

THE LADY MINERVA

Written by

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INT. PALACE KITCHEN - DAY

A bustling kitchen. There is a spread of elaborate dishes in varying states of readiness about the counter top.

A domineering and portly head cook, red faced and sweating, works on the piece de resistance, a many tiered cake stuffed with flowers and delicate frosting designs.

COOK

Mary, tamp down that oven or we'll
all roast alive. And my cake will
melt.

A small girl drops a butter churn and tends to the oven.

Several kitchen maids toil - some kneading bread, others decorating desserts. All are flushed from the hot kitchen.

Two girls twitter together over a large board. They decorate lackadaisically with dried fruits and other garnish.

BETSY

Did you see the princess yet? They
say she's very beautiful.

LIZA

I heard she's lovely. And I heard
she doesn't speak a lick of the
tongue.

BETSY

How romantic -- to not understand
what your husband were saying.

LIZA

What I wouldn't give to not hear
Tom.

COOK

What I wouldn't give to not hear
you! Get to work, the pair of you.

The girls shrink. Then continue their conversation in more hushed tones.

LIZA

Can you imagine, all this feast and
it ain't even the wedding yet.
They ain't even posted banns yet
and we made *that* cake.

BETSY

It's all very exciting. Us getting a queen and all. And the King coming of age!

COOK

Exciting my foot. All it means is another occasion. A wedding! And after the birthday and the coronation. Why, the Regent has me working all hours! I'll not be sad to see him go when the King becomes king.

Betsy and Liza giggle.

COOK (CONT'D)

Laugh now. The ovens running all hours will wipe those smirks right off. I've been praying for the King's twenty-fifth since Lord Sperling were named his Regent.

The girls continue to garnish.

A footman sweeps between them, and whisks away the boar.

The boar's great hairy face fills the screen.

INT. SERVANTS' STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

The footman carries the dish up a flight of steps into a bustling great hall.

INT. PALACE GREAT HALL - DAY

The footman passes several intricate tapestries hanging on the walls. Great sconces tower between them, burning brightly.

He walks to the center of the room where five large wooden tables teeming with elegantly dressed guests stand. The din of the nobles eating and carousing is nearly deafening.

An enormous chandelier hangs from the ceiling, filled with hundreds of burning candles.

Even with the rich colors and burning candles, the hall feels dim.

The footman brings the boar to the head of the table, and sets the heavy platter deftly in front of King Henrik -- 24 and looking melancholy.

Henrik wears tastefully regal clothing and a delicate gold circlet around his head.

Beside him is a beautiful young woman, softly crying. This is his bride-to-be, Gloriana Braganza Leopoldina Victoria.

On Henrik's other elbow is SPERLING (50s). He's a bright eyed and wily politician, and the King's regent until his twenty fifth birthday in a few short weeks.

SPERLING

You don't seem to be enjoying yourself, Majesty.

HENRIK

I'm not. Couldn't you have found a bride who spoke my language, Sperling? Or at least one of the other six I know?

SPERLING

I apologize for the inconvenience, Majesty. Perhaps you would prefer war?

HENRIK

You deliberately misunderstand me, man. But never mind. I suppose only a foolish bridegroom is content.

SPERLING

Precisely, your Majesty.

A hulking, overdressed man stands too close behind the conversation. This is Lord Gerhardt (30s).

SPERLING (CONT'D)

(whipping around)

Yes, Gerhardt?

Gerhardt leans in and whispers in Sperling's ear.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

Yes, yes. Go.

(to Henrik:)

Forgive me, Majesty.

HENRIK

Of course. God, Sperling. I do
abhor crowds.

SPERLING

Perhaps you should take your
betrothed to the balcony, Majesty.
For some fresh air.

HENRIK

And to wave to the masses, of
course.

(he sighs)

Yes, I suppose I ought. The
subjects will be more excited for a
queen than their monarch is.

Sperling nods.

Henrik stands.

The cacophony instantly stops, and the entire hall stands
with him. One woman topples backwards over a bench in her
haste, and quickly rights herself.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Sit down, sit down.

The guests obediently sit, but do not rejoin in conversation.

He holds his arm out to Gloriana. She takes it timidly.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese)

I hate all of these horrible
people. And I hate you. I hope you
are taking me somewhere to hang
myself.

HENRIK

(patting her hand)

Oh my dear, you know I cannot
understand a word you say.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese)

You pig headed idiot man. What a
waste studying English before
meeting you. Had you done the same
we could converse in our own
tongues. Oh, I hate you.

HENRIK

Yes, yes.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Henrik and Gloriana head out of the Great Hall and into an even dimmer hallway.

HENRIK
Isn't that nice? I can hear myself
think.

He calls out.

HENRIK (CONT'D)
Hello, brain. I've missed you!

GLORIANA
(in Portuguese)
What a strange man.

As they walk, a tapestry begins to move. They pass it.

Hands reach out from the wall, holding a hood.

The hands follow the couple, and the hood drops over the King's head.

Gloriana is knocked over, and Henrik struggles.

Gloriana lets out a piercing scream as we -

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. GAMBARDILLA'S FENCING ACADEMY - DAY

A huge, brightly lit room. Cathedral ceilings, stone pillars, and giant gabled windows.

Pairs of masked fencers advance and retreat in unison, their swords clashing merrily. A magnificently mustachioed instructor, Master Gambardella (60s), walks up and down the lines, correcting form and offering words of praise and criticism.

Suddenly a new sound is added to the cacophony. Running steps on the stone floor, echoing down a hallway.

A fop bursts into the room.

FOP
Kidnap! Treason! Treason! The
King has been kidnapped!

The fencers stop their drills and an explosion of voices fills the room.

FENCER #1
What did he say?

GAMBARDELLA
Kidnapped?

FENCER #3
Kidnapped!

FENCER #4
Who's been kidnapped?

FENCER #5
The King! The King has been
kidnapped!

We narrow our focus to one particular fencer who appears unmoved by the chaos surrounding her. She removes her mask and a mass of dark curls comes tumbling out. The face beneath is the mask is a striking one -- flashing-eyed, iron-jawed, defiant, and full of easy good humour. This is Minerva Bellamy (mid-20s), our hero.

Three figures behind her also remove their masks. We see, in succession:

Diana (mid-20s), a languid blonde.

Eleanor ("Ellie") (mid-20s), a tiny spitfire.

Winifred ("Fred") (mid-20s), a tall, gangling bundle of nerves.

These four women are the finest blades in the academy and the toast of the town. They're the beau ideal, and all the fencers in the room turn toward them to see how they'll take the news.

Minerva puts her mask under her arm. She twitches the tip of her rapier restlessly, and considers her words.

She relishes the eyes, and takes a moment longer than is comfortable to weigh in.

MINERVA
I'd wager a hundred ducats that
Edward Gerhardt's behind it.

The room erupts in laughter.

A young provincial, agog at city life, edges over to a sophisticated-looking city dweller.

PROVINCIAL FENCER
What's so funny?

CITY FENCER
She hates Gerhardt! Everyone knows that! They have a standing yearly duel, but neither of 'em ever manages to kill the other!

PROVINCIAL FENCER
(star-struck)
That's Minerva Bellamy?! I've heard about her!

The City Fencer gives him a look of disdain and sidles away.
A rakish young man, Georg Tarlenheim, steps toward Minerva.

TARLENHEIM
A hundred ducats on Gerhardt? I'll take that bet!

The room goes very quiet. Bets are no laughing matter among the fencers of Master Gambardella's academy.

A space opens up between Minerva and Tarlenheim.

MINERVA
(coolly)
Have you a hundred ducats, Tarlenheim?

The crowd reacts appreciatively.

TARLENHEIM
Soon I'll have a hundred more. As though a family as ancient as the Gerhardts would get mixed up in something as gauche as abduction!

The spectators' heads whip back and forth as though they were watching a tennis match.

MINERVA
(looking him up and down)
I bow to your knowledge of all things gauche.

She bows.

Scattered applause.

TARLENHEIM
 (unflappably)
 A hundred ducats, then?

MINERVA
 Make it two.

Gasps from the crowd.

Back to the provincial and the city dweller:

PROVINCIAL FENCER
 She'd wager two hundred ducats on a
 hunch and a rumor?

CITY FENCER
 She'd wager much more on far less,
 where Gerhardt's involved.
 (confidentially)
 She grew up with his wife.

Back to the gamblers:

TARLENHEIM
 Done. Master Gambardella, would
 you witness the wager?

The old fencing master steps forward.

GAMBARDELLA
 (solemnly)
 I bear witness to the this wager.
 Two hundred ducats on the villainy
 of Edward Gerhardt.

Minerva and Tarlenheim shake.

GAMBARDELLA (CONT'D)
 (in a different tone, to
 Minerva:)
 Why do you do these things,
 Bellamy?

MINERVA
 (shrugging cheerfully)
 I can't help myself. Gerhardt *is* a
 villain.

She claps him on the back.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
 Don't worry, Beppo. There's a card
 game at the Swan tonight, and I'm
 always lucky on Wednesdays.

INT. TAVERN - AFTERNOON

The four friends are drinking.

FRED

I'm putting my foot down, Minerva.
No more gambling today. My nerves
can't take it.

MINERVA

Nonsense, Fred.

FRED

Do you even have two hundred
ducats?

MINERVA

Of course not, why would you ask
that?

Fred groans and puts her head in her hands.

ELLIE

Well I for one am glad you made the
bet! Life's been awfully boring
lately, hasn't it?

MINERVA

Dreadfully boring.

FRED

I *like* boring! Boring is
predictable.

ELLIE

We know you like boring, Fred,
dear. You *are* boring.

FRED

I'm not boring.

ELLIE

How can you *like* boring without
being boring? You're a smart girl,
Freddie. You must know I'm right.

FRED

Don't call me Freddie.

ELLIE

(toying with her)
Only a boring person doesn't
embrace a new pet name.

While Fred and Ellie bicker, Minerva sits back and watches, drinking her beer.

Diana turns to Minerva, ready for action.

DIANA

I suppose we'll have to investigate Gerhardt, then?

MINERVA

Yes, I suppose. Otherwise how can we know I won?

Fred overhears.

FRED

(grasping at straws)
No! That's it! If we don't investigate we can't possibly know you lost!

Minerva smiles at her friend.

MINERVA

Fred dear, I do appreciate you keeping me out of scrapes.

FRED

I don't! You always get scraped up no matter what I do.

DIANA

But she appreciates the effort!

MINERVA

Exactly. So, thank you for the attempt, now let's be off. Adventure awaits!

Fred looks bleak and drains her tankard.

Ellie beams.

ELLIE

Where do we start?

MINERVA

We'll pay Gerhardt's mistress a visit.

DIANA

(drily)
Which one?

MINERVA

Oh, I don't know. The newest one --
the blonde one -- what's her name?

DIANA

Belinda.

MINERVA

Of course it is. Well then, let us
see Belinda.

Ellie rises unsteadily to her feet.

ELLIE

To Belinda!

INT. SPERLING'S PALACE CHAMBERS - EVENING

Sperling's chambers are grand but not gaudy. Tapestries hang from the walls, the floor is thickly carpeted, and a fire crackles in the massive hearth.

Sperling sits behind a dark oak desk. He looks bored. On the other side of the desk, pacing and gesticulating wildly, is Gloriana Braganza Leopoldina Victoria.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese)

And then this great big man. The man standing behind you at the dinner. He swooped down on him and masked him with a hood. And the king, he kicked and screamed, like a small boy and not at all like a king. I was pushed to the ground. It was very demeaning. The people here have no chivalry. But that man! You know the man! He is your man! He dragged the king down the hallway, and I screamed and screamed but the people here are deaf and slow as well as rude. And no one came.

