

THIS FABLED ISLE

by
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CHARACTERS

Natives

Elise
Grandfather
Gypsy
Boy
Morris, Court Artist to the King
Cook, In Service to the King
Spud, In Service to the King

Foreigners

Egar, The King
Esther, The Queen
Edward, The Prince
Jester
General Eli
Grim, The Court Astrologer
Tad, Minister of Foreign Affairs

PLACE

A small south sea island community
that has been subjected to the rule of foreigners

TIME

The Sixteenth Century

EGAR How do you find such gems?
 GRANDFATHER He wished to know.
 BOY There!
 GRANDFATHER Explained the boy.
 BOY In waters below.
 EGAR Are there more from where these come, my lad?
 BOY Oh, many!
 GRANDFATHER He cried.
 BOY If they're to be had!
 GRANDFATHER The journey of the mariners was delayed,
 While a tour of our island home was made.
 GYPSY The Captain, shown our village, fields, and shrines,
 Spoke with his scribe, making curious signs.
 EGAR Inspect the divers. Note their size.
 See here! Oh, my! Dear me! This one's a prize!
 GYPSY Alas, the voyagers went on their way,
 Without a sign that they'd return some day.
 GRANDFATHER Now our custom stated at that time,
 The world was perfect, all things sublime.
 GYPSY For the gifts bestowed to those on earth,
 We paid a due, to signify their worth.
 ELISE To the sea we returned a measure
 Of the goods from her boundless treasure.
 GRANDFATHER The moon has scarce run its established course
 When the ships returned in far greater force.
 GYPSY The Captain brusquely marched ashore. He waved.
 EGAR Rejoice!
 GYPSY He said.
 EGAR You've been saved!
 GRANDFATHER And so Egar commenced at once to rule.
 GYPSY His deeds were harsh, his actions cruel.
 GRANDFATHER He called a meeting and with much ado
 Announced our laws were up for his review.
 EGAR To give a single pearl back to the ocean
 Is, by all accounts, a silly notion.
 Henceforth, my men will oversee
 The harvest that is gathered from the sea.

ELISE I care for nothing, but to see
Our home restored to how it used to be.

GYPSY I desire Egar's demise no less than you,
But what, dear child, can any of us do?

GRANDFATHER The King issued decree upon decree.
EGAR My subjects! Hear ye! Hear ye!
From where I come I've been told it's crass
Not to show your gratitude to the ruling class.
So, let's comport ourselves with respect.
When you meet a man of note, genuflect.

ELISE How rude! To treat our captors as lords!
To press their palms and kiss their swords.

EGAR Soon, pearls shall make us rich! But beware!
Rogues and thieves will come to claim their share.
Hence, a program shall at once commence
To manufacture arms for our defense.

GYPSY Soon all were in service to the King,
In fields . . . at sea . . . in mines . . . toiling.

GRANDFATHER You've seen our plight, Elise, you know it well.
Now let me rest. There is no more to tell.
(In the distance, a fanfare is heard)

ELISE That sound can mean but one thing.
Another party is being thrown by the king.

Scene One Main Hall of Egar's Castle

(JESTER is preparing for the arrival of EGAR.
A statue, covered with a cloth, is brought on as
members of the court assemble. MORRIS, the
sculptor, is extremely nervous)

JESTER Stand back! May way! This is precious cargo
Egar's form in stone, chiseled blow by blow.

MORRIS Oh, gosh, my hat, my trunk, my smock, my shoes.
 What if his majesty disapproves?
 I know our King is kind and good and lawful,
 But what if he thinks my work is . . . crap.

JESTER Morris! Rhyme! How can you forget? Rhyme!
 Or you will lose your tongue and become a mime.

MORRIS Can I help if I can't speak the lingo?
 Artists are not trained to tell, but to show.
 When my words gets in a jam and I tries
 To them unscrew, listen with your eyes!

JESTER The king!
(The doors open. EGAR enters and pauses in the doorway. He is extremely large. His eyebrows have been plucked. His teeth are rotting. He has a habit of constantly eating. His crown is large and grotesque.)

EGAR At last, the day has arrived,
 To witness what the sculptor has contrived.
 My image set in stone for all to see,
 Inspiring generations who will follow me!
(The cloth is removed from the statue. EGAR examines the work)
 This monstrosity surely can't be me.
 Where are your eyes, Morris, can't you see?
 If reflects not my figure so sublime.
 The work is without reason, without rhyme.

MORRIS But . . .

EGAR I'm not that short, surely, nor that stout;
 You inept, short-sighted, ungrateful lout!
 Am I a Buddha, a gnome, an oaf?
 When asked to work, did you choose, instead, to loaf?
 A child could do a better job with mud!
 This mindless piece of work--a dud!
 I have a noble chin, a perfect brow;
 This is what you rendered? I don't know how!

MORRIS You see . . .

EGAR My eyes are wise, my nose refined;
 Look, you've got my backbone misaligned!

MORRIS Your Majesty, the piece may not be exact
 But marble is fickle. That's a fact.

EGAR My stomach's firm, my buttock tight;
 You've sculpted flab where I'd envisioned might!
 My chin repeats itself, indeed, it's true;
 But, good grief, you've multiplied my chins by two!
 Is this some kind of jab, a hoax, a joke?

JESTER I fear it's lock and chains for the poor bloke!
 (JESTER exits)

EGAR Go, Morris! Contemplate my true profile
 Within the walls of prison for awhile.
 When you've been freed, my dear misguided friend,
 Strive to make a quick and just amend.
 If your sins you hope to rectify,
 Make a statue, please, that doesn't lie.
 If my form is to inspire devotion
 The statue must exude emotion.
 Choose a stone with an angelic glow.
 Give me an aura. Craft for me a halo.

JESTER (Returns with ball and chain)
 I've just returned from the sanctuary
 Where a band of men most contrary
 Have raised their voices in a ruckus.
 It seems, your Highness, they wish to pluck us.

EGAR Go! Take this monstrosity
 And dump it in the blood sea!
 Be off! Jester, summon my saucy girls
 So we can play *Crack the Oyster* with my pearls.

Scene Two

Egar's Throne Room

(Several men await the arrival of EGAR. JESTER is attempting to keep everyone calm)

SPUD Five hours we've waited! How long will it take?
 GRIM Why the delay? What gives, for goodness sake?
 JESTER Please maintain a semblance of decorum
 As we conduct this informal forum.
 There's much the king will not tolerate;
 If you arouse his wrath, he'll retaliate!
 If your speech is long and boring,
 He'll serenade us with his snoring.

