

Three on a Match

a play

by

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This play is for

Derek Walcott.

*My teacher and mentor.
Your wisdom and guidance have meant more to me
than you will ever know.*

CHARACTERS

THE GIRL BELLBOY: a Latina orphan of The Glorious Revolution whose parents have been disappeared. Perhaps twelve years old. Perhaps younger. Perhaps older. Perhaps a teenager or even a young woman, slight of stature. She does not speak.

THE HABERDASHER: a gentleman's gentleman; purveyor of fine gentlemanly merchandise, accoutrements, and, of course, hats. He speaks quite properly in Received Pronunciation (RP), also known as Standard British.

THE QUEEN: of Isla Colinas (Island of Clouds)--the former island nation, a once elegant and isolated country off the coast of Argentina--before it sank into the Atlantic Ocean. A lovely, lovable, Latina woman with a ready smile. Humble. A bit lost. Bubbling with positivity. Effervescent. She speaks English quite well, perhaps with a pleasant Spanish accent--perhaps with royal Castilian tones, or maybe romantic Barcelonian flourishes, or even Mexican spices. Or not. Have fun with it. So long as she is delightful.

THE AMERICAN: a shadowy man with a shadowy purpose. He speaks quite properly in a Standard American accent, also known as General American, which reveals his higher education and command of syntax, of rhetoric--all the weapons of diplomacy. He is perfectly handsome, perfectly dressed. He may be of any race, ethnicity, color.

SETTING

TIME: Present day. The clothes, architecture, decor, and decorum could easily fool one into thinking this world is of the 1920s or 1930s, but the presence of some contemporary items--a computer, a contemporary phone--reveal that it is in fact present day.

PLACE: South America. An unidentified nation. One which is enduring the same political turmoil that is unfortunately common to so many nations in the region.

SETTING:

The once opulent lobby of The Grand Hotel. In the days before The Glorious Revolution, this hotel was a magnificent palace, right here in the heart of the capitol city of this (unidentified) South American nation. The sofas, chairs, lamp-shades, and rugs are all in a state of perennial decline. The hotel was abandoned long ago (months? years?) and its three remaining residents have done their best to maintain their home's elegance, but the deterioration is unavoidable.

Important items of note: on the reception desk is a contemporary computer once used for registration and payment; displayed on a wall near The Haberdasher's simple work area are several hats--all styles from the 1920s or 1930s; on a table somewhere in the lobby is a contemporary electronic phone that once served as the "house phone."

AT RISE:

SOUNDS drift in from outside: heavy trucks rolling down crumbling streets; roving gangs of militant men shouting unintelligibly in Spanish; gunfire--distant and rare, but quite clear. Upon hearing this...

THE GIRL BELLBOY awakes and sits up calmly. Her nightly bed is a makeshift arrangement of throw pillows and blankets on the lobby floor, in clear view of the ceiling. She wears her uniform: trousers, shoes, and jacket (perhaps unbuttoned at the collar)--all except her hat, which is nearby. Another sound of distant gunfire. She yawns. She stretches.

She stands.

She looks up at the ceiling. A moment. (A silent prayer? A morning vigil?)

She then turns her attention from the ceiling to her toes. She bends down and touches them, thus beginning her morning calisthenics. With military precision, she performs a few jumping jacks, high-knee raises, and any other outdated exercises she deems fit. This lasts no more than a minute. Now that her blood is moving, she takes up her hat and dons it smartly. She folds up her sleeping blankets, just as smartly. She returns the throw pillows to their rightful places and pats them back into form, ever smartly.

She exits and returns momentarily with a serving tray: tea service for two, cups, saucers, toast, etc. She places the tray on a table. Regards it. Adjusts it slightly to present it perfectly. Satisfied, she turns and goes to the front door, opens it, retrieves the morning newspaper, returns, lays the paper in its proper place. Satisfied, she takes her usual post.

She stands at attention.

She waits.

THE HABERDASHER enters, energetic and eager to meet the new day. He is dressed smartly in a suit and tie. (Perhaps with a vest, perhaps no jacket.) He too stands at attention briefly, rapidly surveying the lobby. Pleased with what he sees, he nods to The Girl Bellboy. She responds in kind--as usual. The Haberdasher strides vigorously to his usual spot and takes his seat.

THE HABERDASHER

Good morning, my dear!

The Girl Bellboy marches to him and begins her usual morning breakfast service.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)
(of the breakfast)

Perfection! As always! How did we ever survive without you?

The Girl Bellboy beams with pride. But does not speak.

THE QUEEN enters. She is both regal and humble. She is also a bit lost. Her memory often fails her. She is over-dressed.

Upon seeing her, The Haberdasher immediately stands, respectfully.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Good morning, Your Majesty!

The Queen giggles and blushes.

THE QUEEN

Oh, Mr. Haberdasher! You needn't stand!

THE HABERDASHER

Not stand?

The Girl Bellboy promptly moves to The Queen, bows deeply, and offers her a hand to escort her to her seat--another daily ceremony.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

What kind of Englishman would I be if I did not honor the royal Queen of Isla Colinas?

He bows deeply as The Queen draws near, taking her seat.

THE QUEEN

Why thank you, sir. But really, there's no need to keep making such a fuss over me. After all, I have been living here for...(she hesitates, realizing she has forgotten)...how long have I been here? Weeks? Months? Years?

THE HABERDASHER

Long enough for you to be family!

He takes his seat again.

THE QUEEN

Well then, that's certainly long enough for you to dispense with royal formalities.

THE HABERDASHER

Never! As long as you are resident in this hotel, you shall receive the full royal treatment. The world outside these hotel walls has grown so ugly, and the best way to fight against it is to preserve all the beauty we can. What better weapon in the fight than to honor a right and noble queen?

THE QUEEN

Oh, but am I still a queen? (*tearing up*) Indeed, can one be a queen to a country that no longer exists?

THE HABERDASHER

Of course you are still a queen! Though your beloved nation is no more, your royal blood still flows through your veins! And if royalty is not honored, then what separates us from the barbarians out in the street?

THE QUEEN

(*dabbing her eyes with a lace handkerchief*)

Why thank you for those kind words, my dear Mr. Haberdasher.

(*to The Girl Bellboy who serves her tea*)

And thank you, sweet girl! How would we ever survive without you?

The Girl Bellboy beams with pride, again. She serves the toast. The Queen reaches for the tray before realizing...

THE QUEEN (Continued)

Oh dear. Is there no butter? No jam?

THE HABERDASHER

Alas, I must remind you that we have been without butter or jam ever since the beginning of (*with bitter disdain*) the Glorious Revolution.

THE QUEEN

Have we? I had forgotten.

THE HABERDASHER

We are fortunate that Mr. Baker is willing to trade for my services. So long as his clothes require mending, we will have bread.

THE QUEEN

We are fortunate indeed!

The Girl Bellboy brings the morning paper to The Haberdasher.

THE HABERDASHER

Thank you. Well, let us see what lies The Ministry has for us today.

He opens the paper. Several parts of it have been cut out, leaving a patchwork of holes in various sizes and shapes, squares and rectangles. The Haberdasher reads aloud the remains.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Ah, here's a bit our beloved Presidente has decided not to redact: (*with bitter disdain*) "Another Victory for the United Ministry!"

THE QUEEN

Mr. Haberdasher, why do you read with such scorn? Is that not good news?

THE HABERDASHER

It's a lie.

THE QUEEN

Oh. How do you know?

THE HABERDASHER

Because this rag is nothing but lies. Even so, El Presidente, and his mouth-breathing sycophants, still feel the need to censor it with their scissors at the last minute! Look at this! (*peering through the holes in the newspaper*) It's like reading a slab of Swiss cheese!

This earns a hearty laugh from The Queen and The Girl Bellboy.

THE QUEEN

How can you even read the paper with all those holes in it?

THE HABERDASHER

Why, the holes are the best part. They're the only parts that tell the truth. In fact, you might say they tell "the whole truth."

A shared laugh from all.

THE QUEEN

But, how do you understand any of it?

THE HABERDASHER

It's simple, really. In the backwards language of The Ministry, up is down, black is white. To decipher such nonsense requires one to be fluent in the language of state propaganda. Fortunately, I am well-versed in this language, due to my prior experience before...(beat)...before. For example: (*reading*) "Record Profits Expected in Growing Economy!" translates to "Expect Record Bread Lines and Shrinking Rations!"

A hearty laugh from The Queen and The Girl Bellboy

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

And here: "Thousands Celebrate Another Victory for the United Ministry!" translates to "Thousands Die in Another Battle of Blind Nationalism!"

The tone of this does not elicit a laugh.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Or here: (*a bit of venom creeps into his voice*) "The Peoples Army Inducts Record Number of Recruits!" translates to "The Army Imposes Conscription on The Poor Due to Shortage of Cannon Fodder!" Or here: (*more venom as his blood pressure rises*) "New School Opens in Jewish Quarter!" should properly be translated to "New School Erected Atop Mass Graves!"