By her gestures we see that she's recounting the abduction of the King. She finishes with an entreaty to the Regent.

Sperling regards her gravely.

SPERLING

(slowly and loudly,
enunciating very clearly)
(MORE)

SPERLING (CONT'D)

I. Am. Sorry. Princess. I. Do.
Not. Speak. Portuguese.

She begins to weep.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese)

I hate this horrible country with
no ocean and no love. These stupid
people

Finally Sperling loses patience. He rings a bell. A female
servant enters the room.

SPERLING

(to servant)

The princess has been exhausted by
her recent shock. She's not
herself. Please see her back to
her chambers and ensure she gets
some rest.

The servant bows and begins to lead Gloriana out of the room.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

(to Gloriana)

Rest. Well. Princess!

As Gloriana and the servant are about to pass through it,
Gerhardt comes in through the open door. At the sight of
him, Gloriana shrinks back, points at him, and cries:

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese)

That man! He stole the King! That
man, he pushed me to the ground!

SERVANT

There there, princess. You'll be
alright. We'll have a nice nap.

Without missing a beat, Gerhardt bows to her.

The servant tugs her out of the room and shuts the door
behind them, leaving Gerhardt and Sperling alone.

SPERLING

Well?

GERHARDT

(re: Gloriana)

Will she be a problem?

SPERLING

Certainly not. In two weeks I shall be crowned king, and in three weeks she will be my wife.

GERHARDT

And if she refuses?

Sperling shrugs and sighs with mock regret.

SPERLING

It would be a terrible end to a lovely neck, but I can't be held responsible for the poor decisions of a child.

Gerhardt smiles grimly.

GERHARDT

Of course not, my lord.

SPERLING

(getting down to business)
The King?

GERHARDT

Held in my chambers by men I trust.

SPERLING

Good. That's good. You've done well, Gerhardt. Did he put up a fight?

GERHARDT

Not much of one, my lord. He's rather a frail creature.

SPERLING

Yes, he is, isn't he? He's not a bad sort, though, really, only inconveniently placed. I almost regret the trouble I'm causing him. Does he seem much unsettled?

GERHARDT

(with a trace of admiration:)

Far from it, my lord. He's got courage, I'll give him that much. Trussed hand and foot and with a bag over his head and he never once stopped yelling at us. Would have worn himself out, I dare say, if we hadn't gagged him.

SPERLING

Always had a temper, even as a boy.

He slips into a brief reverie.

GERHARDT

What would you like me to do with
him now, my lord?

SPERLING

(vaguely)
Oh, just get rid of him.

GERHARDT

Does my lord mean--?

He mimes "death."

SPERLING

Eh? Oh, no, no. No call for that.
He looks so much like his father.

Gerhardt makes a face.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

No, Gerhardt, it won't do. Just
keep him somewhere for a few weeks.
The world will mourn, I will
reluctantly have him declared dead,
and at last yielding humbly and
selflessly to popular opinion I
shall permit myself to be crowned
in his stead.

GERHARDT

But if he were to return alive,
wouldn't that negate my lord's
coronation? And place my lord's
faithful servants in -- *compromised*
positions?

Sperling cackles and thumps a leather-bound tome on his desk.

SPERLING

It would not! That, my dear
Gerhardt, is the beauty of the law.
It is stated quite plainly that a
coronation properly handled
bequeaths all powers of the crown --
regardless of any revelations or
complications or confusions *ex post*
facto -- to the newly anointed
monarch.

GERHARDT
So once you're crowned--

SPERLING
Henrik could stand on the steps of
the palace and cry my villainy to
the world and it wouldn't matter a
jot.

Gerhardt bows. He seems impressed.

GERHARDT
My lord has thought of everything.

SPERLING
Of course I have, Gerhardt. It's
my job to think of everything.
See that the King disappears for a
few weeks. After that--

He shrugs and spreads his hands.

GERHARDT
Very good, my lord.

He turns and leaves the room.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - NIGHT

Through a window, we see Gerhardt, with the help of two other
men, leading a struggling Henrik forcibly towards a carriage.
Henrik is bound and gagged.

Six more men trail behind.

The men hoist up the young King, and toss him bodily into the
carriage.

A hand taps on the window we've been looking through.

The men look up. A frightfully young maid waves, beaming
down at Gerhardt.

GERHARDT'S MAN #1
Looks like you've got an admirer.

Gerhardt looks up and she waves harder, and blows him kisses.

He forces a smile, and waves curtly.

She clasps her hands over her chest and smiles at him.

The men laugh quietly.

GERHARDT

Alright enough. We need to get on the road.

GERHARDT'S MAN #1

Aren't you worried she'll rat you out?

GERHARDT

Not in the least. She hasn't two wits to rub together.

The men laugh a little more readily.

GERHARDT'S MAN #2

Those are the most dangerous kind.

The men laugh heartily.

GERHARDT

Enough!

Gerhardt swings into the carriage, and it jerks forwards with a start.

The King's head pops into the back window of the carriage, and he knocks the glass with his bound hands.

The eight other men scramble onto horses and follow quickly behind.

The maid, still in the window, waves them off with a handkerchief.

INT. BELINDA'S PARLOR - EVENING

A lavishly, even gaudily appointed parlor.

Diana leans against a wall. Fred paces anxiously. Ellie bounces on the balls of her feet, her on hand the hilt of her sword.

Minerva sits, quite at her leisure, on a couch. Across from her, lounging on a divan like a Roman consort, is an elaborately made-up woman. This is Belinda.

BELINDA

Oh of course it's hard to say with dear Edward. He's never in one place for any amount of time, and even when he is his head's somewhere else. He's frightfully wise, isn't he?

MINERVA
Frightfully.

BELINDA
How did you say you knew him?

MINERVA
We fence together.

BELINDA
Oh, lovely. He does love his
fencing.

MINERVA
And you haven't any idea where he
is?

BELINDA
Well --

She leans in confidentially.

MINERVA
Yes?

BELINDA
He *said* he was going away on
business for a couple of weeks.

MINERVA
But you don't believe him?

BELINDA
He's frightfully transparent, the
dear. Can't tell a lie to save his
life.

All four of the women are leaning forward eagerly, hanging on
Belinda's every word.

ELLIE
He was lying?

BELINDA
Yes, I'm sure of it.

Minerva smiles. But then--

BELINDA (CONT'D)
He always does. Tries to spare my
feelings. But I don't mind if he
goes to see her now and again!

Minerva's smile fades. She frowns, baffled.

MINERVA

See who?

BELINDA

His wife, of course! It's perfectly alright with me -- after all, it's what wives are *for*!

MINERVA

His -- wife?

BELINDA

Yes, of course. Vanishing mysteriously into the country for two weeks! Where else would he be going but to see his wife?

Ellie rolls her eyes and sighs exaggeratedly. Minerva slumps a little.

MINERVA

I see. Is there-- Is there anyone else he might have told his plans to?

Belinda has abruptly lost interest in her guests.

BELINDA

Oh, I don't know. I suppose you could speak to his mistress.

MINERVA

Whose?

BELINDA

Edward's.

Minerva peers at her.

MINERVA

I thought--?

BELINDA

I mean his *other* mistress. Men are so transparent, aren't they? It doesn't bother me, though, she's not a real mistress, not like me. She's a...*plaything*. A maid, if you can believe it. In the palace. Convenient, I suppose, for late nights with the Regent. If you're looking for Edward, talk to her.

INT. GERHARDT'S CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Gerhardt looks bored. Henrik lies on the seat across from him, bound and gagged and looking daggers at him.

After a moment, Gerhardt leans forward and removes the gag.

HENRIK

How *dare* you!

Gerhardt reinstates the gag.

GERHARDT

It's like this, your majesty.
We've a long ride ahead of us, and
I'd prefer to spend it in
conversation. But if you're going
to be unpleasant, I'm going to try
to bear it with only my own
thoughts.

Henrik glares at him. Gerhardt removes the gag again.

HENRIK

Return me to the palace at once!

Gerhardt sighs and replaces the gag.

GERHARDT

(blandly)

You do understand that you're
bringing this upon yourself.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - NIGHT

Minerva and her three friends surround the young maid from the window.

MAID

Right here was the carriage. Eddie
looked so handsome in his riding
clothes.

MINERVA

And you're sure it was, er, *Eddie*.

MAID

Oh yes. I blew him kisses, and he
waved back at me.

MINERVA

I see.

DIANA
 (to Minerva)
 This doesn't seem suspicious.

MINERVA
 Not yet.

DIANA
 And how many men were with him?

The maid counts on her fingers, mouthing the numbers.

The foursome wait, staring at her.

MAID
 Eight. No. Nine. It's so hard to
 tell. I was of course only looking
 at Eddie.

Minerva begins to lose her patience.

Diana notices, and slips an arm into the maid's, confidingly.

DIANA
 I understand completely. It is
 very important that we get the
 whole story though. Did you
 recognize any of the men?

MAID
 Oh yes, the King was with them.

All four of them stare at her.

FRED
 There we go. It was Gerhardt. You
 win, congratulations, Minerva.
 Let's go home.

ELLIE
 Not so fast.

DIANA
 The King, dear?

MINERVA
 Are you absolutely sure?

MAID
 Oh, positively. It is such an
 honor for my Eddie to be so close
 to the King. He is so
 (she thinks -- hard)
 (MORE)

MAID (CONT'D)

Magnanimous. Although perhaps he'd had too much to drink.

Ellie laughs into her glove.

DIANA

Too much to drink?

MAID

Oh yes. Poor Eddie was practically carrying him out of the Palace. He needed two other men to help! Yes, I think there were eight men. And the king. So nine. And Eddie, of course. So perhaps that is ten.

MINERVA

So, the King was carried by three men and put into the carriage. Did you tell anyone?

MAID

No, silly. It's none of my business where the King goes or how. Oh and dressed so poorly, practically in rags.

MINERVA

That's quite enough.

DIANA

Thank you so very much.

MAID

Any time. I am glad to talk about my Eddie.

The maid cheerfully walks back towards the castle.

DIANA

Well. She was -

ELLIE

Dumber than a post.

FRED

And so very young.

MINERVA

I told you Gerhardt was a villain.

FRED

Well, you were in fact lucky on a Wednesday. Shall we visit Tarlenheim in the morning?

They stare at her.

ELLIE

You can't be serious, Fred.

FRED

Not tonight! Do you really need the money so badly, Minerva?

DIANA

She means, because we have to follow Gerhardt.

FRED

Follow him!

MINERVA

Of course we have to follow him, Winifred! He's abducted our king.

DIANA

On the eve of his engagement.

ELLIE

And threw him tied up into the back of a carriage.

FRED

Yes yes, and it's awful. But don't you think someone *else* can rescue the king? Just this once. We could go home, take a bath--

ELLIE

Are you mad!

MINERVA

We have to save our King, Fred. Basic decency demands it.

FRED

Why do we only care about decency when there's a good chance we'll die for it?

ELLIE

When else is decency worth anything!

DIANA
Besides, it will be very exciting.

MINERVA
And I'm certain to get a good bout
with Gerhardt.

FRED
But aren't there better people to
rescue the king? People who don't
have cozy beds waiting for them?

MINERVA
Who could be more qualified?

FRED
The King's Guard.