If you whine, snivel, beg, or tax his brain,
 The king will fabricate a dreadful pain.
 I warn you. Speeches are his pet peeve.
 So speak in turn, then promptly leave.

GRIM I hear him! At last, relief!
 JESTER Remember! I urge you, keep it brief!
 EGAR (Enters and approaches throne)
 How's my cushion? Before I'm seated,
 Let me check. Is it nicely heated?
 Is it fluffed?

JESTER Soft as a chick.
 EGAR Where's my gin?
 Now then, my time is limited. Begin.

GRIM Disturbing signs we fail to understand!
 SPUD Strange events are occurring in our land!
 GRIM Listen to our stories! Disaster's at the door!
 SPUD Events most bizarre.
 EGAR May I have the floor!?

The Cook should speak first of those I see
 Since his interests most directly profit me.

COOK Yesterday, I paused to plan the menu,
 Asking, "What should I serve the court and you?"

EGAR Bravo! A worthy thing to be questioned,
 Since on this your employment is destined.

COOK A stew of mackrel, I decided,
 Would be really really nice, provided
 I could attain a bevy of fresh fish
 To prepare this rare, delectable dish.

EGAR Congratulations! I anticipate
 This gastric treat. Indeed, I cannot wait!

COOK Thank you. I scurried to the harbor docks,
 Where the daily catch is kept under locks.
 Reserved for your exclusive use, Egar,
 My destination was *The Royal Star*.
 Within the hold, in baskets made of reed,
 I found, just as I hoped, the proper breed.
 Gorgeous fish. Such prime fillets! I was thrilled!
 They were gutted - in a marinade, chilled.

EGAR Day after day, I'm continually shocked
 At the things you so artfully concoct.

COOK But this trip was queer, not the same routine,
 Something odd occurred, as it shall be seen.
 Going up the gangplank, I slipped.
 Oddly, on the way back down, I tripped.

EGAR Perhaps when you're through with your boorish tale,
 You could bring me a small snack to inhale?

COOK Then I noticed, only then I saw
 What had caused my misstep and my fall.
 The narrow plank that stretched from dock to ship--
 Which I blame for my dislocated hip--
 Was not positioned in its normal place;
 It had, instead, come off its trusty base.
 Now, I can't be sure; there's no way to know,
 But the ship was too high or the dock too low.

EGAR What has this yarn to do with me?

COOK Let me finish, Eggar; you shall see.

EGAR Forget it. Your adventure leads nowhere.
 Next! What trifles have you to share?

SPUD Last eve, the castle keg of ale ran dry
 So I scurried off for a fresh supply.
 But, in the cellar where we keep the stock,
 I was treated to a tremendous shock.
 The walls were damp, the floor was wet,
 Everything, glistening, oozing sweat.
 A salty brine, it was, with greenish tones,
 Seeping through the cracks between the stones.
 With such shocking proof, I'm prone to think,
 Our dear island home has begun to sink!

EGAR (Turns to GRIM)
 What wild tales of horror have you stowed
 In your head, which you can't wait to unload?

GRIM Last night, in my observatory
 I viewed the stars in all their glory.
 I thought I might detect a new galaxy
 To be named, eventually, after me.
 But nothing had prepared my feeble brain
 For the sight I was to see, nor the strain.
 Anon, I noticed something was awry.
 A bizarre event! An altered sky!
 The stars above had shifted, it appeared.
 Really! This was unheard of, very weird.

Something was grossly, clearly out of whack--
 Stars, literally, careening off their track!
 I checked my charts, diagrams, and maps
 Hoping, Sir, to fill in these missing gaps.
 Despite all efforts to unravel
 The riddle in the skies was naught but babble.
 No explanation I knew passed the test.
 So I closed my books. I went to rest.
 EGAR Oh, my starry-eyed intellectual.
 Such a curse! I fear your perpetual
 Pursuit of truth, alas, has made you crack.
 I hope, in time, your senses will come back.
 GRIM Then I saw the pattern! Revelation!
 The stars maintained a constant relation!
 It was we, we who had moved, not they.
 It cannot be explained in any other way.
 Our state has slipped. That's the inventory
 Reached last night in my observatory.
 EGAR Pooh! You saw what you wished to see
 And concocted a false reality.
 Learn to distinguish black from white
 And cultivate a true perspective, alright?
 COOK My wife, a contrary beast, will agree:
 Our island home is sinking in the sea!
 This morning as she washed her body parts,
 She said, "Something's wrong. This stings. It smarts."
 From the well, she took a drink. "Could this be?"
 She gasped, "The water tastes just like the sea!"
 EGAR Charming stories, all. Now, if you please,
 Be off. Take them elsewhere--these fantasies.
 GRIM Fantasies!?
 EGAR Exactly.
 SPUD You jest!
 EGAR Farewell.
 GRIM Fantasies!?
 COOK We protest!
 EGAR Men, I enjoyed your complimentary woes.
 On the whole, each account quite clearly shows:
 Men who live pathetic, boring lives
 Are men most prone to drum up lies.

Go!

(The MEN exit as EDWARD enters)

Great. Another fool draws near.

What, my son, brings you here?

EDWARD

Mother needs your help. She's coming down.

EGAR

Don't tell me! Must I attend to the clown?

Why can't she hire domestics for these chores?

A maid to press her gowns and cleanse her pores?

EDWARD

Father, you just had the last one fired

Before her probation even had expired.

EGAR

What was I to do? That mad, meddling wench

Had a curiosity I had to quench.

She went through my armoire on the sly

And found . . . never mind! . . .

(A blood-curdling cry is heard off)

ESTHER

I could just die!

EGAR

Your mother.

(ESTHER, the Queen, enters in a huff)

This damn dress! It shrunk!

EGAR

Good afternoon, dear.

ESTHER

Shut up, punk!

EGAR

You were saying, your dress . . . ?

ESTHER

Is smaller.

EGAR

Are you sure it's not you who is . . . *taller*?

ESTHER

Oh, bosh, I've stopped growing years ago.

EGAR

To look at you, I could swear it wasn't so.

(EGAR helps ESTHER struggle into her gown)

ESTHER

Last night, did you feel anything undue?