The Haberdasher catches himself when he sees the alarm he has caused in The Queen and The Girl Bellboy. He tosses the paper aside, launches from his seat, and goes to the window.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Forgive me. The "news" makes me go a bit mad.

An awkward moment. In the distance, sounds of engines, men shouting in Spanish.

The Queen takes up the service bell on a nearby table and RINGS it.

The Haberdasher and The Girl Bellboy share a look.

THE HABERDASHER

(slightly irritated)

Alas, my Queen, I must remind you that all the servants left long ago to join The Glorious Revolution.

THE QUEEN

Oh?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes.

THE QUEEN

All the servants left?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes.

THE QUEEN

I must have forgotten.

THE HABERDASHER

Yes.

THE QUEEN

When did they leave?

THE HABERDASHER

At the beginning.

THE QUEEN

The beginning? Of what?

THE HABERDASHER

(unable to hide his frustration anymore)

The beginning of The Glorious Revolution. When The Glorious Revolution began, all the servants left.

THE QUEEN

I fear you've told me that before, haven't you?

THE HABERDASHER
(regaining composure)

Many times. Yes.

THE QUEEN
Oh, please forgive me. My memory...*(suddenly lost)*...escapes.

Beat.

THE HABERDASHER
Nothing to forgive. *(Beat.)* What do you require?

THE QUEEN
(still lost)
Require?

THE HABERDASHER
(controlling himself as best he can)
Why did you ring the bell?

THE QUEEN
(trying to return to the world)
Oh. I don't know.

THE HABERDASHER
No matter. Whatever it was, we certainly don't have it.

Beat.

The Haberdasher catches the eye of The Girl Bellboy, gives her a nod.

The Girl Bellboy stands, quickly clears the breakfast dishes and tray, then hastens out through the front door.

THE QUEEN
(snapping back to reality)
Where is she off to in such a hurry?

THE HABERDASHER
It is her daily task to retrieve any new government decrees.

THE QUEEN

Ah. I see. (*she does not see, but does not want to ask*) Allow me to compliment you, sir: you've raised a fine daughter!

THE HABERDASHER

Thank you, Your Majesty. But allow me to remind you that she is, in fact, not my daughter.

THE QUEEN

No? Oh, dear, now that you say it, I feel certain you must have told me that before. Haven't you?

The Haberdasher's frustration melts away. He smiles at The Queen, warmly.

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. But not recently.

THE QUEEN

I do apologize for being such a terrible burden.

THE HABERDASHER

(sincerely; he cannot stay mad at her)

You are no burden at all. (*Beat.*) Shall I tell you her story again?

THE QUEEN

I would like that very much. Only...

THE HABERDASHER

Only what?

THE QUEEN

I fear I will forget again.

THE HABERDASHER

Then I shall simply have to re-tell it. I don't mind.

It's a strange story.

One morning--a few days or weeks after the start of this most recent Glorious Revolution, after all the other residents of the hotel had fled, leaving you and I to fend for ourselves--I came downstairs into the hotel lobby and found her lying on the floor. Right here. I would have mistaken her for dead except that her eyes were open. Wide open. Staring straight up. At that.

He points up at the ceiling. The Queen looks up.

THE QUEEN

Oh, my heavens!

THE HABERDASHER

Heavens, indeed.

THE QUEEN

Isn't that beautiful!

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, it is.

THE QUEEN

I can't believe I've never noticed it before!

THE HABERDASHER

You have.

THE QUEEN

Have I?

THE HABERDASHER

Many times.

THE QUEEN

Oh. How sad that I have forgotten.

THE HABERDASHER

But just think how wonderful it will be when you discover it again.

THE QUEEN

Quite right.

THE HABERDASHER

The hotel owner brought an artist all the way from Italy here to South America to paint that. Perhaps he had visited too many ancient churches and thought only an Italian could paint a ceiling fresco. Fortunately, as you can see, we are spared the hand of God reaching out to mock the hand of Man, and instead we are blessed with a deep blue twilight sky brushed with a few billowy clouds. And that is what the girl was staring at when I found her. Or had she found me? She was a scrawny, underfed, outcast with dirty clothes and bare feet.

Another homeless orphan of the Glorious Revolution. When I stepped up to her and peered down into her eyes, she never flinched. Never startled. She just returned my gaze with the innocence and trust that are the curse of all children. I offered my hand and she took it without fear. I led her to the kitchen and fed her till she could eat no more. Then I took her to one of the very best suites and showed her the washroom, the porcelain tub with brass fixtures, the clean towels and linen. I laid out the only set of clothes I could find that would fit her: a Bellboy's uniform. I left her in private.

Soon after, she came downstairs, freshly bathed and smartly dressed in her new coat and trousers and shiny black shoes. She still had not spoken to me and I was beginning to fear that perhaps she was mute or deaf or both. But now that she seemed to have her feet firmly beneath her, I dared to ask: "Where are your parents?" She looked at me blithely. I asked again: "Your mother? Your father?"

And then she spoke. One word. She pointed up to the frescoed ceiling of clouds and said:

"Disappeared."

That is the first and last time I ever heard her speak.

That is the only word I have ever heard escape her lips.

"Disappeared."

What an awful crime we have committed upon that word. Before this Glorious Revolucion, what did that word mean? "Disappeared" was a trick performed by a magician. "Where did the handkerchief go? Poof! It disappeared!" And now, when we hear news reports of citizens stolen away by the beloved Presidente and his goon squad, how do we explain it? "They have been disappeared." Not just disappeared...*Have been disappeared*. When a child asks, "Where are Mother and Father?" what do we tell her? We don't use the word "dead." Instead we say: "They *have been disappeared*." What does that even mean? Where in the world does she think her parents have gone? What happens to clouds when they are gone? Are they dead? No. They have been disappeared. Poof.

The Girl Bellboy returns. She carries a rolled up scroll of paper which she immediately hands to The Haberdasher. He unrolls the scroll and reads aloud.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

"From this day forth, there shall be a rationing of all mirrors! All residents are hereby allotted one mirror--of reasonable size--per household! Residents must arrange to deliver all excess mirrors to the Department of Rationings by noon of the first Thursday of the last week of the first month of the present quarter-year.

Anyone found in possession of contraband mirrors will be subject to castigation, penalization, humiliation, and public caning. So decreed forthwith heretofore notwithstanding to wit in perpetuity ad infinitum!"

The Haberdasher laughs out loud at the absurdity of the decree. Instantly, his laughter turns to anger and he spits on the scroll.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Silly little men and their silly little laws. My dear girl, I believe we shall file this decree with all the others.

The Girl Bellboy knows the routine: The Haberdasher begins crumbling the scroll into a ball and at the same time The Girl Bellboy fetches a wire waste basket and takes her position behind him. The Haberdasher tosses the paper ball into the air over his shoulder, without looking. The Girl Bellboy smoothly catches the ball in the waste basket and, just as fluidly, returns the bin to its place.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)
(without looking back)

I suppose you had better run along and see if our dear leader has spewed forth any other dictums.

The Girl Bellboy marches out to do her duty.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

I'd like to take the whole Department of Rationings and shove it up El Presidente's dictum.

The Queen gasps.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

I apologize, Your Majesty.

The Queen laughs wildly.

THE QUEEN

Oh, don't apologize! I needed a good laugh. (*She giggles again.*) "Shove it up his dictum!" Indeed!

The Girl Bellboy returns with another scroll--this one is twice as long, but contains only one sentence.

THE HABERDASHER

(unrolling the enormous scroll and reading aloud)

"From this day forth it is hereby forbidden to have two on a bicycle or three on a match!"

The Haberdasher turns the scroll over to see if more is written on the back. Nothing. He turns the scroll horizontally, examines it, flips it over again, perhaps he shakes it to see if anything falls out. Nothing.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

(sarcastically)

Well, that's good use of government funds. *(Beat.)* Perhaps we should burn this one.

He takes a box of matches from his pocket and shakes them.

THE QUEEN

(aghast)

Burn it?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes.

THE QUEEN

No!

THE HABERDASHER

Why not?

THE QUEEN

The new law! They have just decreed that three on a match is illegal. There are three of us here, so if you light that match, we will be in violation.

THE HABERDASHER

That's not what "three on a match" means.

THE QUEEN

It isn't? Then what does it mean?

THE HABERDASHER

Bad luck.

THE QUEEN

Bad luck?

THE HABERDASHER

"Three on a match is bad luck." We learned that in The Great Good War.

THE QUEEN

I don't understand.

THE HABERDASHER

When soldiers are on night watch out on the front lines, they may wish to smoke. So one soldier lights a match and raises it to his cigarette. Then the other two raise their cigarettes to get a light off the first. Now, it is perfectly alright for the first soldier to light the cigarette of the second...but it is strictly forbidden for him to light the third.

THE QUEEN

(not seeing why)

Why?