MINERVA
Ha! I could best any two of them
with a sword -- so could you! And
together we could take the whole
lot of 'em.

ELLIE
Hear, hear!

MINERVA
Why there's no one in all Livonia --
nay, the world! -- more suited to
this task. Our King has been
abducted by a villainous wretch.
We must return him to his seat on
the throne! And there aren't four
people more willing or able. We've
the fire--

Ellie stands tall

MINERVA (CONT'D)
--the brains--

Fred looks sheepish.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
--and the heart--

Diana smiles at her friend.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
--for any task!

DIANA

And the best blade in Ottoburg, to
boot.

MINERVA

I couldn't have said it better
myself. We must save our King from
the dastardly foe.

Ellie pulls out her sword, and thrusts it into the air.

Minerva and Diana join her.

Reluctantly, Fred unsheathes her sword and adds it to the
circle.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

For King and Country.

FRED, ELLIE AND DIANA

For King and Country.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - NIGHT

Four riders, their swords slapping against their thighs and
the feathers in their hats flattened by the wind, gallop down
a white ribbon of moonlit road.

Ellie grins with the pleasure of the chase. Diana is stoic.
Fred glances behind them from time to time. Minerva is a
little ahead of the others. Her eyes gleam and she flattens
herself to her horse's neck.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - DAWN

The sky begins to grow brighter, but our heroes' pace doesn't
slacken.

Then--

ELLIE

Look!

She points ahead. The carriage can be seen in the distance.

They urge their mounts forward. They're noticeably gaining
on the carriage.

INT. GERHARDT'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Gerhardt is sleeping, his head against the window.

Henrik glares at him.

There's a pounding on the roof. Gerhardt jerks awake.

GERHARDT

What?

A small hatch opens in the roof of the carriage. The ugly face of the coachman appears at the opening.

COACHMAN

Begging your pardon, m'lord, but there are riders pursuing us.

GERHARDT

Impossible.

COACHMAN

Very good, m'lord.

GERHARDT

How do you know they're pursuing us?

COACHMAN

They're riding their horses into the ground and waving their swords at us.

GERHARDT

I see. How many?

COACHMAN

Four.

Gerhardt lets out a bark of laughter.

GERHARDT

Thank you, Fritz. Tell my guards to kill them.

COACHMAN

Very good, m'lord.

The window shuts with a snap.

Henrik struggles against the gag.

GERHARDT

Something to say?

He removes the gag.

HENRIK

You're a damned coward, Gerhardt.

A shadow passes over Gerhardt's face.

GERHARDT

(with icy control)

Careful, your majesty.

He re-gags him. Then, with easy grace, he opens the door of the moving carriage and swings himself out to look at the road behind them.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Gerhardt's guards peel away from the carriage and turn to meet the four women. They form a line across the road, effectively blocking it, and spur their horses toward our heroes.

Minerva, Fred, Diana, and Ellie stand up in their stirrups to meet the charge. Their swords are raised above their heads and they look quite dashing -- even Fred, who for all her worries tends to get caught up in the moment.

The two lines come together with a crash of steel.

For a moment there's general confusion, and our heroes use it to even the odds. Minerva immediately dispatches two of the guards, and Ellie a third.

The carriage is slipping away, though. Minerva tries to manoeuvre out of the press of horses to continue her pursuit, but the captain of the guards blocks her path and engages her.

Fred disarms her opponent, who leaps off his horse to find his sword in the dusty road. Fred clambers down after him.

Diana knocks her opponent clean off her horse, and leaps down to engage her on foot.

Ellie is still on horseback, fighting two guards at once. She kills one, but the other cuts deep into her exposed left arm. She cries out and engages her with renewed fury.

Fred and Diana are on foot, fighting back to back.

Minerva and the captain duel furiously. He glances around and sees the odds turning against his soldiers.

He disengages and spurs back the way they came, toward the capitol. Minerva lets him go.

Ellie wounds her opponent, who flees. The two other surviving guards follow suit.

Our heroes, breathing heavily, grin at one another. Then Ellie falls out of her saddle.

Minerva leaps off her horse. She, Diana, and Fred cluster concernedly around their friend.

FRED
(anxiously)
Are you alright?

Ellie's eyes flutter open.

ELLIE
(with heroic bluster)
I'm fine, Freddie. A scratch.
Give me some air.

She heaves herself to standing.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Well, what are you all standing
around for? Come on!

She tries to mount her horse, but can't quite manage it. She staggers. Minerva steadies her.

MINERVA
(re: the wound)
Let me looks at that.

ELLIE
It's nothing! Just a--

She collapses.

INT. SPERLING'S PALACE CHAMBERS - NOON

Sperling lounges in a settee, looking at fabric swatches.

He weighs two of them.

The doors of the room swing open.

PAGE
The captain of Sir Gerhardt's
Guard.

A bedraggled and bloodied man stumbles into the chamber.

Sperling gets up and holds the fabric against himself in the mirror.

SPERLING

Ah. Clarke. I'm deciding between blue satin and emerald velvet to line the late King's coffin. Which do you think I'll look better in at my coronation?

CAPTAIN CLARKE

The emerald. But, sir, I've urgent news.

Sperling looks up from his task. His lip curls at the grime.

SPERLING

What happened to you?

CAPTAIN CLARKE

We were ambushed, sir. A group of rescuers intent on saving the King. There were four of them sir, and we barely escaped with our lives.

Sperling stares silently at the bleeding man.

CAPTAIN CLARKE (CONT'D)

They are still in pursuit, sir.

SPERLING

Do you know who it was?

CAPTAIN CLARKE

It was Lady Bellamy and three companions, sir.

Sperling drops the fabric swatches, and his hands clutch his head. He turns away from the Captain.

SPERLING

You mean to tell me *eight* of the most highly trained guards in Livonia were bested by four hobby swordswomen?

A beat.

CAPTAIN CLARKE

We did injure one of them, sir.

SPERLING

One. Was *injured*. And how many did you lose, Clarke?

CAPTAIN CLARKE
All injured. Four dead, m'lord.

SPERLING
Four dead! They each got one,
then?

CAPTAIN CLARKE
Actually -

SPERLING
That wasn't a question, you fool!
Where are they?

CAPTAIN CLARKE
On the road, sir. Not far behind
the King.

SPERLING
Out! Get out!
(calling his man)
Boy! Get me the Captain.

PAGE
He just left, sir.

SPERLING
Not that one! *Mine*.

PAGE
You mean the Captain of the King's
Guard, sir?

SPERLING
I am the King, boy! Any more
impertinence and I'll have that
tongue removed.

PAGE
Yes, sir.

The page scurries out.

Sperling paces his chambers.

SPERLING
(spitting with rage)
Four girls. Besting my best men.
I'll send a dozen. No, two dozen!
See how they fare then.

PAGE (O.S.)
The Captain of the King's Guard,
sir.

Sperling waves a fist at the young page.

SPERLING
Impertinence!

The page runs out of the room, and a large man enters in his stead.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
Yes, sir?

SPERLING
I need two dozen of your fastest riders and most daring swords to follow Lady Bellamy. I want her and her companions' heads brought back on a spike before my coronation.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD
Yes, m'lord.

SPERLING
And should you fail--

Sperling stares daggers at the Captain.

SPERLING (CONT'D)
It'll be your head I'm after.

EXT. RED STARLING INN - DAY

An inn in a small provincial village.

Minerva, Fred, and Diana sit at a trestle table in the inn yard. A huge breakfast is spread out before them.

FRED
Do you think she's going to be alright?

DIANA
Of course she'll be alright. Ellie's been in worse shape than this.

MINERVA
Ellie's *usually* in worse shape than this.

FRED

That's what I'm worried about.
What if one day she just falls
apart?

DIANA

The surgeon said she'll be fine.
Eat your food, Fred dear, you'll
need the strength.

FRED

You can't mean we're going on.
They'll be leagues ahead of us by
now!

Ellie limps into the inn yard. She's deathly pale, and
trailed by a frantic, white whiskered surgeon, who's trying
to finish bandaging her arm.

ELLIE

And getting further ahead every
minute! What on earth are we
waiting for?

Her friends rise, alarmed.

SURGEON

Please, my lady, you'll tear the
stitches!

FRED

Ellie! Be careful!

ELLIE

Nonsense, Freddie, I'm fine. Is
that breakfast? I'm starving.

She grabs a leg of meat from the table and begins to wolf it
down.

SURGEON

Gently, gently!

MINERVA

(sternly)
Ellie, sit down.

ELLIE

We don't have time to sit down --
have our horses been fed?

She sways on her feet. Fred and Diana catch her. They guide
her to a bench and help her sit down. The surgeon kneels
beside her solicitously.

SURGEON

Please, my lady, we need to get
that arm into a sling.

ELLIE

(weakly)

Nonsense, can't ride with my arm in
a sling.

MINERVA

Ellie, you're not coming with us.

ELLIE

'Course I am.

FRED

You can't!

ELLIE

Don't tell me what I can't do,
Freddie.

A face off. Ellie glares up at them.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I'll be fine.

MINERVA

I know you will -- but you'll slow
us down.

This seems to hit home. Minerva presses her advantage.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

Besides, you'll be more use to us
here. If we're followed you can
throw them off our track.

Ellie nods.

ELLIE

(still dubious)

That's true.

MINERVA

It's settled, then. Diana, you and
Fred go find the innkeeper and get
us a week's worth of provisions.
I'll see to the horses.

ELLIE

What should I do?

Minerva pushes a plate in front of her.

MINERVA

Eat.

INT. RED STARLING INN: CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

The proprietor leads Fred and Diana down a stone staircase into a cellar. It's notably long -- almost an underground hallway. It's filled with wine casks, cheeses, and dried meats.

Diana looks the length of the cellar.

DIANA

This goes on forever.

Fred begins loading food into her saddlebags.

PROPRIETOR

The Romans built it -- goes on for almost a mile, comes up on the other side of the road.

Fred sees a dusty wine rack, and takes a few ancient-looking bottles. The proprietor notices.

PROPRIETOR (CONT'D)

(nervously)

You do have--

DIANA

You'll get your money.

EXT. RED STARLING INN - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie stands forlornly in the inn yard, watching her friends ride away. The proprietor and surgeon stand beside her.

Ellie eyes the surgeon with a glint of mischief.

ELLIE

You should know that I plan on being a difficult patient.

INT. GERHARDT'S CARRIAGE - DAY

Henrik is still trussed and gagged.

Gerhardt is playing idly with a dagger.

Henrik makes noises around his gag.

GERHARDT

Are we going to try this again,
your majesty?

Henrik nods.

GERHARDT (CONT'D)

(sighing)
Very well.

He removes the gag.

HENRIK

Where are you taking me?

GERHARDT

Somewhere safe.

HENRIK

How long will it take to get there?

GERHARDT

Several days.

HENRIK

In that case, I need breakfast. I
can just see a farmhouse out that
window, which means we're
approaching a village. I want you
to stop there.

GERHARDT

That's quite impossible.

HENRIK

I've been thinking, Gerhardt. I'm
not dead yet, which means that you
don't intend to kill me. What's
more, you haven't even threatened
to kill me, which means that you
not only don't intend to, you
intend *not* to. For obscure reasons
of sentiment or politics you want
me alive.

Gerhardt inclines his head in a small bow.

GERHARDT

Your majesty is a paragon of logic.

HENRIK

So I've made a decision. I've had
power my whole life -- I've become
accustomed to power.