EGAR

What's to feel, Esther, lying next to you?

ESTHER

Edward, sweetheart, perhaps you'd better go.

Your parents are about to have a row.

EDWARD

I don't know what there is to fight about.

You pick. You fuss.

EGAR

Edward, don't make me shout!

You heard your mother. Scram! Dawdle! Go!

ESTHER

Our son means well. Why vex him so?

EGAR

Hooyey! His kindly deeds are a disguise.

Behind my back the boy plans my demise.

ELISE

You seek me?

JESTER

There's been an emergency
 So I come with a sense of urgency.
 Last night, in preparation for the ball
 A maid was summoned to the Queen's private hall.
 "Dye my roots," the hapless maid was told.
 "This grey is premature; it makes me old."
 A salve was substituted for the dye
 Which the unmindful maid did then apply.
 The plot, you see, was by Eggar schemed,
 But in the end, he planned to be redeemed.
 The Queen, her hair wrapped in a gauzy net,
 Waited patiently for the dye to set.
 An hour later, much to the Queen's dismay,
 She held the mirror up and pulled the net away.
 And in the fibers dangling from her hand:
 Her glorious, uprooted hair, every strand!
 Such a fray! The King pursued by his wife,
 In one hand, her hair, in the other, a knife!

ELISE

What was the outcome of this courtly tale?
 Did the Queen succeed or the King prevail?

JESTER

To make up for the shame his wife endured,
 The maid was fired, a sequel was assured.
 For this honor, Eggar has chosen you.

ELISE

Me?

JESTER

Yes. Don't be shy. I'm overwhelmed, too.

ELISE

But why, pray tell, did the king choose me?

JESTER

Many are the reasons there may be.
 But for the sake of brevity

Let's say you possess the proper quality.

ELISE

I'm flattered, really, but I must say no.

To the castle I simply will not go.

JESTER

My Sweet, 'tis not what you desire.

Eggar will have his way, come flood or fire.

Go on. Pack your bags. Do the noble thing.

Within the hour, report to the King.

Scene Four Egar's Private Chambers

(EGAR is playing a solitary game. GENERAL ELI waits impatiently to be acknowledged)

ELI
(No longer able to contain himself)
Eleven days have come and gone, eleven nights
Since first we witnessed these distressing sights!
Our country's falling at a rapid pace.
This is not a blemish you can erase.
Within a year, at the current rate,
The sea will reach the door of your estate.

EGAR
Theatrics! Issue a communique!
This, General, is what it shall say:
Proclaim that I've placed an order
To revise the shape of our country's border.
Our island empire, so quaint and sweet,
Was too high by forty feet.
Our harbor was too small, I was told,
For all the ships it was meant to hold.
So I've enlarged the sea's enclave,
An act that history will consider brave.

ELI
Damn it! Would you put your game aside?
How can you take our news in such easy stride?
Something must be done! We need a plan!
Assert yourself. Speak out! Be a man!

EGAR
Good General Eli, it should be clear;
I conceived a military virtu here!
Gangsters sailing on the great blue yonder,
Who seek a port to pilth and plunder,
Will be less apt to see our island knolls
So we'll be spared the mischief of those trolls.
Eli, this modest drop of altitude
Merits, I think, enormous gratitude.

ELI
Are you going to sit on your royal bun,
Doing nothing, as time is on the run?

EGAR
Can't you see politically what's at stake?
The opportunities! Why, it makes me quake!

When land becomes a rare commodity,
 To live on it justifies a higher fee.
 We'll draft a decree in a week or two
 And double the amount of taxes due.
 Soon our coffers will be revitalized;
 Oh, to think of it, I feel tantalized!
 So relax, General Eli, don't despair;
 Think on the funds to which we are heir.
 As for our subjects, they can take great pride,
 Knowing pleasure comes from taxes they provide.
 So while it may be true the island fell.
 'Tis nothing on which we should dwell.

ELI You've been warned. Say what you will,
 I see the ocean creeping up your hill!

EGAR It's a passing fad, this errant motion,
 A trend, a minor shifting of the ocean.
 I fail to see what all this fuss is for;
 No ocean will come knocking at my door.

ELI Who's to say it may not pick up speed?
 Soon, Eggar, we could be a drowned breed.
 As General I demand a conference!

EGAR With the heads of state to be held at once!
 What do you think we just had, you dunce?

Scene Five Queen's Chambers

(ESTHER, the queen. who is bald, is explaining
 courtly duties to ELISE)

ESTHER Now then, let's run down today's list of chores.
 Sweep the hall. Fill the lamps. Wash the floors.
 Hang the sheets from the sill, let them air . . .
 Did I say how much I envy you your hair?
 Clean the chamber pot, scrub it good and well,
 Use the fresh lilac rinse; I like its smell.
 File my nails. Wind the clock. Oh, I could swear!
 The light . . . reflecting from your hair!

I'd love to run my fingers through it.
 You won't mind, dear, will you, if I do it?
 It really has the right amount of sheen,
 So thick and wholesome, and so pristine.
 Trim the wicks. Buff the crystalware.
 Make it shine, make it sparkle, oh . . .

ELISE My hair?

ESTHER I wonder how it would look on me?
 No, I couldn't ask such a thing of thee.
 Where's my flask, Elise, I'd like a swig.
 Really! Your hair would make a smashing wig!
 From the garden, pick a nice bouquet,
 But be smart! Stay out of Egar's way!
 Did you note how he looks at you? His stare?
 I think the prime attraction is

ELISE My hair?

ESTHER Post my letters. Walk the dog. Groom the cat.
 Stoke the fire. Mend my socks. Fill the vat.
 I just can't keep from admiring your hair,
 Given the fact that my head is so bare.
 Take it.

ELISE What?

ESTHER Cut it.

ELISE I couldn't!

ESTHER Really.

ELISE Don't tease.

ESTHER It's yours.

ELISE I shouldn't.

ESTHER You'd do that for me? You really would? Thanks.
 You're not like Egar, with his awful pranks?
 (Offers a pair of scissors)

ELISE Here.

ESTHER Oh, no, I can't cut it. Not me!
To just take it would be piracy.
To be a gift; it must be given, no?
If only there were a way. Wait! I know!

We'll get Edward!

ELISE Edward?

ESTHER My son. Oh, dear . . .
 You haven't met him? I'll have him brought here.
 (Calls for her son)
 Edward! He really is a peach. Demure.
 Kind. Quiet. Like me. You'll like him, I'm sure.
 (Enters)

EDWARD You called?