THE HABERDASHER

Imagine this scene from the point of view of an enemy sniper. Out of the dark vast, the sniper sees a fire--a match flame raised to the first cigarette--the sniper picks up his gun. The flame passes to a second cigarette--the sniper takes aim. The flame passes to a third cigarette--the sniper fires. (*Snaps his fingers.*) The third soldier on the match dies.

Beat.

THE QUEEN

That's hardly bad luck.

THE HABERDASHER

No? What is it then?

THE QUEEN

Stupidity. The solution is rather simple: Don't smoke.

The Haberdasher laughs.

THE HABERDASHER

Touche!

He returns the box of matches to his pocket.

THE QUEEN

But that still doesn't explain the government decree.

THE HABERDASHER

Nothing can explain the government decrees. They are absurd. Which is why we file them...*(He crumbles the scroll, as before, and, likewise, The Girl Bellboy snatches up the waste basket and plays her part: he tosses, she catches.)*...like so.

The Girl Bellboy replaces the waste basket and marches out again to do her duty.

THE QUEEN

Sir, you have intrigued me with your knowledge of battlefield etiquette. I had no idea you served in The Great Good War. *(The Queen suddenly remembers that she often forgets.)* Or...did I?

THE HABERDASHER

No. *(Pause.)* I have never told you of my...service.

THE QUEEN

(sensing his unease)

Oh...well, if it's too painful, please, forgive me for prying.

THE HABERDASHER

Nothing to forgive. My "service" was...unimportant.

THE QUEEN

Every soldier was important.

THE HABERDASHER

Not I.

THE QUEEN

Nonsense. What was your job in the war?

THE HABERDASHER
Uniforms.

THE QUEEN
Uniforms?

THE HABERDASHER
Specifically...buttons.

THE QUEEN
Buttons?

THE HABERDASHER
I spent most of The Great Good War sewing buttons in a factory. I was...lucky.
(*He looks off, lost in a memory.*) Isn't it strange what we remember and what we forget?

THE QUEEN
What do you mean?

THE HABERDASHER
Never mind. I wish I could forget every moment of that stupid war.

THE QUEEN
I beg your pardon, sir. The Great Good War was terrible, but necessary. Fighting it was hardly stupid.

THE HABERDASHER
I beg *your* pardon, but what would you know about it? Isla Colinas sent no soldiers. Your entire contribution to the war effort consisted of rationing nylon stockings. Not that I blame you, my Queen. On the contrary, I envy you. The whole damnable thing was stupid. All those stupid boys rushing out to the front lines--heads filled with nonsense about Honor and Duty and God and Country--in those ridiculous uniforms, perfectly pressed and ready to be eviscerated.

THE QUEEN
Oh, my dear. I have disturbed you. I am truly sorry. But allow me to thank you for your service, my good man. Although I cannot know the pains you must have endured, I hope you can take some comfort in the knowledge that you played your part in helping The Alliance of Nations triumph over evil. You served your time and served your country.

THE HABERDASHER

And as a result I now have more respect for time and less respect for country.

THE QUEEN

Well, I'm sure you'll say it's a cliché, but the fact is, you--all of you brave young men--you saved the world.

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. *(He goes to the window.)* We saved...*(he sneers bitterly at the world)*...that.

Muffled sounds of revolution. Distant gunfire.

The Queen, attempting to break the uncomfortable mood, takes up the service bell on the table nearby and rings it.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

(instantly frustrated and not concealing it)

There are no servants here! Again, let me remind you, that everyone else has gone to-- *(he stops himself in mid-fury; struggles to control his temper)*

THE QUEEN

(embarrassed)

Of course. I'm so sorry. I forgot...again.

The Haberdasher takes a deep breath, regains his composure.

THE HABERDASHER

(sincerely)

Nothing to forgive. *(with forced cheer)* Whatever you may require, my Queen, I am at your service. What may I do for you?

THE QUEEN

(genuinely confused)

I...I don't know. *(She examines the bell in her hand.)* I don't even know why I rang it.

THE HABERDASHER

Quite alright.

THE QUEEN

(still trying to figure it out)

Perhaps I just wanted to hear the sound.

Beat.

The Queen rings the bell again.

They both stare at the bell, a bit mesmerized, and listen to the sound, until it fades to nothing.

The Girl Bellboy enters, beaming with excitement. She is carrying a radio. A big, antique radio: all wood and dials and glass tubes. A lovely work of craftsmanship from the early 20th century. The electrical cord trails behind her. She places the radio on a table for all to see.

The Girl Bellboy kneels before the radio and turns a dial. Nothing happens. The Haberdasher takes up the unplugged cord, but The Girl Bellboy does not notice him--she is spellbound by the beautiful radio. Just as The Haberdasher turns to seek out an electrical outlet, The Girl Bellboy turns another dial--WHITE NOISE bursts forth from the radio.

All three are startled.

The Haberdasher looks down at the electrical cord still in his hand, still unplugged.

The Girl Bellboy turns a dial. The white noise changes--grows and ebbs in strength and volume as the dial moves up and down.

The Girl Bellboy places a second hand on another dial--she begins to turn both at the same time and...

The white noise becomes the sound of a THEREMIN. The Girl Bellboy is delighted. The Queen and The Haberdasher share a look of astonishment and confusion.

The Haberdasher holds up the unplugged cord and examines it closer, tugs out the slack to make sure that it is, in fact, connected to the radio, but not to any electrical source.

The Girl Bellboy turns dials experimentally, causing the Theremin tones to oscillate pleasantly.

The lights dim and flicker--as if the radio is depleting the power in the hotel. The sounds soar and descend, wonderfully rich and resonant. All three are mesmerized by the radio. Its otherworldly sounds continue. Until...

THE AMERICAN steps into the doorway--a shadowy man silhouetted on the line between the hotel and the outside world. He carries a small suitcase.

Instantly, the Theremin snaps back to white noise.

The Three are confused by this sudden, inexplicable change.

The lights fade back up--full and steady.

The Girl Bellboy removes her hands from the dials--the white noise stops.

Silence.

All three regard the radio.

No one sees the shadowy man cross to the reception desk. He puts down his bag. He rings the desk bell.

All three turn to him.

The American smiles. He is perfectly handsome--perfectly dressed in a perfect suit, with perfect gloves and a perfect hat.

His shoes are shined to perfection. His tie is perfectly knotted. His teeth, in that salesman's smile, are perfectly clean.

THE AMERICAN

I beg your pardon, but I believe I am expected.

All three gape at The American in amazement.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

I have a reservation.

The Haberdasher is first to regain his senses.

THE HABERDASHER

A reservation, you say?...(As he fumbles to explain, he makes his way across the room until finally he ends up behind the reception desk.) You must have made it some time ago because...The hotel has been...There's no one...Ever since the...The hotel is...closed.

THE AMERICAN

Closed? Impossible. I have a reservation.

THE HABERDASHER

Are you certain it is at this hotel? The Grand Hotel? Perhaps you've mistaken The Grand Hotel for the Hotel Nuovo just across the--

THE AMERICAN

I have a reservation at this hotel.

THE HABERDASHER

I am sorry, sir, but the fact is this hotel has been closed for some time now, ever since the Glor--

THE AMERICAN

(ever so pleasantly)

I have a reservation. I have papers to confirm it. *(Produces papers from a pocket, places them on the reception desk in front of The Haberdasher.)* Papers of confirmation for my reservation. I have a passport *(Produces passport.)* from the U.S. of A. *(Places passport on desk.)* I have money. *(Produces money.)* American money. Dollars. United States currency. I am expected. I am confirmed. I wish to check in to this hotel.

The Haberdasher regards the items, a bit confused, but nonetheless deferential and willing to help--a good Englishman.

THE HABERDASHER

Your papers appear to be in order. And you are certainly at the right hotel. But...I'm sorry, sir, I cannot help you. I am not The Concierge.

THE AMERICAN

Ah! My apologies. Shall I ring for The Concierge?

The American rings the desk bell. The ring tone hangs in the air. The American smiles pleasantly at The Haberdasher. After an awkward moment, The Haberdasher politely places one finger on the bell, silencing it.

THE HABERDASHER

I'm sorry, sir, but there is no concierge.

THE AMERICAN

No concierge?

THE HABERDASHER

No sir. I'm afraid...ever since The Glorious Revolution...you see, all the hotel staff have...fled. They've fled, sir. They've all been gone for...quite some time. We three (*indicating The Queen, The Girl Bellboy, and himself*) are the hotel's only residents.

THE AMERICAN

You three?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, sir. I do wish I could be of more help.

THE AMERICAN

(pleasantly)

You certainly can be of more help. You can check me in.

THE HABERDASHER

I'm sorry, but I...do not work here. I don't know how to check in guests. And even if I did, as you can see...*(he turns the computer monitor to face The American)*...the computer is...down.

THE AMERICAN

Down?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, down. Offline. Not working.

THE AMERICAN

How is it that you three are still living here?

THE HABERDASHER

Pardon?

THE AMERICAN

You three. How are you still living here?