(MORE)

HENRIK (CONT'D)

You could even say that to a certain extent I *enjoy* having power.

GERHARDT

And who could blame you, your majesty?

HENRIK

Shut up, Gerhardt. What I'm saying is that today for the first time in my life I've learned what it is to have no power at all, and I don't like it. So I've decided to take some back.

GERHARDT

And how does your majesty plan on doing that?

HENRIK

By strangling myself if you don't stop this carriage and get me some breakfast.

Gerhardt laughs.

GERHARDT

Your majesty's spirit does your majesty credit.

HENRIK

You'll stop the carriage, then?

GERHARDT

Alas, your majesty, no.

Henrik purses his lips.

HENRIK

Very well.

He wraps his bound wrists around his own neck and begins strangling himself.

Gerhardt watches with amusement for a moment, but it quickly becomes clear that Henrik is in earnest.

GERHARDT

Stop that. Stop that!

Henrik doesn't. Gerhardt tries to pull his hands away from his neck, but Henrik hangs on tenaciously. His face begins to turn purple.

Gerhardt furiously bangs on the ceiling of the carriage. The window opens and the coachman looks in.

COACHMAN
Yes, m'lord?

GERHARDT
(through clenched teeth)
We'll stop for breakfast.

COACHMAN
Very good, m'lord.

Gerhardt waves him away, and he shuts the window.

Henrik stops strangling himself. He coughs.

HENRIK
There now, that wasn't so hard
after all, was it?

The carriage slows to a halt in front of an inn.

HENRIK (CONT'D)
You'll have to untie these ropes,
unless you plan on feeding me
yourself.

GERHARDT
You're not coming in. I'll bring
you some bread.

Henrik sighs.

HENRIK
Gerhardt, this won't do. If we're
going to be spending the next
several days in this carriage,
we're going to have to learn to
live together.

GERHARDT
(stubbornly)
Someone might recognize you.

HENRIK
I haven't toured the provinces
since I was a teenager -- and
besides, look at my clothes. I
could be a beggar.

GERHARDT
Your majesty might try to escape.

HENRIK

I give you my word of honor that I
will not.

Gerhard looks at him hard.

GERHARDT

Fine.

He unsheathes his dagger and cuts his bonds.

They look out of the carriage at the inn in the morning
light.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. HAWK'S DOWN INN - DUSK

The same inn, that evening. An innkeeper sweeps the stoop
outside his establishment.

Three horses gallop in, kicking up dust over his tidy work.

He sighs.

The riders are Minerva and her crew. They hop down to
inspect.

MINERVA

Good afternoon, sir!

INNKEEPER

Hello there. What can I do for you
today?

MINERVA

Have you seen anyone pass through
today?

The innkeeper looks put out.

DIANA

We'll take some repast.

The innkeeper bustles into the building.

MINERVA

Diana, we haven't time!

DIANA

Minerva, he's running a business!

The innkeeper comes out with a plate of food for the women, and sets it on a table.

Fred sits down to eat.

DIANA (CONT'D)

We are looking for a pair of men. They would have come through in a carriage today. One large and broad. The other smaller, but more stately and handsome. With sandy hair, and intelligent eyes.

Minerva paces about. Something under the table catches her eye.

INNKEEPER

No one by that description. We did have a carriage, but it was just the one man. He bought breakfast for a beggar.

Minerva stoops down and picks up a handkerchief with the royal crest emblazoned on the corner.

She shows it to Fred, who nods excitedly as she eats.

MINERVA

(to the innkeeper)

How kind. My cousin always is. A model of a man. Can you tell us which way he went? I would love to see him.

INNKEEPER

The man?

MINERVA

The carriage. I'd like to return his handkerchief.

Minerva hands the cloth to Diana, who looks at it excitedly.

INNKEEPER

He went that a way down the road. I don't think you'll catch him.

DIANA

Do you know what time?

INNKEEPER

At least eight hours ago. There is a bypass, and you *could* save some journey.

MINERVA

Excellent.

INNKEEPER

The road is in disrepair, though.
And the old bridge won't support a
carriage.

MINERVA

Even better. We should be off.

DIANA

Thank you!

Fred takes a few last bites, and they get back on their
horses.

The innkeeper goes back to sweeping his stoop.

As they ride off:

FRED

I don't like the sound of this
short cut.

MINERVA

Buck up, Fred!

EXT. BRIDGE ON THE SHORTCUT - MORNING

The travellers move slowly on the rutted path.

The road leads through a wood, and the trees are close on
either side. They trot single file.

MINERVA

Perhaps you were right, Fred.

FRED

I usually am.

Fred shoos mosquitos away from her face.

DIANA

It's not so bad. We can't be far
from the bridge, I hear a river.

As if conjured by Diana, Minerva stops at a rickety bridge.

The other two pull their horses up beside their leader.

They look at the worn bridge.

They look down at the raging river below.

Minerva and Diana look at one another. Minerva shrugs.

FRED

We have to turn back. We can't
make it across *that*.

MINERVA

One step at a time, Fred. I'm sure
it will hold.

With that, Minerva urges her horse quickly across the bridge.

Fred and Diana hold their breath.

Minerva trots easily to the other side. She waves to them.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

(calling across the
bridge)

Now you!

DIANA

Would you like to go, Fred, or
shall I?

FRED

I can't do it, Diana.

DIANA

Sure you can. But I'll show you.

Diana trots easily across the bridge.

Fred looks horrified.

DIANA (CONT'D)

(calling to Fred)

It's easy, dear! Come on!

Fred takes a deep breath.

FRED

Here goes nothing.

She urges her horse onto the bridge, and stops.

The bridge makes a horrifying creak.

MINERVA

Faster, Fred!

FRED
I'm coming!

Fred takes a deep breath, and her horse takes a few more steps. The bridge groans.

FRED (CONT'D)
I can't make it.

She tries to turn her horse on the small bridge

DIANA
No, Fred!

The horse tries to make a small turn and -

The bridge collapses under them.

Fred plummets towards the water.

FRED
(screaming as she falls)
I told you so!

She and the horse land with a splash.

FRED (CONT'D)
(yelling as she floats
down river)
Go on without me!

MINERVA
(calling back)
Oh, Fred! We'll find you on our way
back.

Fred waves to them. She calls out, but they can't hear her.

Minerva looks concerned.

DIANA
She'll be alright. The fall didn't
kill her.

MINERVA
I suppose you're right.

Diana nods.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
On we go!

Minerva and Diana continue down the ill-kept path.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

Minerva and Diana reach the main road. They're covered in sweat and dust. Their jaws are set and they look angry.

They rein in at the crossroads and Minerva dismounts. She studies the road.

MINERVA

They're still ahead of us.

DIANA

That was the longest shortcut in the world.

Diana looks back down the main road.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Look.

She points. In the distance behind them is a column of dust. Minerva shades her eyes to the sun.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Riders -- a lot of them.

The sound of galloping hooves becomes audible. Diana and Minerva share a glance. Minerva remounts her horse.

The first riders round the bend, and we see the red uniforms of the Regent's guards.

MINERVA

The Regent's guards.

DIANA

They must be looking for the King!

She spurs toward them, waving her hat. Minerva hangs back, looking pensive.

A musket cracks and a ball whizzes by Diana's head.

DIANA (CONT'D)

(yelling angrily)

WE'RE ON YOUR SIDE!

Another shot narrowly misses her.

DIANA (CONT'D)

DON'T SHOOT, YOU IDIOTS!

They do, though. Diana wheels her horse.

Minerva puts two and two together.

MINERVA

The Regent! He's part of the plot!

Together they begin fleeing the approaching guards.

They ride neck and neck, yelling back and forth as they do. Musket balls fly around them.

DIANA

Fred would call this a scrape!

Minerva glances behind them.

MINERVA

It's not a full detachment.

They look at each other and say simultaneously:

DIANA AND MINERVA

Ellie.

MINERVA

(weighing the odds)

We have a chance.

She draws her sword.

DIANA

No -- let me. Rescue the King.

Minerva looks at her, then nods.

MINERVA

Good luck.

Diana smiles at her. She turns her horse, draws her sword, and charges straight at the surprised guards.

Minerva keeps galloping after the carriage.

TRAVEL MONTAGE:

Days pass. The terrain becomes more rugged throughout the following:

--Minerva gallops down the road, backlit by the sunset.

--Henrik and Gerhardt sleep in the carriage.

--Minerva lays out her cloak and sleeps on the ground.

--Henrik and Gerhardt eat at an inn.

--Minerva rides hard, eating stale bread in her saddle.

--Gerhardt plays with his dagger.

--Henrik fogs the glass of the carriage window with his breath and plays tic-tac-toe with himself.

--Minerva studies the tracks on the ground.

--The carriage disappears into a mountain pass.

--Minerva sees a lonely tower in the distance.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. LONELY TOWER - EVENING

A smallish stone tower in the mountains. It's surrounded by a moat, and the drawbridge is drawn up.

The carriage is parked outside, and the four hobbled horses graze in a nearby meadow.

Minerva reins in behind a copse of trees and surveys the tower.

She walks around it and sees that there's no way in.

She notices an open window halfway up.

She approaches the edge of the moat. She carefully takes off her cape. She folds it and lays it on the grass. She takes off her hat and puts it on top of her cape, patting the magnificent ostrich plume fondly.

Without hesitation she dives headfirst into the icy moat. It's an elegant dive, and leaves barely a ripple. When she resurfaces she's halfway across. She shivers as she swims the remaining distance.

There's not so much as a strip of land on the other side -- the tower rises directly from the water. Minerva begins to climb the sheer rock wall.

When she's nearly to the open window, a projecting stone crumbles beneath her foot. She slips and nearly falls. The stone plummets into the moat with a splash.

Minerva clings to the side of the tower and waits to see if anyone was alerted by the noise. After a moment she continues her climb.

She reaches the window. She slowly raises her eyes over the sash. The room within is a rough bedroom, with great timber beams on the floor and ceiling.

Sitting in a rickety chair before a rickety card table, lit by a single guttering candle, Henrik plays himself at chess.

Minerva hauls herself through the window.

INT. LONELY TOWER: HENRIK'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Henrik looks up in surprise as Minerva tumbles into the room.

HENRIK
Good God!

MINERVA
Quiet, your majesty! I'm a friend!

Henrik peers at her.

HENRIK
Lady Bellamy?

Minerva bows.

HENRIK (CONT'D)
How on earth did you find me?

MINERVA
We've been following you since your abduction. Have you any things to pack?

HENRIK
Of course not. Where are your men?

MINERVA
What men?

HENRIK
You said "we."

MINERVA
I started with three companions. They send their regards. Let's go.

Minerva's impatient to leave the tower, but Henrik seems to be in no hurry at all.

HENRIK
Then you were the four on the road?

MINERVA

We were. Is your majesty ready to leave?

HENRIK

Oh, no, thank you.

Minerva looks at him, shocked.

MINERVA

I'm sorry?

HENRIK

I'd prefer to wait for a proper rescue. No offense.

Minerva's offended.

MINERVA

A proper rescue? I *am* a proper rescue. Who do you suppose is going to rescue you more properly?

HENRIK

Lord Sperling, of course. I'm surprised he hasn't sent men already.

MINERVA

He *has* -- to stop me.

HENRIK

That's ridiculous.

Minerva begins to lose her patience. She takes a deep breath and regains her composure.

MINERVA

Your majesty, I understand that it's hard to accept, but the Regent is behind your abduction.

HENRIK

Impossible.