ESTHER I'd like you to meet my new maid,
 Elise.

EDWARD Hello.

ESTHER Doesn't he make the grade?
 His qualities, inherited from me,
 Defy description; they're so un-worldly!
 Though Eggar, of course, supplied the means,
 Edward has no trace of his father's genes.

EDWARD Mother, your brazen form of flattery
 Has no purpose, but to embarrass me.

ESTHER See what I mean? He won't accept my praise.
 He insists on holding to his humble ways.

EDWARD I must go.

ESTHER You're not going anywhere!
 We need you here to cut off Elise's hair!

EDWARD You're joking.

ESTHER Edward, you know that tone.

EDWARD Why?

ESTHER Look at me! In this state, I'll surely die.

EDWARD Mother, you can't!

ESTHER She offered it to me,
 Of her own free will. A gratuity.

EDWARD I suspect what she said and what you heard
 Would not share a single common word!

ESTHER She offered. Yes, she did!

EDWARD My answer's "no."

ESTHER This is not like you at all, to be my foe.

EDWARD Ask her. See if she offered up her hair.
 Is it true, what my mother says?
 ELISE I swear.
 EDWARD I think this affair a sly charade,
 A game between the queen and her maid.
 ESTHER I've endured your protestations long enough!
 Go. Get the scissors. Stop playing tough.
 Bear in mind the queen is talking!
 Duty calls. Get moving! No more balking.
 EDWARD Once more, I ask you, Elise . . .
 ESTHER Can we start?
 EDWARD You promise this deed won't break your heart?
 ESTHER Don't be sentimental and cause a row;
 In time, Edward, her hair will grow.
 EDWARD So, I should follow Mother's course?
 ELISE Against the doer I shall bear no remorse.

Scene Six The Throne Room

EGAR (Is munching on a plate of sweets as MORRIS is painting a portrait of the King)
 Morris, can't you speed things up a bit?
 I'm bored. When you said I had to sit
 I had no idea it would take this long.
 Oh, dear me. Now, what's wrong?
 MORRIS Nothing, I just need to pause and erase
 A small portion of your regal face.
 The lines I drew are somewhat askew.
 They fail, sir, to do justice to you.
 EGAR An artist should have a discerning eye,
 Rendering his subject rightly on the first try.

MORRIS I ask, please, sir, that you recognize
I never did a portrait of this size.
I wish to capture your Highness without flaw
But your form is not an easy thing to draw.

EGAR How much longer must I sit here and wait?

MORRIS Some dimensions are hard to translate
From you to a magnitude of this scale,
But have no doubt, Egar, I will not fail.

EGAR How was your time in prison, Morris, dear?
I hope it was quieter then it's been here.

MORRIS Thank you. I devoted most of my time
Learning how to frame my thoughts in rhyme.
Would you like to relieve your bladder
While I go ahead and move my ladder?

EGAR No, no, carry on. Let's get on with this.
Later, I'll go have my royal piss.
When, Morris, will you grant permission
To see this grand, artful rendition?

MORRIS Not just yet, please, I prefer you wait
It's at that stage where it may not relate
Your features in exact, precise detail
And you might have me sent back to jail.
(A rumble is heard off. MORRIS panics)
Egar, Listen!

EGAR Yes. Yes.

MORRIS That sounded deadly.

EGAR 'Twas but the earth singing a harmless medley.

JESTER (Enters)
The council's coming here to see you!
Apparently, they have a bone to chew.

EGAR The council is stewing? That pot needs a lid.

JESTER I couldn't keep them out. I tried! I did!

ELI (Storms on with TAD)
Egar, we've reached the end of our rope.

TAD Time is running out.

ELI If we don't cope

With the ills that face our nation
 We'll invite our own elimination.
 EGAR Please! Spare me. Relax. Save your breath;
 Talk about beating an issue to death.
 GRIM Not a single, productive thing's been done
 Since this whole fiasco has begun.
 ELI We spied the first telltale clue
 Thirty days ago! And what do you do?
 GRIM Nothing!
 TAD We've counseled you!
 GRIM To no avail.
 ELI Spelled out the situation.
 GRIM Each detail.
 ELI Still you choose to turn your back and ignore
 The fact that disaster's knocking at our door.
 EGAR Gentlemen, catch your breath. Such an outcry.
 You make it sound like we're about to die.
 TAD Sir, the least you could do is allocate
 Some funds to buy some foreign real estate.
 EGAR There must be a less expensive way
 To keep the rising sea at bay.
 TAD Egar, all we ask is to acquire a deed
 So we can move if we have the need
 EGAR I'll tell you what. Go see the King of Thor.
 He's a guileless man, whom I adore.
 See if he has a smallish stretch of land
 He's dying to get off his pudgy hand.
 TAD Good!
 EGAR But don't assume I intend to pay!
 I'll accept only if he gives the land away.
 ELI Let us also build a fleet of ships,
 In preparation for the impending trips.
 EGAR Why?
 ELI To save the people of this nation!
 EGAR Not, I hope, the *entire* population!
 ELI Yes, sir.
 EGAR Oh, no! You're far too kind.
 I say we leave the islanders behind!

ELISE Here's the glove I came to retrieve,
 And so, Your Majesty, I take my leave.

EGAR Why the rush? The Queen can surely wait.
 In fact, it's wise, on occasion, to be late.
 Your absence will help her recognize
 Your worth and thereby magnify her ties.

ELISE You wish that I should compromise my duty?

EGAR Precisely what I have in mind, my beauty.

ELISE If I should spite the Queen, her righteous wrath
 May take a harsh and unexpected path.
 My Lord, 'twould be a grave offense
 To have you bear a bruise at my expense.

EGAR Her blows mean naught to me.

ELISE I'll bear that in mind.

EGAR The glove you hold, which the Queen left behind.
 Could you sniff it?

ELISE What?

EGAR Go on. Smell.

I'm curious. Is it possible to tell
 Whose flesh that soiled glove last caressed?
 Which man had the privilege? Can it be guessed?

ELISE The aroma speaks of the Queen alone.
 All I smell is her usual rose cologne.

EGAR Are you sure? You can't detect my scent?

ELISE No. Pray tell, what is your intent?