THE HABERDASHER

We...we were here before...before.

THE AMERICAN

Yes, but how is it that you are still here?

THE HABERDASHER

I don't understand.

THE AMERICAN

(confused)

A hotel with no staff? Who cleans your rooms? Who brings your meals? Who changes your linens, replenishes your toiletries, all of that?

THE HABERDASHER

Well...we do. We serve ourselves here.

THE AMERICAN

(curious)

To whom do you pay your bill?

THE HABERDASHER

Oh! *(chuckling)* We haven't paid a bill in...well, since we've been on our own.

THE AMERICAN

No bill?

THE HABERDASHER

(laughing pleasantly)

Well, there are a few benefits to living in a hotel with no staff. Perhaps one day, when the Glorious Revolution is over, we shall have to settle accounts.

THE AMERICAN

(with menace)

Indeed you will. Accounts must be settled. Balance must be restored.

The Haberdasher is taken aback.

THE HABERDASHER

I'm not sure...what you mean.

Beat. The American regards The Haberdasher menacingly.

THE AMERICAN

You look familiar to me, sir. Have we met before?

THE HABERDASHER

(wary)

I don't believe I've had the pleasure.

THE AMERICAN

(leaning in to study The Haberdasher's face)

No?

THE HABERDASHER

No.

THE AMERICAN

Are you certain?

THE HABERDASHER

Quite certain.

Beat.

The American's face alights as if he has finally recognized The Haberdasher.

THE AMERICAN

Yes. I know that face.

THE HABERDASHER

I beg to differ.

THE AMERICAN

You can beg all you like, I never forget a face.

THE HABERDASHER

I'm sorry to disagree with you, sir, but you must be mistaken.

Beat.

*The American grins conspiratorially. He winks.
The Haberdasher appears completely befuddled.*

THE AMERICAN

Well, then: why don't you reach back on that wall there and hand me one of those room keys?

THE HABERDASHER

I...I don't know if that would be...I'm not sure I should.

THE AMERICAN

Why on Earth not?

THE HABERDASHER

I'm not sure I'm...allowed.

THE AMERICAN

(jovially amused)

Not allowed? Look: *(indicating each)* My papers. My passport from the U.S. of A. My money. Do you see?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, but--

THE AMERICAN

(with authority)

I will decide what is allowed. Now, turn yourself around and reach your hand up on that wall and give me my room key.

The Haberdasher hesitates. But then, maintaining his composure as best he can, he turns and reaches for a room key.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Not that one. Higher up.

The Haberdasher reaches up a level.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Higher. The top floor. The Penthouse Suite.

The Haberdasher takes the key from the top floor and lays it on the reception desk.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
(instantly pleasant, again)

Thank you, Charles.

THE HABERDASHER
(as if waking from a strange dream)

Pardon?

THE AMERICAN

I said, thank you, Charles.

THE HABERDASHER

Charles? My name isn't Charles.

THE AMERICAN

Of course it is.

THE HABERDASHER

No. I'm sorry, sir. You must have me confused with--

THE AMERICAN
(ignoring this completely, he turns with a wave to the Haberdasher's work area)

I see you are a haberdasher.

The American takes his papers, passport and money and puts them back in his pockets.

THE HABERDASHER

I... Yes.

The American takes off his hat and lays it on the reception desk.

THE AMERICAN

My hat needs mending.

The hat does not require mending--it is absolutely perfect.

THE HABERDASHER

(regarding the hat inexplicably)

Your hat, sir?

THE AMERICAN

Yes. My hat. Requires mending. Can you mend it, Charles?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, I--my name isn't--I can mend your hat, but my name isn't Charles.

THE AMERICAN

(leaning in to examine The Haberdasher's face)

Are you sure?

THE HABERDASHER

Of course, I'm sure. My name is--

THE AMERICAN

Not about the name. The name is not in question. There's no question about your name, Charles. The only question is about the hat. Do you see that my hat requires mending?

THE HABERDASHER

(confused, discombobulated)

I--The hat...*(picks up the hat and studies it closer)*...Your hat is...perfect.

THE AMERICAN

Nonsense. It's rubbish.

THE HABERDASHER

(a bit mesmerized by the perfect hat)

It...it isn't, sir. It's immaculate.

THE AMERICAN

It's old. It's worn out. It's threadbare. It's collapsing. I can't possibly wear it a moment longer, Charles.

THE HABERDASHER

(snapping out of his spell, regaining his courage)

Do not call me by that name again. My name is not Charles.

The American smiles a predatory smile--his eyes afire with the promise of battle.

THE AMERICAN

Here. *(He takes his hat and places it on The Haberdasher's head.)* You wear it. I give it to you. A gift. *(Looking directly into The Haberdasher's eyes.)* Perhaps I'll take one of those. There. On your wall. Charles.

A beat. No response from The Haberdasher. Only then, finally, does The American turn and approach the wall of hats--jovially relishing the splendid merchandise.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Ah! Here's a good one! *(Takes hat and tries it on. Turns to The Queen and The Girl Bellboy.)* What do you think? Yes? No? Too stiff? Perhaps you're right. *(Replaces hat, takes up another.)* How about this one? *(Puts it on.)* Hm? What do you think? Too rakish? Too roguish? Perhaps. *(Replaces hat, takes up another.)* Oh, look at this one! *(Puts it on.)* Yes, I think this may be the one. Yes. Just the ticket! What do you say? Hm?

No reaction. The three are stunned, nervous. The American turns his attention to The Girl Bellboy.

THE AMERICAN

You. Bellboy. You're a handsome young man. What do you think?

THE QUEEN

(politely)

Actually, sir, our bellboy is a girl.

THE AMERICAN

Really? Why, yes you are. I see it now. What do you think of my hat, miss?

THE HABERDASHER

(protective)

She doesn't speak.

THE AMERICAN

(not at all surprised)

With beauty such as yours, in a world such as this, why would you ever want to?

The American reaches to touch The Girl Bellboy under her chin. She recoils.

The American smiles at this. He licks his lips ever so slightly. He leans in closer to The Girl Bellboy. She stands her ground, eyeing him warily. He inhales deeply through his nose--smelling the aroma of her. He exhales. He looks her dead in the eyes.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

My shoes are dirty.

The Girl Bellboy is confused. She looks at his shoes. Then back up at him.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

(hungrily)

Do you see? They're dull. Scuffed. Soiled. They need a good shining. Tell me boy, girl, whichever...can you give me a shoe shine?

THE HABERDASHER

She's not a shoe shine boy.

THE AMERICAN

(unfazed, proceeding)

Just a little shine is all I need.

THE HABERDASHER

It's not her job.

THE AMERICAN
(*unfazed, proceeding*)

Oh, but I'm sure you could handle one little job, couldn't you?

THE HABERDASHER

She doesn't even have a shine box!

THE AMERICAN
(*coy; playful*)

No shine box? Well, that's not a problem. (*Maintaining that menacing eye contact with The Girl Bellboy, he takes a handkerchief from his jacket pocket. He holds it out to her.*) How about a little...spit shine?

THE HABERDASHER
(*desperately trying to intervene; deferential*)

I can shine them, sir! (*nervous laughter as he comes around from behind the reception desk*) I can find the proper tools and take care of them for you! Shine them up, good as new!

THE AMERICAN
(*turning to The Haberdasher; incredulous*)

You? Shine my shoes? (*Bursts out laughing.*) Don't be ridiculous. (*Turns back to the Girl Bellboy. Oozing with cordial politeness.*) No no no. Now that I've got myself in mind of a little spit shine...nothing else will do. Here.

Offers the Girl Bellboy the handkerchief.

She does not take it--simply eyes him warily.

The American does not like this.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
(*with sudden force; frightening*)

Take it.

The Girl Bellboy is startled by the change in his voice. She hesitates, then takes the handkerchief. The American is pleased--and, just as suddenly, returns to his coy, playful voice.

THE AMERICAN

Good! Now...(taking a seat in a substantial chair)...I'll sit here. (He looks at the Girl Bellboy. She does not move.) Have you never done this before? (She shakes her head: no. The American is delighted.) Splendid.

THE HABERDASHER

Really, sir, I must insist, the girl is too...inexperienced. She'll only make a muck of it. Please. Please allow me to shine them for you.

The American turns slowly to The Haberdasher.

THE AMERICAN

(murderously cold)

Don't you have a hat that needs mending?

The Haberdasher grudgingly relents. The American keeps his murderous eyes on The Haberdasher, but speaks to the Girl Bellboy.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Get on your knees.

The Girl Bellboy does not realize The American is talking to her, so she does nothing. The American turns to her.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

(sweetly)

How will you ever shine my shoes from way up there? (The Girl realizes he had been talking to her.) Hmm? (Softly, sweetly.) Get on your knees.