MINERVA

His guards repeatedly attacked us. My friends may be dead for all I know. I'm sorry to have to insist, your majesty, but if you don't come with me of your own free will I'm going to pick you up and throw you out that window.

HENRIK

Treason!

Minerva looks at him flatly. She rolls up her sleeves and advances toward him.

He looks alarmed. He stands and puts the chair between them.

Minerva moves the chair and grabs him.

Suddenly, a key turns in the lock and the door opens. Gerhardt stands framed in the doorway, holding a tray of food.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Gerhardt, she's abducting me!

Gerhardt drops the tray and draws his sword. Minerva drops the King and draws hers.

GERHARDT

Lady Bellamy.

MINERVA

Lord Gerhardt.

GERHARDT

How can I be of service?

MINERVA

I've come to rescue the king.

GERHARDT

I don't think he wants rescuing.

HENRIK

I do -- I just want it done properly!

MINERVA

(to Gerhardt:)

You'd be doing me a great favor if you would tell his majesty that the Regent is behind all this.

Gerhardt feigns surprise.

GERHARDT

The Regent? Good heavens no! I had no accomplices.

HENRIK

(triumphantly)

See?

MINERVA
 (to Gerhardt:)
 I really do hate you.

HENRIK
 I'll pay you both ten thousand
 ducats to leave me alone!

MINERVA AND GERHARDT
 Shut up.

MINERVA
 (to Gerhardt:)
 We missed our duel this year.

GERHARDT
 Good heavens, did we? Time does
 fly.

His rapier flashes out. Minerva parries it deftly.

HENRIK
 Stop it at once, both of you!

Neither looks at him.

MINERVA AND GERHARDT
 Shut up.

Minerva attacks Gerhardt in earnest. He retreats out the
 open door under her flurry of blows. She advances after him.

INT. LONELY TOWER HALL AND GREAT STAIR - CONTINUOUS

The inside of the tower is ringed by an open spiral
 staircase. On one side is the bare wall of the tower -- on
 the other, the drop to the floor far below.

Minerva and Gerhardt fight furiously down the stone steps.
 Henrik follows, unsure what to do.

When they reach the floor, Minerva and Gerhardt break apart
 and catch their breath.

Henrik hangs back on the bottom step.

MINERVA
 (to Henrik:)
 Open the drawbridge.

HENRIK
 But--

MINERVA

DO IT!

Meekly, he complies. He crosses to the mechanism that controls the drawbridge and looks at it in some perplexity.

Gerhardt attacks Minerva. They fence back and forth across the open floor.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

Your majesty!

HENRIK

I'm sorry, I've never opened--
Just a moment-- There!

The drawbridge begins to lower.

The duellists have reversed positions, so that Gerhardt's back is to the King.

Henrik hesitates, then picks up a heavy lead candlestick.

While Minerva and Gerhardt continue to fight, he walks up behind Gerhardt and knocks him on the head with it. Gerhardt collapses, out cold.

Minerva frowns at Henrik.

MINERVA

(disapproving)

Bad form, your majesty.

HENRIK

I'm through with this whole thing.

He runs out of the tower. Minerva grabs Gerhardt's sword and hurries across the drawbridge after him.

EXT. LONELY TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Minerva and Henrik hurry toward the carriage horses. Minerva cuts their hobbles. She helps Henrik onto one of them, then slaps the other three with the flat of her sword. They run away.

She hands Gerhardt's sword to Henrik.

MINERVA

Here.

HENRIK
(taking the sword)
Thank you.

Minerva jogs back to the edge of the moat. She swirls her cape around her shoulders and dons her hat with a flourish. Then she mounts her own horse, and together she and Henrik gallop down the mountain road away from the tower.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

Minerva and Henrik trot in silence down the road.

Minerva suddenly swerves.

Henrik follows.

Minerva leads them to the mouth of a cave, and dismounts.

Henrik follows suit.

MINERVA
We should stop for the night.

HENRIK
I gathered.

MINERVA
Unfortunately, my provisions fell
into a river with my friend, so
we'll have to find something.

HENRIK
Of course.

INT./EXT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Minerva ducks into the cave. It is very dark and dank.

MINERVA
I'll get us some food. You start a
fire.

HENRIK
Of course.

Minerva heads back out of the cave.

Henrik looks a little lost.

He gathers up some dead leaves and sticks from around the cave, and puts them into a messy pile in the center.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

That doesn't seem quite sufficient.

He ducks out of the cave, and reenters moments later, with some branches.

He throws them on the pile.

He grabs a few rocks, and begins striking them together. They make an awful clatter.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Well, that won't do at all.

He picks up two twigs, and begins twisting one on top of the other, and blowing.

Minerva reenters the cave.

MINERVA

What are you doing?

HENRIK

Starting a fire.

Minerva laughs.

MINERVA

You've never had to, I suppose.

Henrik shakes his head.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

No matter. I can do it. You should skin that rabbit.

Henrik looks wide eyed at her.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

(sighing)

Or not. I would hate to be royal.

Minerva sets about making a fire.

HENRIK

It really isn't so bad, most of the time. It's only when your subjects kidnap you that it becomes a little uncomfortable.

MINERVA

You don't say.

The fire flickers into being, and she gently blows on it.

HENRIK

I do though. And Gerhardt has always been such a staunch friend to dear Sperling. I'm sure he won't like to hear of this.

MINERVA

I already told you! The Regent orchestrated your kidnapping.

HENRIK

Oh, I know you told me. I simply don't believe you. It isn't logical.

Minerva picks up the rabbit she caught, and begins to skin it.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Rather unpleasant, that.

MINERVA

You won't think so when you're eating it.

HENRIK

No, I don't suppose I will. How strange. I of course know what rabbits look like in the wild. And I know what they look like on my table. But I've never really considered the process in between.

MINERVA

It seems there's a lot you haven't considered.

Minerva finishes skinning the rabbit, and skewers it with a branch. She shoves it over the fire.

HENRIK

You don't like me, do you?

MINERVA

I can't really say that I do, no.

HENRIK

Then why are you here?

MINERVA

Well, you are the rightful King. And I don't think people should just go around kidnapping the King.

(MORE)

MINERVA (CONT'D)

Even if he is a useless frivolous man.

HENRIK

I see.

MINERVA

Rabbit in a minute. And then we should sleep if you're able. We'll ride out at dawn.

HENRIK

Of course. Perhaps Sperling's men will meet us with a carriage tomorrow.

MINERVA

We should hope they don't.

HENRIK

Oh right. You'll see! I'll bet a thousand ducats they come to find me, and then you'll know I was right.

MINERVA

I'll take that bet.

Henrik looks surprised.

HENRIK

Have you got a thousand ducats?

MINERVA

I will soon.

INT. CAVE - MORNING

Minerva is up, her things packed. She begins kicking dirt onto the dimly glowing fire.

She looks at the still sleeping King, and kicks a little louder.

She clears her throat.

The King stirs.

She clears her throat a little louder.

He sits up groggily.

HENRIK
What time is it?

MINERVA
Time to go. Come on, your Majesty.

HENRIK
Five more minutes.

MINERVA
No. Time to get up.

She snatches his cloak from atop him.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - MORNING

Minerva trots her horse along.

Henrik sulks along behind her.

HENRIK
So glad we didn't miss this.

MINERVA
Miss what?

HENRIK
Riding down the road. We only have
several more days ride! It would
have been a shame to sleep through
this.

MINERVA
You'll be glad for the extra hours
when you're back home.

Henrik grumbles.

Over the next hill, a cloud of dust appears.

Hoofbeats get louder.

Minerva stops her horse, and pulls to the side of the road.

The approaching horses crest the hill, and three of the
King's Guard appear.

HENRIK
I told you they were coming for me!

MINERVA
So did I!

The Guards see the pair, and one fires at Minerva.
She deftly leans off her horse to avoid the whizzing bullet.

HENRIK
(waving his arms above his
head)
It's me! It's your King.

Another bullet whizzes by.

The Guards continue towards them.

Henrik looks shocked.

MINERVA
I'm going to insist on those
thousand ducats now. I'm not sure
how you'll fare in this fight.

HENRIK
I have been trained to use a sword,
even if I can't light a fire.

MINERVA
Good.

With that, she begins galloping towards her enemies with a
battle cry.

Henrik follows her, though he doesn't yell.

Minerva stands in her stirrups, and handily slices her first
foe - first in the arm, then in the leg. He falls off his
horse.

She moves onto the next foe.

They cross swords, he thrusts, and as she parries, the third
Guard rides up behind her.

The Guard raises her sword, but before it falls, Henrik's
sword meets hers.

Henrik takes on the Guard. He is handy with a sword.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
You aren't a bad swordsman, your
Highness.

HENRIK
Neither are you.

MINERVA
 (re: the saving)
 Thank you for that.

HENRIK
 Anytime. Perhaps it was worth a
 thousand ducats.

MINERVA
 Certainly not.

They each battle a man on horseback.

Minerva pierces her adversary through, as Henrik hits his
 with his pommel, knocking her off her horse.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
 Well done, you.

HENRIK
 The same to you.

Henrik re-sheathes his sword.

Minerva hops off of her horse, and runs back to the man she
 knocked off his horse.

MINERVA
 Where is my companion.

The man groans.

Henrik joins Minerva on the ground.

HENRIK
 Does the Guard have your friend? I
 thought she fell into a river?

MINERVA
 No. She battled the Guard. Well -
 one of them battled the Guard.
 Another fell into the river. And
 the third was injured in our first
 skirmish.

HENRIK
 You do know how to get into
 trouble.

MINERVA
 (to the Guard)
 Where is she?

GUARD

At the camp.

MINERVA

What camp?

GUARD

Our camp. Down the road a few miles.

MINERVA

Thank you.

She walks back to her horse.

She tosses water to the Guard before remounting.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

We should get back to the capital, your Majesty. Stop the Regent from - well, I don't know what.

Henrik remounts as well. They start loping down the road.

HENRIK

Me either, actually. He's been a very good Regent, from what I can tell. Solicitous with my good ideas, judicious with my bad ones. And always a kind teacher. I'd hoped to make him my chief advisor.

MINERVA

Not now.

HENRIK

No, I suppose you can't have a chief advisor who secretly wants you dead. Do you think he intends to take the throne?

MINERVA

How should I know?

HENRIK

It really is disappointing.

MINERVA

I can imagine. At any rate, we should get back. I don't anticipate meeting more Guards until we arrive.

HENRIK

I think we'll meet lots.

MINERVA

You think Sperling will send another detachment?

HENRIK

No, but we're headed to their camp. There's bounds to be loads of Guards there.

MINERVA

Oh, your Highness, you don't need to do that. Diana will be fine.

HENRIK

We must. She risked her life to rescue me, and I cannot ask a loyal subject to do what I would not. And perhaps you can call me Henrik. We have now shared a meal and a battle. Though both were paltry.

Minerva laughs.

MINERVA

Henrik it is. And if you don't mind stopping, I'd like to rejoin Diana.

The two trot companionably towards the camp.

INT. LONELY TOWER: GERHARDT'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

In a small room under the stairs. The Ugly Coachman dabs Gerhardt's head with a damp cloth.

The Coachman looks distressed.

Suddenly, Gerhardt stirs, and lazily opens his eyes. He jumps when he sees the Coachman's face.

GERHARDT

What - ?

COACHMAN

I brought you into my room, sir. You took a nasty hit, sir. I would have taken you up the stairs, but you were too heavy, sir.

GERHARDT

What happened?