EGAR Then you must learn it. Here, take my hand.
 Inhale deeply. There. Good. Is it not grand?
 Tell me, where it has been?

ELISE I cannot say.

EGAR Can you tell where it would like to lay?

ELISE What'er the King may hope to touch,
 Really doesn't interest me very much.

EGAR Now, it's my turn! That's how the game goes.
 So, let me examine you with my nose.
 What scent arises from that skin of yours?
 What lovely odors compliment your lures?

EDWARD (Enters)
 Father, what ill sport are you up to now?

EGAR Edward!

EDWARD Again!

EGAR Elise was asking how . . .

This . . . lovely . . . diamond ring
 Had found its way to the hand of her King.

EDWARD I think, once again, you're on the prowl
 With base designs to do something foul.

EGAR Boy, you have no inkling, no notion
 Of my intentions. Stop this commotion!

EDWARD I know exactly what your intentions are
 Which, if unchecked, will go extremely far.
 And though most men are loathe to stop you,
 That is precisely what I aim to do.

ELISE Please, I don't wish to cause a rift.

EDWARD Elise, father has a unique gift,
 Of which I'm sure you're aware.
 With every maid he hires, he hopes . . .

EGAR This affair
 Is none of your business, boy. Scram!
 What's your angle now? Why give a damn?
 Edward, child, remember. . . .

EDWARD Your public position
 Is no excuse to carry out a private mission.

EGAR Dare you speak like this to your father's face?!
 It's an outrage, unheard of, a disgrace!

ELISE May I be excused?

EGAR No! I'm the one to go!
 'Tis obvious that my son wants it so.
 I leave you with Edward. See if you can,
 Ascertain the object of his secret plan.
 (EGAR exits)

ELISE Thank you, sir, for your kind defense,
 But why place yourself in peril at my expense?

EDWARD 'Twas no peril. Father rants because he knows
 There are certain things he simply can't oppose.

ESTHER If I put on your cloak, what will you wear?
 ELI Egar must have something here he could spare.
 ESTHER Seducing Egar isn't what I had in mind.
 But check the closet. See what you can find.
 ELI Where's that serving maid of yours - Elise?
 I'd hate to have her interrupt our peace.
 ESTHER Don't worry. I sent her off on chores. Say!
 I just thought of a brand new play.
 You'll be dressed like Egar, so, here's the thing:
 Why don't you and I play *Kill the King*?
 ELI You can't be serious!
 ESTHER Oh, yes, indeed, I can!
 ELI Really? You propose to kill the man?
 ESTHER In jest, of course.
 ELI I see.
 ESTHER 'Tis just a play
 Unless, of course
 ELI I took it another way.
 ESTHER You thought I meant to really take his life?
 Spill his blood? Who, me? His wife?
 Is that not rather bold to suggest
 Unless, of course, I speak in jest?
 ELI You're acting very strange; is this a joke,
 Or do you mean to actually kill the bloke?
 ESTHER Let's pretend, Eli! In all clean, good fun,
 How would you propose the deed is done?
 ELI I don't know.
 ESTHER But killing's your profession!
 ELI I honestly can't say
 ESTHER Your confession
 Is safe with me. And, please! Don't say the thought
 N'er crossed your mind. Why, you look distraught!
 ELI Do you think it very wise or clever
 To continue in this dark endeavor?
 ESTHER Eli, 'tis just a simple, petty game.
 Playing it will not ascribe us blame.
 I'd like to know how many ways there are
 To kill a moron like our King, Egar!

ESTHER

The General enacts a harmless spoof
 In this his comic costume should be proof.
 He asked for my approval of the thing
 Before he played it out before the King.

JESTER

Will I get to see the play, as well?

ESTHER

Perhaps. It's still too soon to tell.

JESTER

Go on! I'll critique the presentation!

EDWARD

(Enters) Mother, have you seen Elise?

ELI

Tarnation!

ESTHER

Edward, dear, not now . . .

EDWARD

What's going on, Eli?

Wearing Father's clothes! In God's name, why?
 And you, Mother, dressed in the General's cloak.
 What's the meaning . . . ?

ESTHER

'Tis just a harmless joke!

ELI

'Tis a play we'll perform presently
 When the Queen deems it's fit to see.

(Exits)

JESTER

Were I to guess the nature of your scene,
 I'd surmise it is a tad obscene!

ESTHER

Oh, hush, we were simply making sport
 Of the machinations of the court.
 Edward, wipe that scowl off your brooding face.
 If you seek Elise, look some other place.

JESTER

What is your interest, Edward, in this maid?
 Oh my, your face, it seems, has turned a shade!
 What's the cause? Could it be the boy's in love?
 Did Cupid wing his arrows from above?

EDWARD

I'm warning you, Fool. Do not tempt my ire.

JESTER

Oh, my! Such passion, such fire!
 It seems the Fool has found himself a fool!
 How his temper flairs...

EDWARD

I am perfectly cool!

ESTHER

Edward! Well, well, this is a surprise!
 Thank you, Fool, for opening my eyes.

I had no idea! Really! In love? You jest!
 My Edward? Who would have guessed?
 I didn't know you had it in you.
 Edward in love? Is it true?
 The Fool has misconstrued the facts!

EDWARD
 JESTER
 EDWARD
 ESTHER

Indeed!
 Remember, mother, who he is! Pay him no heed.
 (Exits)
 (To the JESTER)
 Follow him. Hound his heels. Divine his dreams.
 Is Edward's interest in Elise what it seems?
 (JESTER exits)
 Oh, ho! What luck! This happy change of course
 Suggests a different route I can enforce.
 To plant that glove in Egar's room was wrong!
 Why test the maid to see if she is strong?
 Instead, I'll advance in any way I can,
 An affair between Elise and my man.
 When Edward learns of his competition
He may carry out the deadly mission.

Scene Nine Throne Room

ELI
 MORRIS
 JESTER
 COOK
 JESTER
 ELI
 GRIM
 EGAR

Do you comprehend, Egar? Forty days!
 The threat is real.
 It's not a passing phase!
 Egar, please, hear us!
 Listen to the facts!
 We must mobilize.
 You've been far too lax.
 Soon we'll hear from the King of Thor
 And we won't have to worry anymore.
 Exercise restraint. Why cause a stink?

ELI We cannot wait! We're on the brink!
Egar, a fitting plan has been conceived.
For which I think you would be relieved.