The Girl looks to The Haberdasher. The Haberdasher looks away--he cannot meet her eyes. The Girl Bellboy steels herself--then kneels in front of The American.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

That's a good boy. Good girl. Whichever. Now...lean down. (She tilts forward a bit.) Much farther. (She does so.) Put your mouth...very...very close...close enough to kiss the leather...(She does so.) Mmmm...good. That's good. Now...spit. (The Girl hesitates.) It's okay. Go ahead. Spit. (She starts to, but hesitates.) Spit on it. (She spits on his shoe. The Haberdasher slumps slightly, defeated. The Queen looks away, disturbed.) Good. Very good. Now...rub.

(She rubs the shoe, awkwardly.) Mmmmm...Good. Very good. Now, again: spit. *(She spits.)* Mmm-hmm. Yes. Now, rub. *(She rubs. The Haberdasher retreats behind the reception desk.)* Oh, yes, very good. Now the other shoe. Spit. *(She spits.)* Rub. *(She rubs.)* Spit. *(She spits.)* Rub. *(She rubs.)* Oh, that's very good. Yes. Yes, you're very good at that. Are you sure you've never done this before? Hmmm...you must be...a natural. Yes. Now, give it one last firm rub. Polish it up nicely. And...stop. *(She stops.)* Now: look at what you've done. *(She looks.)* Do you see what a good job you've done?

The American stands. He takes money from his pocket. He holds it out for The Girl Bellboy. She looks at it curiously, uncertain. He gestures for her to take it. She takes it.

The American inhales and exhales with deep satisfaction. Then turns and announces to all:

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

I need a smoke. *(Beat. No response from anyone. He turns to The Haberdasher.)* How about you, Charles? *(The Haberdasher stiffens.)* Could you go for a smoke?

The Haberdasher turns on The American, calmly, coolly.

THE HABERDASHER

I don't smoke. And I am not Charles.

The American laughs gleefully, relishing the fun.

THE AMERICAN

Of course you do and of course you are.

The American saunters to The Haberdasher at the reception desk, peeling off his perfect gloves as he approaches. He lays the gloves neatly on the desk.

He takes a cigar case from a pocket. He pops it open, removes two cigars, and lays the case on the desk--neatly, precisely.

He takes one cigar and puts it in his own mouth. He offers the other cigar to The Haberdasher.

The Haberdasher does not move.

The American smiles--then pushes the cigar at The Haberdasher's mouth. The Haberdasher recoils and snatches the cigar with his hand.

The American laughs.

The Haberdasher glares at him.

The American raises his eyebrows--expectantly.

After not getting the reaction he wants, The American takes the cigar from his mouth and says:

THE AMERICAN

Well?

THE HABERDASHER

Well what?

THE AMERICAN

Have you got a light?

THE HABERDASHER

No.

THE AMERICAN

No?

THE HABERDASHER

Of course I haven't got a light. I told you. I don't smoke.

THE AMERICAN

Oh? Is that right? Hmmm....

The American puts the cigar in his mouth and uses both hands to pat his own pockets in search of a light--makes a big show of it--a pantomime.

Then, just as dramatically, makes a big show of being struck with a brilliant idea.

He points at The Haberdasher and gives him a playfully reproachful look.

Then suddenly: he lunges one hand out and grabs The Haberdasher by his jacket.

The Haberdasher grabs The American's wrist to pull the hand away, but The American points his finger menacingly at The Haberdasher's eye.

The Haberdasher freezes.

The American smiles and gives The Haberdasher a good-natured slap on the cheek--nothing painful, just humiliating.

The two men eye each other dangerously.

Then: Very slowly, the American reaches his hand into The Haberdasher's pocket--feels around a bit--finds something--and pulls out...a box of wooden matches.

The American shakes the box of matches. He smiles triumphantly.

The Haberdasher lowers his eyes, defeated, ashamed, enraged.

The American strikes a match.

He puts the match to his own cigar and lights it, then passes the match toward The Haberdasher who, reluctantly, raises the cigar to his own lips and allows The American to light the cigar.

The two men eye each other.

The American holds the still-burning flame between them.

The Haberdasher stares at the burning flame. He grows more anxious with each passing second, until he cannot resist any longer...and hastily blows out the match.

Beat.

The American laughs.

THE AMERICAN

Oh, that's priceless. Tell me, Charles, you haven't become superstitious in your old age, have you?

THE HABERDASHER

Don't be absurd.

THE AMERICAN

No? Perhaps just a little taken in by...magical thinking?

THE HABERDASHER

Rubbish.

THE AMERICAN

Well, then, if you're not superstitious...you must be paranoid. *(Beat.)* Do you imagine a sniper across the plaza has his eye on you and is just waiting for the right moment to put a bullet right here? *(Pokes The Haberdasher in the forehead.)* Hm? Which is it? Magical thinking or paranoia? Or is there no difference?

THE HABERDASHER

Habit.

THE AMERICAN

Habit! Of course! How silly of me. You Englishmen don't even believe in luck, do you? We Americans know that a man makes his own luck. *(The American tosses the box of matches to The Haberdasher. He catches it, puts it back in his pocket.)* But you English--British? English? whichever--you believe...what do you believe?

THE QUEEN

(a sudden insight)

Bad luck!

The American turns to her, curious.

THE AMERICAN

Come again?

THE QUEEN

(delighted to participate)

Bad luck! Three on a match is bad luck!

THE AMERICAN

(curiouser and curiouser)

Where did you hear that, my dear?

THE HABERDASHER

(indignant)

Do not address her as, "My dear!" You are speaking to The Queen of Isla Colinas!

THE AMERICAN

Am I?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. In fact, I think you should not speak to her at all. But if you must, you will address her as Your Majesty.

THE AMERICAN

Will I?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. You will.

THE QUEEN

(oblivious to any subtext between the two men)

Oh, heavens! There's no need for such formalities!

The American studies The Haberdasher for a beat, then smiles as if he has seen his hold card.

THE AMERICAN

(turning to The Queen)

I wonder, Your Majesty, has he been telling you stories?

THE QUEEN
(delighted)

Oh, yes!

THE AMERICAN
 Really? Stories of his time in The Great Good War?

Something in The American's tone makes The Queen suddenly wary--unsure if she should reveal anything to this man.

THE QUEEN
 Well...(she looks to The Haberdasher for guidance)

THE AMERICAN
(reassuring)

Of course, he has. How else could you know that silly superstition about three on a match? Besides, he has every right to tell you about his life as a soldier. He has so much of which to be proud!

The Queen is utterly smitten by The American and all wariness instantly melts away.

THE QUEEN
 That's precisely what I told him!

THE AMERICAN
 Did you?

THE QUEEN
 I certainly did!

THE AMERICAN
(mischievously)

Well, if you would like to hear stories of our dear friend's life during the war, I could tell you stories.

THE QUEEN
(eagerly)

Could you?

THE AMERICAN
 I could.

THE QUEEN

Did you two gentlemen know each other during the war?

The American turns a conspiratorial eye to The Haberdasher.

THE AMERICAN

Oh...everyone knew Charles. Alas, he never knew me. But then again, no one knew me.

The American turns to speak to The Queen, but The Haberdasher interrupts.

THE HABERDASHER

I knew you.

This hits The American like a bucket of cold water. His spine grows rigid. He turns to The Haberdasher.

THE AMERICAN

What did you say?

THE HABERDASHER
(with newfound righteous bravery)

I knew you. I knew of you, anyway. We all knew of you.

THE AMERICAN
(chuckles)

That's hardly the same thing.

THE HABERDASHER

Isn't it? *(mocking, in an imbecilic American accent)* Knew you--knew of you--whichever. *(Now that he has The American's attention again, he reverts to his British accent.)* We all knew you.

The American is not pleased. He locks eyes with The Haberdasher, but speaks to The Queen.

THE AMERICAN

Please forgive us, Your Majesty. We are being so very rude. We haven't bothered to ask you...*(finally turning to The Queen)*...what did you do during The Great Good War?

THE QUEEN

(suddenly wistful, melancholy)

Oh, my life during the war was...heavenly.

THE AMERICAN

Yes, I imagine it was. Isla Colinas managed to stay neutral throughout the entire war. How very lucky.

THE QUEEN

Indeed.

THE AMERICAN

Not so lucky *after* the war, though. Hm?

THE HABERDASHER

We do not speak of what happened to Isla Colinas after the war.

THE AMERICAN

We don't? *(switching suddenly to a mocking British accent)* Terribly sorry, old chap. *(switching suddenly back to his American accent)* Well, let's not talk about anything unpleasant; let's talk about how heavenly life was during the war. *(chuckles at his own irony)* Heavenly for you, at least, my dear. *(correcting himself)* I mean, Your Majesty. *(beat. a sudden thought)* Isn't there another name people call you, besides Your Majesty?

THE HABERDASHER

No.

THE AMERICAN

Really?

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. Really.

THE AMERICAN

Why not?

THE HABERDASHER

Because to address her otherwise would show an enormous lack of respect.

THE AMERICAN

Would it?

THE HABERDASHER

Wars have been fought for less.