COACHMAN

I heard a scuffle, and by the time
I came from the kitchen, you were
lying on the ground, with this--

He produces the heavy candlestick

COACHMAN (CONT'D)

--lying next to you. I deduced
you'd been hit with it, so I
brought you in here.

GERHARDT

Where is the King?

COACHMAN

I expect he's the one that did the
hitting, sir. He's gone.

GERHARDT

Gone! Since when?

COACHMAN

Oh, I should say since about four
o'clock yesterday, sir. I wasn't
keeping the time though.

Gerhardt leaps out of bed and finds his clothes.

GERHARDT

Yesterday! What time is it, man?

COACHMAN

Well, I'm not keeping the time, but
I should say about 5 o'clock, sir.

GERHARDT

Twenty four hours head start! We
must find him! And Bellamy!

COACHMAN

As you like, sir.

Gerhardt puts on his scabbard.

GERHARDT

Where is my sword?

COACHMAN

Gone, sir. I should think the King
needed it.

GERHARDT

You idiot man. Get the carriage ready. No. I'll get the carriage ready. You get food.

Gerhardt swings out of the room.

The Coachman toddles after him.

EXT. LONELY TOWER MEADOWS - MOMENTS LATER

Gerhardt runs outside.

The carriage sits in front of the Tower, in the meadow, but there are no horses.

Gerhardt looks furiously around, as if the horses may magically appear if he just looks in the right place.

He runs his hands through his hair.

The coachman hobbles across the drawbridge, food in tow.

GERHARDT

Where are the horses?

COACHMAN

I expect the King took them, sir, and loosed the others so you couldn't follow him.

GERHARDT

You expect! One might think you had *helped* the King.

COACHMAN

I did not, sir. Though I would have if he'd asked, sir.

GERHARDT

Never mind. We'll walk.

COACHMAN

No matter, sir.

Gerhardt begins trudging towards the road. The Coachman follows with the bag of food.

EXT. WOODED AREA - EVENING

Minerva and Henrik are in a thicket of trees, peering through the branches at the enemy camp beyond.

The guards have set up a small but well-ordered camp, consisting of several small one-man pup tents, a few campfires, and one larger command tent.

HENRIK

I don't see her.

MINERVA

Of course you don't see her. What did you expect, that they'd chain her to a post? She'll be inside that tent.

HENRIK

Which tent?

MINERVA

The big tent.

HENRIK

I see.

Pause.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

How are we going to go about this?

Minerva shrugs.

MINERVA

I suppose we'll ride in, grab her, and then fight our way out.

Henrik frowns.

HENRIK

That sounds...dangerous.

MINERVA

Of course it's dangerous. You're welcome to stay behind.

HENRIK

I mean, more dangerous than it has to be. I don't object to danger, just stupidity.

MINERVA

Are you calling me stupid?

HENRIK
No, I'm calling your plan stupid.

MINERVA
It's not really a plan.

HENRIK
Exactly.

Minerva lets out a short laugh.

MINERVA
Alright then, what's your plan?

HENRIK
Well, I've been thinking about that for the last few miles. I didn't want to say anything, because I assumed you'd have a plan and I didn't want to embarrass myself. But....

MINERVA
Yes, yes -- so?

HENRIK
So look at us. I'm dressed in rags, we're both covered in grime, you look positively awful.

MINERVA
How kind.

Henrik shrugs.

Minerva crosses her arms and looks at him with impatience.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
You still haven't told me your plan.

HENRIK
Well the way I see it, we could pass for a couple of beggars.

MINERVA
Go on.

HENRIK
So why don't we? Then we can simply walk into the camp. No one will look at us twice. When we reach the tent we'll slip inside. Then....

MINERVA

Then?

HENRIK

Then we'll rescue your friend and fight our way out. But we'll only have to fight half as far.

MINERVA

What if someone recognizes you?

HENRIK

My own mother wouldn't recognize me -- far less a detachment of the Regent's guards. Most of these men have never seen me before in their life.

MINERVA

What about the horses? And our weapons?

HENRIK

Leave the weapons on the horses. We'll get them on the other side.

MINERVA

And how will we fight our way out without weapons?

HENRIK

We'll improvise.

MINERVA

It's a bold plan, your majesty.

HENRIK

Henrik.

MINERVA

It's a bold plan, your Henrik.

He smiles at her.

HENRIK

Am I detecting a thaw?

MINERVA

Certainly not -- just a warm breath of respect. Shall we?

HENRIK

Certainly.

EXT. KING'S GUARD CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Henrik and Minerva approach the camp. It blazes with torchlight.

Henrik limps outrageously and Minerva taps on the ground in front of her with a stick, as though she were blind.

She's removed her hat and cape, and neither of them has a sword.

They're nearly to the outer sentries when the King goes rigid.

HENRIK
(in a sharp whisper)
Stop!

MINERVA
(muttering back)
What is it?

HENRIK
I know these men! They're my
personal bodyguard!

MINERVA
Are they loyal to you?

HENRIK
Unlikely. But they could recognize
me!

A sentry notices them.

SENTRY #1
Who goes there?

MINERVA
(to Henrik:)
We'll have to chance it.
(to the sentry:)
But two poor beggars, m'lord, after
a night's supper!

SENTRY #1
There's nothing for you here!
Begone, before I thrash you!

SENTRY #2
Hold on, hold on. They might've
seen something.

MINERVA

I hasn't seen anything, sir, I's
blind! But my friend here, he sees
everything!

Sentry #1 hesitates, but relents.

SENTRY #1

Fine, then. Ask for Captain
Mueller -- he'll have some
questions for you. If he likes
your answer, maybe you'll get
something to eat.

MINERVA

Thank you, m'lord!

They pass the sentries and continue into the camp. Henrik
tries to hide his face as he passes the men.

The tension builds as they make their way deeper into the
camp. The soldiers eye them suspiciously, and every sound
makes Henrik jump.

Minerva sees this, and tries to reassure him.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

Don't do anything stupid. We're
almost there.

They get closer and closer to the big tent. It seems as
though they've made it, when at the last minute a swarthy man
recognizes Henrik.

SWARTHY SOLDIER

The King! It's the King!

Minerva launches herself at him, and before he can draw his
sword she's knocked him down. She takes the sword from his
scabbard and holds it to his throat.

She glances around. Soldiers are rushing toward them.
Minerva lowers the sword. She grabs a burning brand from a
campfire and hurls it onto a nearby tent.

Seeing her intent, Henrik begins yelling:

HENRIK

FIRE! FIRE!

Other voices pick up the cry. The two of them slip into the
big tent.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

The tent is supported by a large pole in its center. Diana's back is to the pole and her hands are tied behind it.

She smiles as Minerva and the King enter.

DIANA

(to Minerva:)

You do know how to make an entrance.

(to Henrik:)

Hello, your majesty.

Henrik stares at Diana, in awe of her.

She tosses her hair out of her eyes.

The King makes a small bow.

Minerva cuts Diana's bonds.

HENRIK

A pleasure to see you, Lady...er?

MINERVA

Pohl. Lady Pohl. Diana, The King

HENRIK

Henrik.

MINERVA

Henrik. Your Highness--

HENRIK

Henrik.

MINERVA

(exasperated)

Henrik, Lady Diana Pohl.

Henrik bows again.

DIANA

Pleased to meet you Your Majesty.

HENRIK

Henrik.

DIANA

(laughing)

Henrik.

A soldier dashes into the tent, his sword drawn. He's much closer to Henrik than to Minerva, and charges the unarmed King.

MINERVA

Henrik!

She throws him his sword. He catches it, spins, and runs the soldier through.

Minerva picks up the dead man's sword.

MINERVA (CONT'D)

Let's go.

She cuts a hole in the back of the tent and they hurry through it.

EXT. KING'S GUARD CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The camp is in an uproar. The fire has spread, and men and horses rush everywhere in the confusion. One of them spots the fugitives, but Minerva makes quick work of her.

Another soldier attacks her, and the two fence back and forth.

Diana grabs a frightened horse and swings herself onto its back. She reaches down for Henrik.

DIANA

Your majesty?

He takes her hand and she pulls him up behind her.

Minerva and the soldier are still fighting. She calls over her shoulder:

MINERVA

(to Diana:)

Go! I'll catch up!

Diana and the King gallop through the flames into the night.

Minerva kills her man and catches a horse. She gallops after Diana and the King, leaving the burning camp far behind.

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY

A group of ten or so stodgy men and women dressed all in black murmur quietly in the chamber.

They are seated around a large stone slab, and all sit in high backed intricately carved chairs.

Suddenly the door to the chamber clambers open.

Sperling glides in.

SPERLING

I am so sorry to be late. I am in shock. Absolute shock over our late King.

The council murmurs some more.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

As I am sure you will all agree, this is a time of great devastation not only for ourselves, but for our people. We must give them hope. For a stronger kingdom.

More murmurs.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

That is why I propose a coronation, as soon as possible. Our dear late Henrik was to be coronated on his twenty-fifth birthday, and I see no reason why we can't crown our next King using the same plans. Well, most of the same plans.

COUNCIL WOMAN #1

That's fine in Theory, Lord Sperling, but who would we crown? There is no heir apparent.

Sperling's lips purse as the rest of the council murmur agreement.

SPERLING

It seems that the country will need some - stability in this difficult time. Wouldn't it make sense to continue with rulers we know?

COUNCIL MAN # 1

But that's just it. The King is dead!

Sperling is getting annoyed. He continues.

SPERLING

Yes, but there's been a - guiding hand helping our dear King as he came of age.

COUNCIL MAN # 2

Oh loads, but we can't very well put a council on the throne.

Sperling loses it.

SPERLING

I should take the throne!

The group all ahh at this revelation.

COUNCIL WOMAN #2

A fine idea.

SPERLING

Of course, I am honored to help us all through this - most tragic time.

They nod at him.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

We shall have the coronation in a few days time, and then a wedding the following week.

COUNCIL WOMAN #1

Who is getting - ?

Sperling cuts her off, expecting the question.

SPERLING

I will be marrying the Princess. We still need a Queen? And we still would like to avoid war with Portugal?

They all murmur agreement.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

So a coronation and then a wedding. It will cost the coffers dearly.

He sits at the head of the table.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

Which is why I am proposing a tax.

COUNCIL WOMAN #3
Not a tax! We hate taxes!

SPERLING
Not on you! You volunteer your time to the council and your servants for the wars. I would never expect you to offer your wealth. I wouldn't dream of asking you to pay for such extravagances. After all, you could host these events yourself.

The council nods assent.

SPERLING (CONT'D)
Which is why I propose we tax those who truly benefit from seeing such opulence. Those less fortunate than us who may not otherwise see a grand event.

COUNCIL MAN # 2
Who's that?

SPERLING
The crowds who will gather outside the Cathedral, and around the balcony. Who gain such pleasure in seeing how Livonia thrives by watching their rulers and ambassadors thrive.

COUNCIL WOMAN #3
They should definitely pay! Who are these crowds?

Sperling lets out an audible sigh.

SPERLING
The poor. We need to tax the poor.

The council ooh and ahh over this.

SPERLING (CONT'D)
Now. Let's begin levying!

EXT. MAIN ROAD - DAY

Gerhardt and his coachman trudge down the road.

The usually immaculate Gerhardt has lost a little of his shine.

EXT. KING'S GUARD CAMP - DAY

Gerhardt and his coachman enter the smoking ruins of the camp. It looks awful, and is a mess of confusion.

A soldier sees Gerhardt.