GRIM The council met. A speech was approved.
Now, as ruler, we hope you will be moved
To inform the people of our views.

EGAR Another boring speech! Unwelcome news!
Oh, the trials of a politician!

MORRIS Here's the script.

ELI It explains our position.

EGAR I hate these speeches.

JESTER Of course, poor thing

EGAR Why is all the dirty work assigned to the King?
I get flustered!

JESTER I know.

EGAR Lose my place.
See double words. Turn into a basket case.

MORRIS There, there,

ELI Don't get hysterical.

EGAR Why me?!

MORRIS We'll help you practice your delivery.

EGAR If I must.
(Begins reading the prepared speech. His delivery
is wooden)
We are gathered here today,
Good people of this isle. That's a cliché.
Must I start on such a mushy note?

ELI Egar, this is not the time to gloat.

MORRIS The speech is not designed to be
A longwinded, foot-stomping eulogy.
I know you like to focus on your feats,
But, please, stay with what's written on the sheets.

EGAR Good people? These islanders are not my friends.

MORRIS 'Tis but a phrase, King Egar. It lends
Credence to your words. To impress
The crowd is the first rule of public address.

Elevate their sense of worth! Thereby
 You become more appealing in their eye.

JESTER Please. Once more. 'Tis fine to say one thing
 And think another. You're the king!

EGAR Now, that makes sense. It clarifies my role.
 That's astute. It really is. Bless your soul.

MORRIS Please honor the artistry of the script
 I do not wish the speech be to stripped
 Of subtly! As speaker be aware
 How I chose each word with utmost care.
 Prepositions, nouns and verbs may be
 The germs of peace or seeds of anarchy

EGAR Well, if you feel that strongly about it,
 I'll ape your damn words. Don't have a fit.
 (Continues reading)
 As you know, our country's in disrepair.
 But, my friends, 'tis no cause for despair.

JESTER Remember who the words are meant to reach
 And adjust the tempo of your speech.

EGAR We had a slight change in topography
 When some land engaged itself to the sea.

GRIM Modulate your tone, try to look sincere.
 Manufacture, if you can, a tear.

EGAR So I propose a plan I'm sure you'll like:
 We shall build one, big, thick, long, high, strong dyke.

ELI At that point, Egarr, could you pause
 As we initiate a round of applause?

EGAR High above the sea we'll erect our fort
 Sealing off the upper fields and the court.
 In time, the ocean will admit defeat,
 Change her course, and begin its retreat.

JESTER More feeling, Egarr! Give it some nerve.

ELI How else will people volunteer to serve?

GRIM Enunciate. Breathe life into every word.

ELI And don't flap your arm like a crippled bird!

EGAR The time is here! It's our sacred, civic duty
 To preserve our homeland's matchless beauty.
 Victory cannot be achieved by one man.
 But as a country, as a team, win we can!

COOK (Hidden)
The King's a rogue. Evil are his ways. Do you
Hold these sentiments and share our view?

GYPSY I will not speak with any shadow.
I cannot tell if it be friend or foe.
(COOK and SPUD come forward)

SPUD Though we serve the King, fear not.
We despise the man.

GYPSY I sense a plot.

COOK In truth, we wish the imbecile were dead.

GYPSY I best be going, Gentlemen. I value my head.

COOK Don't go! Pray, hear us out, instead.
We tried hemlock in his wine, arsenic with pâté,
Toxic brews, venom served on soufflé.
Alas, sadly, each plan seemed to missfire,
The results, we admit, were not very dire.

GYPSY Gentlemen, shouldn't you be working
On the dyke, toting rocks, not lurking
In corners dark, divining plots which
Might undo the ogre and the witch?

SPUD We are told you have secret charms,
A book of recipes with cures and harms,
And that you can make a stringent potion
From a deadly plant found within the ocean.

GYPSY You heard wrong. I have no such skills.
Don't look to me for herbs or magic pills.

COOK Old woman, I brought a sack of wine.

SPUD Here, exotic fruits you can't decline.

COOK Please help us in our noble quest
And rid our island of this foreign pest.
We're poor simple natives, as you know.
As one of us, it would seem you would show
Allegiance to your stead and help us find the means
To put an end to the rule of Kings and Queens.

GYPSY Oh, the King's a louse, there's no doubt of that.
As for the Queen, she's sneaky as a rat.
But to murder I will not stoop. There
Must be a better way to stop the pair.

SPUD
GYPSY Then you'll help us? You'll really do it?
Hold. Not so fast. I need to think a bit.
In due time, I may have a plan,
But speak no word of this to any man!
No mention of my part, I insist!
Now off! To the dyke before you're missed."
(COOK and SPUD exit. (EDWARD and ELISE step out of the shadows as GYPSY retreats)

EDWARD
ELISE Elise, you sent for me?
No one in court
Must hear the solemn news that I report.

EDWARD What'er you say will stay with me;
Your words I'll keep in utmost secrecy.

ELISE Today, as I stood by the quarry ledge
Where the sea washes o'r the ragged edge,
I saw, in waters trapped within the hold,
A blinding flash, a brilliant streak of gold!
I took the path cut in the granite face--
Down--until I reached the quarry base.
There, in a pool collected on the floor,
I saw a fish unlike any seen before.
Around the pool it swam, in circles small,
A graceful dance that seemed to be a call.
By the pool I knelt, brushed aside the dirt,
And made a cradle with my apron skirt.
Thus, I returned the fish to the open sea.
It swam apace, turned, then came back to me.
From the shallow surf a splash appeared.
A moment later when the waters cleared
The fish was gone. But at my feet I found
An object planted in the sandy ground.
I picked it up, this curious shiny thing--
'Twas a brilliant pearl the fish did bring.

EDWARD May I see it?

ELISE There seems to be within
A glowing light . . .