THE AMERICAN

I'm sure they have. But let's not wander off topic. I was asking The Queen about her name. That *other* name that people have for her. (*pretending to think hard*) What is it? It's right on the tip of my tongue. (*pretending to recall*) Oh, yes! "The Virgin Queen."

THE HABERDASHER

No one calls her that!

THE QUEEN

(*laughing it off*)

Oh, my dear, Mr. Haberdasher! It's quite alright. (*to The American*) Yes, sir. You are correct. I am known as The Virgin Queen because I never married.

THE AMERICAN

Never married. True. But that doesn't necessarily mean...that you never...

THE QUEEN

(*growing uncomfortable*)

I'm sure I don't know what you're...implying.

THE AMERICAN

Forgive my American manners, Your Majesty, but we are less...delicate than the British or the Spanish. So I'll just come right out and ask: have you ever...been in love?

THE QUEEN

(*greatly relieved*)

In love?

THE AMERICAN

I bet you have.

THE QUEEN

Oh, yes! I was in love once.

THE AMERICAN

I knew it! Tell me, what was he like? Or was it she?

THE QUEEN

He was Italian. I fell in love with him the first moment I saw him. Perhaps I had seen too many Italian films and thought only an Italian could steal my heart. His family had a small vineyard in the Tuscan hills; my family vacationed nearby every summer.

THE AMERICAN

Was he handsome?

THE QUEEN

He was beautiful and simple and pure and happy. Sadly, he was also forbidden.

THE AMERICAN

Forbidden?

THE QUEEN

I was the Princess of our small island nation. I could not possibly marry a man without noble rank.

THE AMERICAN

Really? But wasn't his family rich?

THE QUEEN

I suppose they were upper-middle class, at best. Not good enough for my parents who were terribly old-fashioned and dreamed of arranging a marriage to some European blue-blood. Of course, they were hopelessly delusional. Isla Colinas offered nothing any noble suitor could want. Nonetheless, my parents persevered in their blind foolishness for years, decades, most of my life. Eventually, when I reached the age of fifty, my dear, foolish father died in his sleep. A few days later, my mother followed him. Now an old woman, I, the Princess, received my rightful inheritance, donned the crown, and became The Queen of Isla Colinas. The Virgin Queen. (*Beat.*) And then...

THE AMERICAN

Then what?

THE QUEEN

Then something extraordinary happened. The ground beneath my feet began to sink, literally. It was as if the very island itself somehow knew our family was doomed. And so it gave up on me too.

On the day I ascended the throne, the island began to sink into the Atlantic. Within a few weeks, the shorelines were visibly disappearing.

Houses were being overtaken by the waves. Panic spread quickly amongst the island's citizens. Scientists were consulted. The facts were indisputable: the island would be gone within a year. The sea would swallow up my beloved nation from the outside in, house by house, saving the best for last: the Royal Castle perched atop the highest hill.

Evacuations were planned.

And so, all my people, my loyal subjects, gathered together one last time at the Royal Estate for a farewell fiesta. I opened my home and received them all into the Royal Palace, the Royal Gardens, the Royal Hunting Grounds, and the Royal Orchards. I invited them all to take whatever heirlooms they liked. I asked them to promise to carry Isla Colinas with them, piece by piece, into their new worlds of Argentina, Chile, and even--God protect us!--Brazil.

They ate the best foods from the Royal Kitchen. They fed filet mignon to their dogs. They filled the Royal Fountain with champagne and danced in it.

As the night wore on, they grew melancholy and sang ancient folk songs of the great history of our doomed country.

At dawn they sat on the grass in their tuxedos and formal gowns and gazed out at the sea, which was inching closer by the hour.

Finally, they made their way to the boats waiting on the shore. They watched porters load their belongings. They boarded ships, filed onto decks, pressed against railings, and took a last look back at their homeland...at me...their sinking queen. They waved. And I waved back. From atop the highest tower in my castle, I waved...and watched everyone I ever knew disappear over the horizon. And then, later that same day, I too boarded a ship. And I came here. My doctors told me the mountain air would be good for me, and so I came here to breathe it! And I have been here ever since! Ever since...*(she stops to think)*...oh my. How long has it been now?

THE HABERDASHER

Sometime after the last stolen election, but before the most recent glorious revolution.

THE QUEEN

(She looks off.) Isn't it strange what we remember and what we forget?

Pause.

THE AMERICAN

What happened to the horses?

THE QUEEN

I beg your pardon.

THE AMERICAN

Isla Colinas was famous for its equestrian breeding. In fact, it's the only thing we Americans knew about your country. Well, until it sank. Then it became famous for that. But before it sank, it was famous for its horses, wasn't it?

THE QUEEN

Oh, yes! Our horses were the envy of the world!

THE AMERICAN

So what happened to them?

THE QUEEN

Oh, they were all saved, of course!

THE AMERICAN

How?

THE QUEEN

Well, I don't know the particulars, really. It was all handled by people who worked beneath me. I imagine they were all...sold.

THE AMERICAN

What a shame.

THE QUEEN

Shame?

THE AMERICAN

Not that they were saved, but that they were sold. It's a shame about the bloodlines.

THE QUEEN

I'm afraid I don't take your meaning.

THE AMERICAN

The bloodlines will all be lost now. The entire equine population was so pure before...before. But now...they've all been scattered to the winds, to the four corners of the wide world. The bloodlines will be lost. Forever.

Pause.

THE QUEEN

I never thought of that.

Pause.

THE AMERICAN

I wonder, my dear, did you own any horses?

THE QUEEN

Oh yes! My family bred horses for generations!

THE AMERICAN

(flirtatiously)

We Americans value good breeding, perhaps because it is so rare in our own country. In America, everywhere you look, you see wealthy people, but so few of them come from money. From...breeding. You can see it in the way they live. Many of these people, these "new rich," own some of the best equestrian stables in the world, yet they've never even ridden a horse. Imagine that. Owning something so beautiful and never riding it. Tell me, my dear...did you ride?

THE QUEEN

Of course! I loved to ride!

THE AMERICAN

I bet you did. *(While he continues, he saunters to his suitcase.)* Did you ride often?

THE QUEEN

In my youth, I rode most every day. But even when I grew older, I scarcely went a week without riding.

The American opens his "carry on" bag and removes an apple.

THE AMERICAN

Of course you did! *(He shows the apple to The Haberdasher.)* And why? *(He moves to The Queen.)* Because you come from good breeding. *(He pulls a knife from his pocket and opens it with a flourish. The Haberdasher tenses visibly. The Queen is simply impressed. As he continues, The American slices off three pieces of the apple and lays them on the table near The Queen.)* I remember the first time I saw a horse. When I was a boy, my father had one. A mare. And one day, he taught me how to feed her. He told me to lay my hand out flat, palm up...*(he demonstrates)*...like so. And he placed a slice of apple on my palm. *(He places a slice of apple on his own palm.)* Like so.

And he taught me to hold it up to the horse's mouth, (*he holds the apple up to The Queen's mouth*) so she could take it without biting off my fingers.

The Queen does not bite the apple. But she eyes it hungrily.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

How long has it been since you had a bite of apple? Hm? I expect fresh fruit has been impossible to find here for a long time. How long? Hm? How long has it been? (*His voice suddenly drops into that familiar, menacing octave.*) Tell me.

THE QUEEN

(flinching, but still eyeing the apple)

I don't know. Weeks? Months? Years?

THE AMERICAN

(his smooth, seductive voice returns)

I thought so. Well...go on. Take it.

The Queen reaches for the apple with her hand.

The American pulls it away and chides her.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. (*He holds it out of reach for just a beat, then slowly moves it back to her mouth.*) Not with your hand. Do it properly.

The Haberdasher steps forward, as if to intervene.

The American--never taking his eyes off The Queen--simply raises his other hand, the one still holding the knife, and points at him. The Haberdasher freezes.

The Queen eats the apple from The American's hand.

At first, she is hesitant. But as soon as she bites into it, the taste overwhelms her. She relishes it, and the pleasure reverberates through her whole body.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Very good. Here. Have another. (*He offers her another. This time, she doesn't hesitate. She feasts on it.*) Yes. That's it. (*He has a new thought.*) I wonder...when you rode horses in Isla Colinas, how were you taught to ride? English or Western?

The Queen swallows and locks eyes with him.

THE QUEEN
(*hungrily*)

Both.

The American is a bit surprised.

THE AMERICAN

Both?

THE QUEEN
(*hungrier still, leaning in, eyes locked on his*)

Oh, yes. I was taught many ways to ride. I rode English saddles, Western saddles, dressage...hunt.

THE AMERICAN
(*meeting her gaze*)

You rode hunt?

THE QUEEN
(*hungry; lustful*)

I rode hunt. My dear sir, I rode every saddle there is.

The American takes a third slice of apple, places it on his palm, and holds it just out of her reach.

THE AMERICAN
(*seductively*)

How about...bareback?

The Queen flinches visibly. She snaps out of their playful game.