SOLDIER #1
My lord Gerhardt!

His face is smeared with ash, but he salutes smartly.

GERHARDT
What's happened here?

SOLDIER #1
The King, sir, and Lady Bellamy.
They rescued Lady Pohl and torched
the camp.

GERHARDT
(incredulous)
Three people did this?

SOLDIER #1
Begging your lordship's pardon, but
that Lady Bellamy -- she ain't a
person, she's the devil himself!

Gerhardt loses patience with the soldier.

GERHARDT
Who's in charge here?

SOLDIER #1
Captain Mueller, my lord.

GERHARDT
Bring me to him. And find me a
sword.

The soldier does. In a moment Gerhardt stands before a scarred and grizzled captain.

Mueller looks shocked to see him, and salutes.

CAPTAIN MUELLER
My lord.

GERHARDT
You'll be lucky if I don't hang
you, Mueller.

CAPTAIN MUELLER

Yes, sir.

GERHARDT

You've mismanaged this whole affair.

CAPTAIN MUELLER

Yes, sir.

GERHARDT

I'm taking command. Gather your men. We leave in half an hour in pursuit of the fugitives.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - DAY

Minerva, Henrik and Diana trot down the road the next day.

DIANA

It is actually incredibly useful to be taken prisoner. People say all sorts of things they wouldn't tell you otherwise. It's like they forgot I was there.

MINERVA

Did you hear about Fred? Or Ellie?

DIANA

Nothing of Fred. But Ellie is hosting a rollicking siege at the inn.

MINERVA

Of course she is.

DIANA

Yes. Apparently, they've sent three waves of relief for the poor soldiers.

MINERVA

Is she hurling weapons, or only insults?

DIANA

From what it sounds like, mostly insults. But as you know that can be more hurtful.

HENRIK

Did you learn anything of my abduction, Lady Pohl?

MINERVA

Oh yes -- did they say what Sperling is up to?

DIANA

They did. He is planning on crowning himself King on *your* coronation day.

HENRIK

Is he, really? Didn't know he wanted the job.

DIANA

Yes. And very shortly. The guards were very confused though. They said there was nothing you could do about it. Even if you were alive and "shouting from the palace steps."

MINERVA

That can't be right.

HENRIK

No, I'm quite certain it is. We had some problems about eight hundred years ago. Plague things. And none of the rulers were living long enough to rule. But then when they died, there were so many questions of succession, that there was a blanket law put into effect.

DIANA

This sounds like there will be dire consequences.

HENRIK

There haven't been yet. It in fact brought peace for many years. But the law does state that a coronation properly handled cannot be nullified. Even if a more rightful monarch presents him or her self.

MINERVA

So, once the crown is on his head,
there is nothing you can do about
it.

HENRIK

Precisely.

MINERVA

Even though he is a usurper, and a
knave?

HENRIK

It doesn't matter.

DIANA

That seems awful.

HENRIK

Like I say, it really worked during
the plague. It made for much more
peaceful transitions of power. No
one really WANTS to be treasonous.

MINERVA

It still seems wrong.

HENRIK

I suppose that means we need to get
back soon, if I am to be Ruler of
Livonia.

DIANA

I suppose it does.

HENRIK

I suppose I ought to *want* to be
King.

DIANA

I'm sure you'll make a great one.

MINERVA

Long live the King.

DIANA

It looks like there is an inn
ahead. Shall we stop?

MINERVA

(condescendingly)
Your Majesty would like to stop, no
doubt. For food?

HENRIK
 (noting the shade)
 I have no need to stop, unless you,
 Lady Bellamy, require repast.

MINERVA
 Certainly not.

DIANA
 Aren't you hungry, Minerva?

MINERVA
 Not in the slightest.

They pass the inn.

EXT. MAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The shadows are lengthening. Minerva, Diana, and Henrik are dusty and exhausted.

DIANA
 Because neither of you are going to
 admit it, I will -- I'm tired and
 it's time to stop.

HENRIK
 (under his breath)
 Thank God.

MINERVA
 Fine. We'll camp in the clearing
 ahead.

EXT. JUST OFF THE ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

A lovely little clearing under the stars.

Henrik competently builds a fire while Minerva and Diana unsaddle the horses.

Minerva notices what Henrik's doing.

MINERVA
 (to Diana:)
 Two days ago he didn't know how to
 build a fire.

DIANA
 Of course he didn't, Minerva. He
 spent his life in a palace.

MINERVA

I know, but--

DIANA

He's privileged, not stupid.

Minerva makes a wry face.

MINERVA

You're too kind for your own good,
you know that?

Diana smiles at her.

DIANA

He's awfully handsome, isn't he?

Minerva looks over at Henrik.

MINERVA

Not especially, no.

DIANA

Well *I* think he is.

Minerva lets out a bark of laughter.

DIANA (CONT'D)

What's funny?

MINERVA

The way you two look at each other
when you think the other's not
looking.

Diana flushes.

DIANA

Nonsense.

Minerva finishes with the horses. Then:

DIANA (CONT'D)

(shyly)

Does he really look at me?

But Minerva is already walking toward the fire.

She sits down on a fallen log.

MINERVA

(re: the fire)

I'm impressed, your majesty.

But Henrik isn't paying attention -- he's too busy watching Diana.

HENRIK

What?

Minerva laughs.

EXT. JUST OFF THE ROAD - LATER

Minerva is asleep. Diana and the King sit side by side, their backs propped against the fallen log, lit by the dying embers of the fire.

DIANA

What do you think will happen when we get back?

HENRIK

Oh, I don't know. We'll all be killed, I expect.

DIANA

I don't think so.

HENRIK

Then I'll be annointed King and forced to marry a woman I don't love and can't speak to.

DIANA

You don't love her?

HENRIK

Certainly not.

DIANA

But she loves you, doesn't she?

HENRIK

How can she? She doesn't *know* me?

He lapses into moody silence.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

You know, I don't recall ever having met a Lord Pohl.

DIANA

(giggling)

Oh, there isn't a Lord Pohl!

(MORE)

DIANA (CONT'D)

I mean, there was my father, God rest his soul. But there's not-- There isn't-- Not yet.

Henrik takes that in.

DIANA (CONT'D)

She's frightfully beautiful, isn't she? Minerva, I mean?

HENRIK

Minerva? Yes, I suppose so.

Diana looks crestfallen.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Can't imagine the man for her.

DIANA

Then there isn't-- You don't--?

She indicates Minerva's sleeping form.

HENRIK

(genuinely shocked)

Me? Good God no! I'd rather--

No! Certainly not.

Diana positively beams.

DIANA

Aren't the stars beautiful?

HENRIK

Yes -- beautiful.

But he isn't looking at the stars.

TRAVEL MONTAGE:

Minerva, Diana, and Henrik ride hard for a few days. Diana and Henrik fall in love.

--The three of them gallop through the beautiful springtime countryside.

--Diana and Henrik flirt by a brook.

--Henrik builds a fire.

--Minerva rolls her eyes at the lovers.

END MONTAGE

EXT. RED STARLING INN - EVENING

Henrik, Minerva, and Diana approach the village with the Red Starling.

They hear the clatter and yells of a small battle.

DIANA
That will be Ellie.

MINERVA
Shall we see what she's gotten
into?

The three of them pull up their horses and look at the clatter.

There are forty odd King's Guard yelling and brandishing at the small inn.

Ellie pokes her head out the attic window.

ELLIE
And we won't come out! Even if you
burn the house down!

A middle aged woman pops her head in next to Ellie's

PROPRIETOR
Please don't burn the house down!

The rabble continues.

MINERVA
Well. She did keep them off the
road.

DIANA
She did.

HENRIK
That's your friend?

Minerva and Diana nod.

MINERVA
Should we leave her?

HENRIK
Absolutely not! Such gallant
loyalty deserves respect. We can't
abandon her!

DIANA
No. I know a way in.

EXT. CELLAR ENTRANCE - LATER

Diana, Henrik, and Minerva walk along the side of the road, looking at the ground.

They stomp every few steps.

Henrik stomps, and the sound returns to him hollowly.

HENRIK
I think I've found something.

Minerva and Diana head to Henrik.

DIANA
Wonderful!

She pries up a door and the three head down a ladder.

INT. CELLAR/INN - EVENING

Minerva, Diana, and the King are in the cellar of the Red Starling Inn.

MINERVA
I'm so glad you remembered, Diana.

HENRIK
(calling out down the long
corridor of provisions)
HELLO!

Diana laughs.

FRED (O.S.)
Who goes there! Show yourselves!

MINERVA
Fred?

FRED (O.S.)
Minerva? Where are you?

MINERVA
Down the way! We're coming.

FRED (O.S.)
Who's coming?

MINERVA
Diana, the King, and I.

FRED (O.S.)
You found the King?

A loud clatter.

FRED (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Sorry. I've lost my light.

MINERVA
No matter.

The two women grope through the darkness.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
Fred!

FRED
Minerva!

DIANA
Fred!

FRED
Diana!

HENRIK
Let's get out of the cellar.

INT. RED STARLING INN - EVENING

Minerva, Diana, Henrik, Fred, and Ellie sit around a large table. The proprietor bustles solicitously around the King.

HENRIK
Really. I am fine. Thank you.

PROPRIETOR
As you wish, your Majesty. Only, I have better ale.

MINERVA
We'll take that.

HENRIK
No, we won't.

ELLIE
(to the proprietor)
No need, Lara. Come take a seat.

MINERVA

I want to hear all about your adventures without me, but we really must get his majesty back to Ottoburg before the coronation.

ELLIE

And I need to keep this siege going to draw men away from the capital.

PROPRIETOR

Oh, I can keep the siege up.

DIANA

Oh can you? That would be wonderful! Then you can come home with us, Ellie.

PROPRIETOR

'Course I can. I don't see why I can't. All they--
 (indicating the troops outside)
 --seem to do is sit around, and get excited when this one--
 (indicating Ellie)
 --yells at 'em. Can't see why I can't yell at 'em a few times a day. Keep 'em here 'til you make it home. If it please your Majesty.

MINERVA

That works wonderfully. Pay her for her services, Highness.

Henrik shoots her a look. Diana shoots her a similar one.

DIANA

(laying a hand on Henrik's arm)

I'm sure his majesty will compensate you generously as soon as he returns home.

PROPRIETOR

No need, your Greatness. Just having you here is all I could want.

HENRIK

You are too kind. We really ought to be going though.

(MORE)

HENRIK (CONT'D)
 (to Diana)
 My birthday is tomorrow.

DIANA
 And the coronation.

MINERVA
 We must be off.

FRED
 How are we going to get out of
 here?

EXT. CELLAR ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A door flops open in the ditch.

Minerva's head pops out.

MINERVA
 All clear.

Henrik follows her.

He helps Diana.

Fred clambers after.

Then Ellie, with much difficulty, still having the use of
 only one arm, drags herself up the ladder.

Fred reaches down to help her.

ELLIE
 I've got it!

The five of them walk in the ditch. They hear hoofbeats down
 the road.

MINERVA
 Get down!

They all drop to the ground.

On the road, Gerhardt and the Guards from the camp gallop
 past.

The quintet sits quietly as they pass by.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
 We need to hurry.

They head down the ditch towards their horses, tied to some trees.

When they arrive, they realize they have only three horses.

They look at one another.

Henrik takes Diana's hand. She blushes.

Fred looks at Ellie.

ELLIE
(shrugging)
I can't hold the reins anyhow.

MINERVA
That's settled then.

She climbs on a horse.