ESTHER (Rushes on) Where have you been!
Honestly. I've been searching high and low!
Elise, I just came by to let you know

I shan't be needing you tomorrow, dear.
 The day is yours. Do as you please. I hear
 You speak of your Grandfather with such pride.
 Why not visit her? I'll arrange the ride.
 ELISE That's kind of you. Of course, I'd like to go.
 ESTHER It's our little plan. Don't let Egar know.
 Such a pretty night. What are you two up to?
 EDWARD Nothing.
 ESTHER Nothing? Oh, I doubt that!
 EDWARD Adieu.
 ESTHER What's the rush? Why so petty?
 You're sounding like your father, Eddie.
 Well, Elise, I hope your day goes just fine
 I know I intend fully to enjoy mine.
 (Exits)
 ELISE I'll show the pearl to Gypsy. She will know
 Why the gem has such a mysterious glow.
 ESTHER (Returns) Elise, I failed to say, tomorrow I
 Shall have a picnic with my friend Eli.
 Tell the cook to prepare a special lunch
 Which includes a jug of my favorite punch.
 (Exits)
 EDWARD Keep the pearl close at hand. Guard it well.
 It's charms are great.
 ESTHER (Returns) If I might . . .
 EDWARD Oh, hell!
 ESTHER One more thing! Pardon me, Edward, dear.
 Sorry, Elise. I hate to interfere.
 But, please, when you return tomorrow night,
 Tuck my Egar into his bed, alright?
 He's such a baby. He needs a coddling hand.
 In these troubled times, by him we must stand.

Scene Eleven

The Throne Room

ELI As I see it, we've but one recourse, sir:
 To build those ships to which I oft' refer.

But, I warn you, each hour we delay
 More and more island trees are swept away.
 EGAR Take the army! Sail to a nearby isle.
 There, as befits your brutish style,
 Clear the land of foreign squatters, I say!
 Slay the scum. Crush the foe. Seize the day.
 Then transport the goods from our domain
 To that isle where I'll renew my reign.
 ELI With what do we bombard the enemy?
 The rocks are needed here to brace the sea.
 EGAR Use clubs, arrows, spears and bows,
 Surely, you have stockpiled some of those.
 ELI Thanks to you, our arsenal is extensive.
 EGAR Then why, pray tell, are you so pensive?
 ELI Sir, these men have never fought before
 You expect them now to wage a war?
 EGAR Their lack of combat needs no mention,
 Promise medals. Bribe them with a pension.
 ELI They're exhausted, toting rocks day and night.
 I doubt they have the strength to even fight.
 EGAR Do it! Haggard men will fight just fine
 When they learn their lives are on the line.
 ELI They will all be slaughtered. Crushed like flies.
 They're not warriors, which you fail to recognize.
 EGAR General Eli, really! You are a disgrace!
 I'll address the troops myself, face to face.
 I shall ask each man to cast his lot.
 Will he love his country or will he not?
 ELI Perhaps you could show this love personally
 By joining us on this warring spree?
 What weapon would you like to use, Egar?
 Will you sail with us or take *The Royal Star*?
 Come, take the oath, sir. Do not stall.
 Say you'll join us in our love-making brawl!
 EGAR No, 'tis enough my soldiers are on loan.
 As for me, I must occupy the throne.

ELISE I'm sure you must be weary, sir,
Given all the work your role does incur.

EGAR My pet, 'tis a crime to conclude the day
With no space reserved to pause and play.

ELISE Go on. Amuse yourself. I won't object.
Your privacy I promise to respect.

EGAR Amuse myself alone? That's time ill spent.
To see joy multiplied is my intent.
Why let this opportunity go to waste?
There's no need to feign that you are chaste.

ELISE Push me not, Egar, I shall protest.

EGAR You wish to put my muscle to the test?

ELISE Let me go, Egar, or I shall scream.

EGAR Go on! 'Twill add ardor to our scene.
Such resistance speaks well of your gender
And, in the end, sweetens your surrender.

ELISE It seems, sir, what'er I choose to say
You interpret in a grossly different way.

EGAR Maidens far and wide envy my manhood,
Desirous of my charm, as well they should.
Though you present quite a brazen show,
You're no different from the rest, I know.

ELISE Perhaps we should try a different path.
May I suggest, Egar, a bubble bath?

EGAR I would like that! Splendid, my dear,
Your new tone is music to my ear!

ELISE Into the tub you go. I'll sponge you down,
And, with the soap, make a bubble crown!

EGAR You know what pleases men, I swear.
I predict we'll make a ducky pair.

Scene Fourteen Queen's Private Quarters

(ELISE is combing the wig as the bald Queen
questions her maid)

ESTHER I see my man is up and well.
What occurred last night, Elise, pray tell.

ELISE What occurred?

ESTHER When you tucked away the king.

ELISE Last night?

ESTHER Yes! Yes!

ELISE Not a thing.

ESTHER Oh, pooh! 'Tis like the female sex
To play these coyish games. She objects
Refutes . . . obscures . . . Let's be clear.
The truth is all I seek.

ELISE What do you wish to hear?

ESTHER Eggar's countenance this morn was almost serene.
Why, the King even flirted with his Queen!

ELISE Really? Is that so? And how fared you last night?
Did General Eli prove himself alright?

ESTHER What a dull, blunt, contrary maid you be,
Perhaps another source will talk to me.

Scene Fifteen The Throne Room

ESTHER Why am I here? No, let me guess.
There is something you would like to confess?

EGAR My dear, sweet, constant and compliant wife.
My better half. My inspiration. My life!
How was your day, my dear? Did you prevail?
Sit next to me and tell me each detail.

ESTHER There's no need to take this phony pose
Your concern is fake, which everybody knows.
So, whatever news you wish to share with me,
Make it quick. I'm making plans to flee.

EGAR I'm not the ideal man; I have my flaws.
At times, my acts may give a person pause.
My mood swings, I admit, can be severe;
I tend to scoff when I mean to be sincere.

ESTHER In family matters, I've rarely done my share.
 Still, my darling Queen, you know how much I care.
 If I placed your cares on a scale, my dear;
 They will not register. In this I'm clear.

EGAR Who pays the bills, I ask?

ESTHER You, I admit.

EGAR Who sends for the doctor . . .

ESTHER When I've been hit?

EGAR I am always here for you to nag.
 I allow myself be your punching bag.
 I provide you with this cozy house.
 And behave like the average spouse.

ESTHER This is not the time to play tit for tat,
 To whine or engage in a nasty spat.
 No matter how kingly you may feel,
 To me, Husband, you are no big deal!

EGAR Enough! A truce! We must talk, my dear,
 Our situation's delicate, I fear.

ESTHER I agree. Our son has become a sass
 And thinks to tango with an island lass.
 My hair has yet to spawn from its roots
 The country's slipping in its rotten boots,
 There are plots afloat to take your life.
 You're saddled with a terse and bitter wife.
 What are your plans? A miracle? A coup?
 Act. I'm waiting. What do you plan to do?