THE QUEEN
(*a hint of fear in her voice*)

Bareback?

THE AMERICAN
(*unyielding*)

Bareback.

The Queen recoils a bit into herself.

THE QUEEN
(*suddenly ashamed of her behavior*)

No. Never bareback.

THE AMERICAN
Never? (*moving the apple closer to her*) Not even once? (*moving the apple closer still*) Not even...a little bit?

The Queen retreats from him.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
Pity. You know what they say. "You haven't lived until you've ridden bareback."
Hmm... Oh don't be ashamed, my lady.

He sets the last apple slice down, puts the knife away, then lays his hand on her knee, reassuringly.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
There's still time.

The Queen melts a bit at his touch. The Haberdasher tenses, takes a hesitant step toward them, but stops himself.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
Plenty of ladies your age...still ride. Nothing to fret about. Come on. Give us a smile. (*The Queen melts further and smiles.*) Oh, come on, give us a real smile. (*The Queen giggles and beams her delightful smile.*) That's it. Let's have a look at those pearly whites. Oh, you do have a lovely set of teeth, my lady.

The American examines The Queen's teeth. He angles his head to get a good look.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)
(*with a veterinarian air*)
Oh, yes.

The American reaches for her mouth to examine more thoroughly, but halts to ask permission first.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

May I?

The Queen blinks in confusion. But since she doesn't explicitly refuse, The American takes this as compliance. He puts his fingers inside The Queen's mouth and examines her teeth as one would a horse. The Queen accepts his examination as one would a doctor's.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Yes. Those are quite healthy. (He slides his fingers around her lips to expose the gum-line. He leans in very close to get a good look.) Oh, yes. Good coloration. Healthy root system. (He is satisfied with what he has found. He pulls back and removes his hands from her mouth.) You've taken good care of yourself, my lady. (She smiles with pride at the diagnosis.) You see? There's no reason at all why a woman of your age should not be able to ride. (He leans in, flirtatiously.) You know what they say: "You're only as old as you feel on the inside." (They share a giggle.) I wonder...(his voice again drops into that dangerous register) ...how you feel...inside.

The Queen blanches in fear.

The Haberdasher finds his courage.

THE HABERDASHER

Enough!

The American turns to him. The Haberdasher moves toward The American, coolly, in control.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Get away from her.

The American scoffs at The Haberdasher, then turns his attention back to The Queen. The American takes her hand. He looks into her frightened eyes as he speaks to The Haberdasher.

THE AMERICAN

Stay out of it, Charles. This is none of your business.

The Haberdasher steps right up behind The American.

THE HABERDASHER

Why don't you try to examine my teeth?

The Haberdasher slaps the hat off the American's head.

The American whips around and glares at The Haberdasher who holds his ground. The American regains his composure. Calmly, coolly, The American smooths his hair.

Then--just as calmly, just as casually--The American punches The Haberdasher in the gut. The Haberdasher doubles over but does not fall. The American strolls over to a nearby chair, perhaps whistling or humming a pleasant tune to himself, picks up the chair and places it right behind The Haberdasher. He then, matter of factly, rockets a punch into The Haberdasher's kidneys. The Haberdasher recoils and--just as planned--The American guides The Haberdasher gently into the chair.

THE AMERICAN

(patting The Haberdasher on the shoulder)

That's a good lad. You have a seat right there.

The American retrieves the hat from the floor and dusts it off.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Oh, Charles. Look at what you've done. You've gone and mussed up my new hat. *(He holds it out to have a good look at it.)* It may be unsalvageable. Hmph. Pity.

The American tosses the hat away without looking.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Now that I have your attention, Charles, I have a few questions I've been meaning to ask you.

The American takes a nearby lamp and positions it so that the light shines in The Haberdasher's face, then begins to interrogate him.

THE AMERICAN (Continued)

Are you quite comfortable?

THE HABERDASHER
(*squinting from the harsh light*)

Are you mad?

THE AMERICAN

I'm asking the questions here. (*sincerely*) Don't make me have to get violent. (*Pause.*) Let's start again. Are you quite comfortable?

THE HABERDASHER

Of course not.

THE AMERICAN

Good. Now: what did you do with the buttons?

THE HABERDASHER

The what?

The American smacks The Haberdasher on the head.

THE AMERICAN

Do not answer a question with a question.

THE HABERDASHER

I don't know what you're talking about.

THE AMERICAN

Better. You see? That's a statement, not a question. It's a lie, but still...Let's try one more time: what did you do with the buttons?

The Haberdasher begins to ask again.

THE HABERDASHER

What bu-

The American raises his hand and The Haberdasher stops himself.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

I don't know anything about buttons.

THE AMERICAN

You don't know anything about buttons? But you're a haberdasher! You must know a great deal about buttons.

THE HABERDASHER

Well, yes.

THE AMERICAN

You wouldn't be a very good haberdasher if you knew nothing about buttons.

THE HABERDASHER

Of course.

THE AMERICAN

So you admit that you do know about the buttons.

THE HABERDASHER

Yes. No! I--what buttons are you talking about?

The American smacks him on the head again.

THE AMERICAN

I've warned you repeatedly, Charles. I ask the questions, you answer them. Try again.

THE HABERDASHER

(Beat. Thinking carefully before speaking.)

I do not know to which buttons you refer.

THE AMERICAN

Much better. I'll take you at your word on that. Allow me to clarify: what did you do with the buttons from The Great Good War?

Pause. The Haberdasher appears genuinely confused.

THE HABERDASHER
(not asking; simply repeating)

The buttons from The Great Good War.

THE AMERICAN

Is that a question?

THE HABERDASHER

No! No. I'm just...clarifying. The buttons.

THE AMERICAN

Yes.

THE HABERDASHER

From The Great Good War.

THE AMERICAN

Precisely.

THE HABERDASHER

Do you mean- *(stops quickly, catching himself)* No, let me rephrase: I assume you mean the buttons from the uniforms. The uniforms on which I worked during the war.

The American adjusts the light to scrutinize The Haberdasher more closely.

THE AMERICAN

Why would you assume that?

THE HABERDASHER

Those are not the buttons you mean?

THE AMERICAN

(raises his hand, but doesn't strike)

Ooooooh, that had the inflection of a question, but I suppose, technically, it could be interpreted as a statement, so I'll let that one go. Yes. The buttons from the uniforms on which you worked. Those are, in fact, the buttons that I mean. But...the question remains: why would you assume that?

THE HABERDASHER
(confused; hesitantly; carefully)

Well...I...can't imagine...any other...buttons.

Beat. The American looks closer. Then, decisively:

THE AMERICAN

Nope. That's not it.

THE HABERDASHER

I beg your pardon.

THE AMERICAN

You can beg all you like, but you'll get none. (*Beat. The American suddenly laughs at his own joke.*) But seriously. Were they brass? Let me clarify: were they *real* brass? Not merely brass colored? But genuine, actual brass?

THE HABERDASHER

Well...I suppose. I never really...

THE AMERICAN

Sure you did.

THE HABERDASHER

I...it never occurred to me to ask.

THE AMERICAN

Would you need to ask?

THE HABERDASHER

I...

THE AMERICAN

Wouldn't you be able to tell?

THE HABERDASHER

If they were...

THE AMERICAN

Without asking?

THE HABERDASHER

Well...I suppose I could *now*, but...I'm not sure I could have...*then*.

Pause. The American bursts out in appreciative laughter.

THE AMERICAN

Oh, that's good. That's a very good answer. Very clever. "If we only knew then, what we know now." Eh, Charles?

THE HABERDASHER

I'm telling you for the last time, my name is not Charles.

Instantly furious, The American lunges at The Haberdasher and shouts in his face.

THE AMERICAN

NO! FOR THE LAST TIME / AM TELLING YOU! YOU CAN PLAY YOUR STUPID GAME FOR THE OLD WOMAN AND THE LITTLE GIRL BOY WHICHEVER, YOU CAN PRETEND TO BE SOMEONE YOU ARE NOT, YOU CAN EVEN PRETEND TO KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE BUTTONS! BUT YOU WILL NOT PLAY THAT NAME-GAME WITH ME! I KNOW YOU! I KNOW WHO YOU REALLY ARE!

Suddenly, The Girl Bellboy jumps up and turns on the radio.

THEREMIN SOUNDS erupt loudly.

The lights dim and flicker--as before--as if the radio is depleting the power in the hotel.

The American suddenly releases The Haberdasher and covers his ears--he's in pain.

The Haberdasher and The Queen look on in confusion--no one else is affected the same way; only The American is tortured by the Theremin sounds.

He emits a painful cry.

He reels away from the radio, writhing and contorting in agony.

He cowers in a corner.

The Girl Bellboy allows him to suffer for awhile, then turns off the radio.

The lights fade back up--as before--full and steady.

Instantly, The American is relieved. He trembles, breathing desperately. He looks up at the Girl Bellboy in fear.