The five people and three equines gallop into the moonlight.

INT. OTTOBURG CATHEDRAL - MORNING

The great cathedral of Ottoburg, on the morning of Sperling's coronation.

The huge space filled to bursting with people.

In the centre of it all, on throne upon a dais, sits Sperling. He's bedecked in kingly array, and looks rather smug.

Gloriana, the Portuguese princess is prominent in the front row. She is pale and grim.

A bishop stands beside Sperling, declaiming in Latin. Next to the bishop, a young girl holds a purple velvet pillow. Upon the pillow is the crown of Livonia.

Suddenly, the ceremony is interrupted by the clattering of horse hooves on the steps outside.

The bishop breaks off, and a murmur sweeps through the crowd.

A look of alarm flits across Sperling's face.

SPERLING
Get on with it!

Hesitantly, the bishop resumes speaking.

EXT. OTTOBURG CATHEDRAL - SIMULTANEOUS

Two groups of riders pound into the street outside the cathedral and up the steps.

Gerhardt and his guards attempt to block the door, but Minerva and her companions attack them.

MINERVA

(to Diana:)

Get the King inside!

Henrik is confused by the melee that ensues, and Gerhardt nearly kills him -- but before the blow can land Minerva leaps out of her saddle and tackles Gerhardt to the ground.

Diana pulls Henrik off his horse, and hauls open the huge door of the cathedral.

Four guards try to stop him from entering, but Fred and Ellie hurl themselves upon them.

While Diana covers his exposed back, Henrik slips into the cathedral. Diana follows him in.

INT. CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

Every head in the cathedral turns to look at the King.

DIANA

(yelling:)

His Majesty King Henrik!

Before anyone has a chance to speak, Sperling decides to throw all his cards on the table.

SPERLING

Guards! Kill them!

The cathedral erupts in a roar.

Swords spring from scabbards, and in an instant a general battle breaks out. Loyalists to the King fight in the pews with supporters of the Regent.

A pair of fops make for Henrik, and he and Diana engage them.

Gloriana wrestles a sword from one of the Regent's guards and launches herself into the fight on the side of the King.

The cathedral doors are pushed fully open, and the battle spills into the streets.

ROYALIST #1
Long live King Henrik!

REBEL #1
Out with Henrik! In with Lord
Sperling!

Fred and Ellie dash inside and fight their way to Diana and Henrik, who are now fencing back to back.

ELLIE
You alright?

DIANA
Wonderful, you?

ELLIE
Never better!

Gloriana joins them.

GLORIANA
(in Portuguese:)
Death to the usurper!

DIANA
What did she say?

HENRIK
No idea!

They form the nucleus of a knot of royalists, besieged on all sides by Sperling's men.

INT. CATHEDRAL: BELLTOWER STEPS - SIMULTANEOUS

Minerva and Gerhardt, swords flashing, duel their way up the steps of the cathedral's belltower.

GERHARDT
It's over, Bellamy!

MINERVA
Nonsense, Gerhardt--

She drives him up several steps. On their right, the vast open space of the cathedral yawns below them.

From their bird's eye view, the knot of royalists grows.

A rush of fighters burst into the cathedral, and we recognize Master Gambardella and his students.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
 --it's just beginning!

They continue their battle up the stairs. She cries over her shoulder:

MINERVA (CONT'D)
 (yelling:)
 Ciao, Beppo!

Master Gambardella finds her and salutes with his sword.

GAMBARDELLA
 Ciao, Bellamy!

Minerva and Gerhardt disappear up the stairs.

INT. CATHEDRAL - CONTINUOUS

Gambardella's fencers throw themselves into the battle on the side of the King. We see the Provincial Fencer, the City Fencer, and Tarlenheim the gambler in their midst.

The King is flushed and sweating, but has never looked so regal.

Diana's eyes are shining.

Fred has somehow acquired a second sword, and is fighting with one in each hand.

Ellie, her left arm still in a sling, kills three opponents in quick succession.

EXT. CATHEDRAL ROOF - SIMULTANEOUS

Minerva and Gerhardt have battled onto the roof of the cathedral. Far below them the battle rages on in the streets.

They advance and retreat in an extraordinary display of swordsmanship.

Gerhardt wounds Minerva in the left arm. She replies with a shallow slash across his chest.

The duel rages across the treacherous slate tiles of the roof. The opponents are perfectly matched, neither able to gain the upper hand.

Then suddenly a tile gives way and Gerhardt slips. He almost rights himself, but Minerva drives her sword into his thigh.

Gerhardt drops his sword and rolls down the incline of the roof.

At the last possible moment he catches himself on the waterspout snout of a gargoyle. His sword slides off the roof next to him and plummets to the street.

Gerhardt hangs onto the gargoyle with both hands. His feet dangle over the void. A line of blood drips down his leg and in huge gleaming droplets off the toe of his boot.

Minerva, moved by chivalry, hurries over to him. She reaches down to him.

MINERVA
Give me your hand!

GERHARDT
I can't reach!

Minerva stretches even further, extending her whole body down the treacherous slope of the roof.

At last Gerhardt is able to grab her hand. He desperately clings to her as she pulls him to safety.

His hands, wet with sweat, begin to slip from hers.

MINERVA
Hold on!

One of Gerhardt's hands slips away, but Minerva tightens her grip on the other.

With one last desperate tug she gets him safely onto the roof.

But--!

Even as she does, his other hand is reaching for the dagger in his boot.

As Minerva pulls him to his feet the dagger flashes toward her. She spins out of the way.

Gerhardt is overbalanced by the momentum of his lunge. His feet are half on and half off the roof. His body sways back and forth. His arms windmill wildly.

Then, with a horrible scream, he falls backward off the roof and plummets to his death.

Minerva collapses onto her back, covered in blood and sweat, breathing hard.

She allows herself a moment. Then her hand reaches out and grabs the hilt of her sword.

INT. CATHEDRAL - SIMULTANEOUS

Meanwhile, inside the cathedral, Diana, Fred, Ellie, Gloriana, and the King continue their heroic fight.

They've been joined by Gambardella and his fencers, and the tide of battle has turned.

Sperling hides beneath his throne. It has become clear, though, that the King will triumph.

Sperling peeps out, gathers up what little courage he has, and flees the room. He hurries through a small door next to the altar.

Henrik sees Sperling leave, and without a moment's hesitation he drops his guard and sprints through the battle after him.

The others try to follow, but are blocked by the last surge of the rebels.

Henrik wrenches open the door and flies through it after Sperling.

INT. CATHEDRAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The door leads to a hallway, at the end of which Sperling can be seen disappearing down a narrow spiral staircase.

Henrik follows.

INT. CATACOMBS - CONTINUOUS

The staircase leads to a network of catacombs beneath the cathedral.

They're lit by torches guttering in iron brackets on the wall.

Henrik grabs a torch in his free hand, and continues after Sperling.

INT. CRYPT - CONTINUOUS

Henrik enters a round-roomed crypt. There's only one entrance, and Sperling is trapped.

He cowers in a corner.

SPERLING
Please, your majesty! I beg you,
have mercy!

INT. CATHEDRAL - SIMULTANEOUS

Minerva tries to rejoin her companions, but the press of battle is still too thick.

She notices that Henrik is missing.

She yells to Diana over the clamor:

MINERVA
(yelling:)
DIANA!

Diana kills her opponent and looks around for Minerva. She locates her, and beams to see her friend safe.

MINERVA (CONT'D)
(yelling:)
Henrik?

Diana points toward the altar door.

DIANA
(yelling:)
He went after Sperling!

Minerva nods, and sprints across the room to the door. She parries a few thrusts as she runs, but largely misses the main battle.

She goes through the door.

INT. CATHEDRAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Minerva runs down the hall and takes the steps to the catacombs two at a time.

INT. CRYPT - SIMULTANEOUS

Henrik's sword is at Sperling's throat. Sperling cowers.

SPERLING
Mercy, your highness, mercy!

Henrik looks down at his Regent with contempt.

Sperling sees that it's not working, and changes tacks. He becomes a different person before our eyes. He composes himself and grows cold.

SPERLING (CONT'D)

Well if you're going to do it, do it.

Regret tinges the King's face.

HENRIK

Why, Sperling?

Sperling shrugs.

SPERLING

Avarice, I suppose.

HENRIK

You were a good Regent.

SPERLING

I'd have been a good king.

HENRIK

No your wouldn't.

Sperling allows himself a bitter smile.

SPERLING

Probably not. But I'd have been a rich one.

Minerva runs into the crypt.

MINERVA

Your majesty!

HENRIK

It's alright.

Sperling takes the opportunity to barrel into the King, disarming him. Henrik falls to the floor.

Sperling points the sword at Henrik, but Minerva sweeps in.

She handily disarms Sperling, her sword at his throat, Henrik's under her arm.

Henrik gets up from the ground.

HENRIK (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Minerva hands him his sword.

MINERVA
Certainly.

HENRIK
How goes the battle?

MINERVA
Well, your majesty. The tide has
turned.
(re: Sperling)
What shall I do with him?

HENRIK
I'm not sure. He'd like me to kill
him, I believe, but I'm not going
to give him the satisfaction.

SPERLING
It wasn't personal, Henrik -- it
was politics.

Henrik glares at him.

HENRIK
Get up.

Sperling does. Henrik and Minerva march him at swordpoint
out of the crypt.

MINERVA
You've won, your majesty.

HENRIK
I believe that you've won, Lady
Bellamy. And I'd like to thank
you.

MINERVA
For what?

HENRIK
For rescuing me properly.

INT. CATHEDRAL - MOMENTS LATER

Minerva, Henrik, and Sperling re-enter the main room of the
cathedral.

When Sperling's men see that he's been captured, the few
still fighting throw down their arms.

Fred, Ellie, and Diana hurry to Minerva and Henrik. To their mutual surprise and delight, Diana throws her arms around Henrik and kisses him soundly.

Gloriana stalks up to Sperling and slaps him. Then for good measure, she spits on him. Then she unleashes a sting of invective in Portuguese. This time, though, it's subtitled.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese:)

You're a cowardly dung beetle. I'd no sooner marry you than a half-starved mad hyena. You're a waste of the air you breathe. If you ever lay a finger on me I'll cut it off. If you ever look at me I'll gouge out your eyes. If you ever speak to me I'll rip out your tongue.

Minerva laughs, looks Gloriana up and down, and replies in Portuguese.

MINERVA

(in Portuguese:)

If you'll permit me, my lady, when this is all over you should come to Signore Gambardella's academy. I think you'll fit right in.

GLORIANA

(in Portuguese:)

It would be an honor.

They smile at one another.

FADE TO

INT. PALACE GREAT HALL - EVENING

The King's birthday celebration.

We pan from an elaborately decorated birthday cake, to an even more elaborately decorated coronation cake (it has a crown on it), to a positively obscene wedding cake.

The unhappy cook from the beginning of the film stands next to them, beaming.

We pull back to reveal our heroes, dressed in their finest clothes. The insignia of the captain of the guard is proudly emblazoned on Minerva's tunic.

Diana and Henrik stand at the front of the room. He has a crown upon his head, and she's in a wedding dress.

They kiss.

The crowd applauds and breaks into a dance.

Fred and Ellie spin together amongst the sea of guests.

Minerva stands by her friends, the monarchs watching the dance.

Someone behind her leans forward. We realize it's Tarlenheim.

TARLENHEIM

A hundred ducats says their first
child's a boy.

MINERVA

Make it two.

CUT TO BLACK.