EGAR If you would kindly shut your trap, perhaps
 We could try to put on our thinking caps.
 Dear, if we are forced to evacuate
 We'll need a place in which to relocate.
 I thought your Father, the good King of Ite,
 Could help us in our dreadful, present plight.
 In his kingdom vast, surely there must be
 A tract of land he'll give to you and me.

ESTHER Speak to father? We haven't talked in years.
 I was disowned. Despite my soulful tears,
 He threw me out. It's what he choose to do,
 When he learned I was betrothed to you.

EGAR I'm sure the pain which first your Dad endured,
Has, with the salve of time, been cured.
What good and decent, self-respecting Pa
Would not welcome home his son-in-law?

ESTHER I know the man. He'll never give us land!

EGAR Not give. We'll pay! A very generous hand.

ESTHER Pay? How, pray tell! With a strand of pearls?

EGAR Not at all! With a loot of pretty girls!

ESTHER I suggest something dearer to his heart.
The man likes rare books, champagne and art.

JESTER (Enters) The Minister of Foreign Affairs
Has returned. Let's hope the news he bears
Is good . . .

EGAR Welcome. How fares the King of Thor?
Tell us he's a gem, generous to the core.

TAD The King's prepared to help us in our plight.
He'll give us land -- but not outright.
It seems he has a special daughter, Clo,
Who has quite a reputation, as you know.

EGAR Oh, yes. I've heard. An oddish creature,
Without a single, common feature.

TAD Those who could have her hand, choose not to wed;
They prefer to remain chaste, instead.

EGAR I understand the sentiment, I do.
For a spouse can be the death of you.

TAD Now, if Edward will align himself with Clo,
The King swears he's willing to bestow
A healthy stretch of land to you, Egar.
Thor's prepared to make the deal, if you are.

EGAR Well, this is good news! Of course, I agree!
As far as I'm concerned, the land is free!

ESTHER Are you sure this is what Edward would want?

EGAR He'll be tickled, the little runt.
What boy in his right mind wouldn't say "yes"
If given the chance to wed a princess?

ESTHER I say our son should make the choice!

EGAR In this affair, Edward shall have no voice.

(To JESTER)

Bring him here! He shall hear firsthand
How his father intends to get his land.
Describe once more this prize female,
For your report sadly lacked detail.

TAD
Though her skin may bear scars of the pox,
She's as strong and hefty as an ox.
And though her teeth haven't all been retained
Her speech is still rather well-maintained.

EGAR
He means to say, dear, it can't be denied
This Clo would make a man a faithful bride.

(EDWARD enters)

Edward. Come, let me hug you, you lucky thing,
The joys that only marriage can bring,
Shall be yours! We've found your perfect mate!
At last, you shall meet your deserved fate.

EDWARD
What rumors are being spread in this house?

EGAR
The Minister has found you a spouse!

TAD
She's a gem.

EGAR
A doll.

TAD
Her name is Clo.

EGAR
And, Edward, there's no way you can say "no."

ELI
We're told she's quite a catch.

MORRIS
A pearl.

TAD
First rate!

EGAR
By all accounts, Edward, the perfect mate!

EDWARD
I should trust no one but myself, I've learned,
Where matters of my marriage are concerned.

EGAR
Her father, King of Thor, proposed a pact
That would be suicide for us to retract.

TAD
To you, it's Clo the King intends to give
To us, a piece of land, a place to live.

EDWARD
I fear in your games of state I'm the pawn.

EGAR
Edward, none of us wish to be drawn
Into an argument. There's no debate.
You will wed the girl and save the state!

Scene Fifteen Palace Garden

ELISE Then it's true? Edward means to marry Clo?
 COOK Yes, my dear. It appears that is so.
 The King is making plans to abdicate,
 Escorting Edward to his new-found mate.
 I'd love to stay and chat, I really would,
 But I must pack. Farewell. Be good.
 (Exits)

ELISE The time has come; I cannot wait.
 I must act before it's too late.

EDWARD (Enters) Elise, no doubt you've heard of father's scheme?
 ELISE Which you endorse completely, it would seem.
 Congratulations. I wish you well.

EDWARD Don't go.
 Do you think I mean to marry Clo?
 You must not believe everything you hear.
 I thought my true sentiments were clear.
 Too long I've been silent and held my peace.
 It's your hand that I desire, Elise.
 Tomorrow, when the royal fleet heads out to sea.
 As mother's maid you'll join us in the journey.
 When, at last, we reach the land of Thor,
 You and I shall remain apart no more.
 I'll announce that I've rejected Clo;
 It's you I wish to wed, I'll have them know.

ELISE Edward, this is home. I cannot leave.
 'Twould be a course I would forever grieve.
 Perhaps, Edward, there is another way
 Which will enable you and I to stay.
 But you must trust me, do as I request,
 Believing what I do is for the best.

EDWARD Just tell me. What must I do?
 Elise, my love, I place my trust in you.

Soon we'll set sight upon a new land.
 And, lo, a second state we will command.
 GRANDFATHER The Queen, on waking in the morning,
 Learned Egar had left without a warning.
 Alone and stranded, she ran to the shore,
 ESTHER Where she cursed the King, crying,
 (In a dim and distant shaft of light)
 Nevermore!
 GRANDFATHER Above the waves, her voice rose loud and clear,
 ESTHER Egar, you worthless dog! Come back here!
 I'll hunt you down. You cannot escape me!
 Until you're found, I shall scour the sea.
 GYPSY Her mind undone, cracked beyond repair,
 She walked into the ocean, unaware
 Of the crashing waves. And from afar
 We heard her calling . . .
 ESTHER Egar! Egar!
 GRANDFATHER Edward, no longer having need to hide,
 Was reunited with his waiting bride.
 Then word came back of King Egar
 And his fateful ship, *The Royal Star*.
 COOK They broke the rudder, which they could not mend,
 And with a faulty compass, Egar is condemned
 To forever drift. 'Tis though he were blind,
 Searching for a home he shall never find.
 GRANDFATHER Elise told the story of the golden fish.
 Knowing she had but one final wish.
 ELISE May this island home rise up again,
 A land invisible to foreign men.
 Thus, unseen, we shall never be enslaved
 By kings who have so rudely misbehaved.
 GYPSY Her wish came true. Once more we're free.
 GRANDFATHER Then Elise returned the giving pearl to the sea.