberately sets his glass on the side table.

JOHNNY

I'm scared. The smallest sound makes me jump. I can't sleep. I can't eat. All I can do is drink, and that scares me, too. The last thing I want to be is some old sot, sitting around in a bar, leering at young girls, his only manhood coming out of a bottle.

Wini rests her hand lightly on his severed thigh.

WINI

That could never happen to you, Johnny.
That's not who you are.

Johnny stares at her hand on his thigh.

JOHNNY

You want to know what scares me most?

WINI

What?

JOHNNY

Being married to you.

Wini slips her hand from his leg.

WINI

To me?

JOHNNY

Being married to you scares me more than all those other things combined. You're the Eye. You will be on battlefields, in the King's council chambers, strategizing with Marlbury and Moline and Dalgleish and all the rest while I sit here -- helpless -- feeble -- my only accomplishments in life marrying you and preserving the sanctity of the Eye and maybe -- just maybe -- after God only knows how much trying -- producing an heir.

Johnny reaches for his whiskey and takes another drink.

WINI

You're not the only one who's scared. I never wanted to be the Eye. I ran from that fate as long and as hard as I could.

Wini reaches for Johnny's glass.

WINI

Here -- let me have some of that before you drink it all.

Wini takes a long swallow and hands the glass back to Johnny.

WINI

I don't want to be on battlefields or in council chambers or strategizing with the mighty. I wanted to be Bel's wife and have his children and live out my life quietly and peacefully with him at Little Eye. That was my dream of happiness.

JOHNNY

And now you're stuck with me.

WINI

We're stuck with each other. I told Leonidas I did not intend on ever marrying, and I meant that. Something's died in me, Johnny, like it's died in you. If I'm only getting half a man, you're only getting half a woman. My heart will never be fully in this marriage. You must know that.

Johnny hands the glass back to Wini.

JOHNNY

Here, you finish it.

He watches as she drains the tumbler, takes it back from her, and sets it on the table. He traces her profile with his finger.

JOHNNY

Life isn't really about happiness, is it? There's something deeper -- richer -- more important going on. Bel kept me alive for a reason. You know what I thought I heard him say, there in that surgery room, when all I wanted to do was die?

Wini shakes her head.

JOHNNY

"You must take care of her for me."

He knew -- and he wanted me to be there for
you when he -- when he --

Wini gently pulls Johnny's hand away from her face and runs her lips
across its back. Tears trail down her cheek.

WINI

Stop, Johnny. Let's not talk about Bel right
now. You're making me cry. You don't want me
to cry on our wedding day, do you?

Johnny pulls Wini onto his lap and cradles her head against his
shoulder. He kisses her tenderly but lightly.

JOHNNY

Is it our wedding day?

WINI

I'm ready if you're ready.

JOHNNY

Then I think we had better send Hamish for
Marlbury --

Johnny tightens his arms around Wini and bends his head to kiss her.

JOHNNY

(murmurs in her ear)

And Wini --

WINI

Yes?

JOHNNY

I don't think we need to worry about having
an heir after all...

They kiss.

FADE OUT:

THE END.

Afterword: A Self-Adapter's Reflection on Adaptation as a Craft Tool

Much of the critical debate over the adaptation of literary texts arises from the impositions placed on the adapter by the screenplay's condensed form, what André Bazin describes as "digest" (Bazin). This forced constriction and limitation of the description of inner landscapes of characters, actions, and settings into external representations pressures the adapter to prioritize one kind of content over another. In making those decisions—what to emphasize in the beats of a scene, what to relegate to background information embodied solely in the passing comment of a character, what to eliminate entirely from the telling of the story—the adapter clarifies his or her theme. Bazin maintains that the issue of an adaptation's fidelity to its source text is critically determined by its faithfulness to this communication of theme, not in its conformity to representations of character, plot, or place; deconstructionists see adaptation as an opportunity to examine said theme in a new light and posit an alternative point of view.

For the self-adapter, such decisions become a process of discovering, clarifying, and reinforcing one's purposes in telling a story. Experimentation with settings, character dynamics, and plot twists breed insight into the inner workings of one's own mind, the thoughts and intents of one's heart. In the case of *The Eye of the King*, I return to the revision of the novel (with publication in view) armed with deeper insight into the desires and fears motivating my characters and the necessary consequences of their choices and actions. Their identities are known to me in a fuller, more comprehensive sense as well as the implications those identities hold for plot development and for theme. More significantly, the process of self-adaptation culminated in a new level of thematic specificity: I know precisely what thoughts I want to provoke in my audience and why.

Because the adaptation process allowed me to re-create my story in a contemporary setting, I wrestle now with the question of whether or not to retain the novel's original context as a "period piece" or rewrite it, too, as situated in the present. If the contemporary setting worked in the screenplay, will it work equally well in the novel? I experimented with a contemporary context in the screenplay out of a realization that fiction concerned with the supernatural is almost always placed in "far-away" places, removed in time and location from life as we experience it now. The experience of the supernatural is a very real phenomenon in my own life. I wished to portray it as something currently accessible to an audience conditioned to associate it only with the past or with fantasy worlds or with science fiction.

Whatever the purposes and materials of the adapter—fidelity in literary adaptation, representation of alternative points of view in deconstruction, discovery and vision in self-adaptation—adaptation is a powerful tool for anyone practicing the writer's craft.

Section Four

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McKee cuts to the heart of the essentials of storytelling and challenges the screenwriter to provide not cliched portrayals or escapist fantasies but meaningful experiences of life for

his or her audience. His observations, like those of many of the writers represented in this bibliography, focus attention on the primacy of theme in drafting effective screenplays, whether original works or adaptations.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Laughter in the Dark*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1938.

Nabokov's novel, originally serialized in 1932, portrays a parasitic relationship between an aging art critic and a young aspiring actress, who eventually kills him.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Strong Opinions* (Vintage International), Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1990.

Nabokov's annotated re-publication of previously published interviews, essays, and editorial letters.

New King James Version Bible. Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Pew Research Center. "Projecting U.S. Religious Groups' Population Shares by 2070." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 13 Sept. 2022, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/projecting-u-s-religious-groups-population-shares-by-2070/.

Pew's most recent statistics give a dark view of Christianity's future in the West.

Tamás, Péter. "The Attraction of Montages: Cinematic Writing Style in Nabokov's *Lolita*." *Nabokov Online Journal*, Vol. X–XI (2016/2017).

Tamás identifies structures and stylistic choices in Nabokov's penning of *Lolita* that suggest the author wrote the novel from a cinematic point of view, indicating areas in which a screenplay orientation might inform the drafting and/or revision of a novel.

Von Zinzendorf, Nikolaus. "My Zeal Has Not Cooled...." Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church, 1982, www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-1/my-zeal-has-not-cooled.html. Accessed 27 Nov. 2022.

Zinzendorf's poignant and eloquent testimony to the enduring change in his life produced by the encounter with Christ through Domenico Feti's painting, "Ecce Homo."