She turns on the radio again. Again the Theremin sounds erupt and torture The American. Again, the lights dim and flicker. He wails and twists and squirms into a fetal position trying to protect his ears from the sound, but it's not use. He's at her mercy.

She turns off the radio.

Lights fade back up.

The American whimpers, defeated.

All go dead still.

The Three stare at The American.

The only sound is his weeping...

Which continues for a few moments...

Until...

The Girl Bellboy sings.

It begins soft, gentle, delicate. A high, falsetto aria.

As if from another world.

Heavenly. Ethereal.

In another life, before The Glorious Revolution, perhaps she was classically trained.

Or perhaps she truly is from another world. Either way, all the others gaze at her in amazement, including...

The American, whose pain is eased by this supernatural voice.

The American crawls toward her, toward the opiate of her song. Tears of conflicting emotions run down his cheeks.

He supplicates himself before her.

Her song evolves, builds, grows, and ultimately ascends to a crescendo as she stands over him.

Her song ends. The last note fades into the infinite.

The American looks up at her towering above him.

He is under her spell.

So she picks up the radio...

And smashes it into his head.

The American falls, wounded.

The Haberdasher leaps up, stunned.

The Queen leaps up, exhilarated.

THE QUEEN

HAI

The American staggers to his feet, stumbles, dazed and delirious. Weak. His face smeared with blood.

The Haberdasher comes to his senses, storms over and punches The American in the gut, causing him to double over and put a hand on the floor to catch himself.

While The American totters there trying not to vomit, The Haberdasher calmly strolls to “the interrogation chair,” perhaps whistling or humming a pleasant tune to himself, picks up the chair and places it right behind The American. He then, matter of factly, rockets a punch into The American’s kidneys. The American recoils and--just as planned--The Haberdasher guides him gently into the chair.

The Haberdasher goes to the radio, rips the cord out of it, and uses it to tie The American’s hands behind his back.

The Three circle The American--a pack of wolves around a frightened prey.

The Queen takes up the apple from earlier. She stops in front of The American. With one hand, she grabs a fist-full of The American’s hair and holds his head upright. With the other she shoves the apple in his mouth.

THE QUEEN

Bite it!

The American struggles to eat the apple to prevent it from being shoved down his throat.

THE QUEEN

(pulling the apple away, then forcing it in his mouth again)

Yes. That’s it. Bite it again!

She pulls it away, rotates it, and shoves it in his mouth again.

THE QUEEN

Yes! Eat it! Eat it! EAT IT!

The American struggles as best he can, but finally ends up with the mangled apple core wedged in his mouth. He gasps for air through his nose.

The Queen steps away, somewhat satiated.

The Girl Bellboy steps up to him. She examines him coldly. She leans in close, looks in his eyes. He winces and turns away. She moves again to force eye contact. He winces again and turns away. She relents.

She stands over him.

And spits on him. On his face. He flinches but makes no move against her. He just whimpers and takes it. So she reaches into his pocket, takes out his handkerchief, and rubs the spit off. She repositions herself. She spits. She rubs. He whimpers. She repositions herself again. She spits. She rubs. He whimpers.

On the last round, she moves in close, inhales as if to spit right in his eye, but she doesn't. Instead:

She screams. A shrill, primal, gestalt. Sustained as long as she needs in order to achieve a violent catharsis.

And when she's done, she punctuates her howl with hard slap across his face, knocking the apple core out.

The Girl Bellboy staggers away, somewhat satiated.

The Haberdasher takes up the "interrogation light." He shines it in The American's face.

Pause.

THE HABERDASHER
(matter of fact)

Name?

What? THE AMERICAN
(blinking, discombobulated)

Name? THE HABERDASHER
(blithely)

My name is...John. THE AMERICAN

Instantly, The Haberdasher smacks him in the head.

Name? THE HABERDASHER
(routinely; another chance)

I...I told you...you know...you know my name is John. THE AMERICAN
(stammering)

Again, The Haberdasher instantly smacks him.

Name. THE HABERDASHER
(growing impatient)

The American's eyes search his interrogator for some clue as to what he wants. Seeing nothing, he tries a new tactic.

Okay...okay...my name is...Joe? THE AMERICAN

Another smack.

Name! THE HABERDASHER
(truly irritated)

THE AMERICAN
(stammering, desperate)
Uh...uh...my name is...Bob?

Another smack.

THE HABERDASHER
(no longer a question; a command)
Name!

THE AMERICAN
(pleading)
My name truly is John!

Another smack.

THE HABERDASHER
Name!

THE AMERICAN
George!

Smack.

THE HABERDASHER
Name!

THE AMERICAN
Bill!

Smack.

THE HABERDASHER
NAME!

THE AMERICAN
(crumbling into weeping desperation)
Tom...Sam...Mark...What do you want me to say?! Just tell me what you want
me to say and I'll say it! Please...please...

Pause.

The Haberdasher turns pushes the light closer to The American. Holds it there for a beat. Then, slowly, turns the light onto himself.

THE HABERDASHER

What...is...MY...name?

The American finally understands. Desperately, eagerly, he hopes to give him the right answer.

THE AMERICAN

Charles! Your name is Charles!

The Haberdasher smiles.

The American breathes a gasp of relief.

THE HABERDASHER

Not anymore. *(He turns off the lamp.)* I stopped being Charles, a long time ago.

And with that, The Haberdasher is somewhat satiated.

So he stands upright and, while he talks, begins to make himself more presentable: adjusting his sleeves, straightening his tie, etc.

THE HABERDASHER (Continued)

Yes, I went into The Great Good War as Charles, but I came out the other side a whole new man. Whole. New.

He takes up a discarded hat and places it on The American's head.

THE HABERDASHER (continued)

(to the others)

Now: what shall we do with him?

THE QUEEN

(primal)

Kill him!

THE HABERDASHER

Oh, yes, to be sure. But how, my Queen?

Beat.

THE QUEEN

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

Beat. The Haberdasher frowns curiously at her. She gazes back at him, wild-eyed. Beat. Then they both burst into laughter. Good, healing laughter. The Girl Bellboy, not quite sure what is happening, laughs along too. After a moment, The Haberdasher notices that The American is staring agape.

So he attempts to explain the joke.

THE HABERDASHER

“Off with his head!” she said!

Nothing.

THE HABERDASHER (continued)
(as further explanation)

The Queen. The *Queen* said, “Off with his head!”

Still nothing.

THE HABERDASHER

No? Do you not see the literary allusion? Oh, right, you’re American. Never mind. *(to The Queen)* Ah, Your Majesty, that was delightful. Much needed. And yet, we still must decide what to do with him.

THE QUEEN

(relishing her newfound bloodlust)

Slit his throat!

THE HABERDASHER

Yes, that would do. But so messy.

THE QUEEN

Burn him alive!

Too conspicuous. THE HABERDASHER
(pragmatic)

Bullet in the brain! THE QUEEN

Too noisy. THE HABERDASHER

Throw him off the roof! THE QUEEN

Ah, now there's an idea. *(thinks; reconsiders)* But it would lead the authorities to our door. Although we might be able to sell it as a suicide, it could be tricky. Hmm...

The Queen thinks.

Poison! THE QUEEN
(inspired)

Maybe... THE HABERDASHER
(open-minded)

Rat poison! THE QUEEN

It's very quiet. Discreet. THE HABERDASHER
(pleasantly rational)

Yes, and painful! THE QUEEN

True. THE HABERDASHER
(liking the sound of that)

THE QUEEN

Very painful!

THE HABERDASHER

Very true.

THE QUEEN

His guts will corrode into acid and he'll drown on his own bile!

THE HABERDASHER

Oh, that's delicious. Yes, I rather like that image. Hmm...

The Queen moves toward The American, but The Haberdasher's voice stops her.

THE HABERDASHER

But, there would still be the matter of his body. What to do with the body?
Hmm...

THE QUEEN

(thinking quickly)

We could chop it up into bits and feed it to the rats! And then the rats would die too! Ha!

THE HABERDASHER

(careful not to condescend in any way)

Well, I do like your enthusiasm. However, I'm not certain of the practical application. Although we do have a significant rat problem, to be sure, I doubt it would be sufficient to dispose of the whole body. The meat and muscle, perhaps. But what about the bones?

The Queen realizes her oversight.

THE QUEEN

The bones!

THE HABERDASHER

(nodding)

The bones.

The Haberdasher and The Queen take a moment to think.

The Girl Bellboy steps forward.

They look at her.

Yes, my dear?

THE HABERDASHER

She looks to The Queen.

What is it?

THE QUEEN

She looks back to The Haberdasher.

Have you got an idea?

THE HABERDASHER

The Girl Bellboy nods.

Oh, thank Heavens!

THE QUEEN
(delighted)

What do you think we should do with him?

THE HABERDASHER

Pause.

The Girl Bellboy slowly looks up, then points at the ceiling.

The Haberdasher, The Queen, and The American all look up too.

The Haberdasher figures it out first.

Of course!

THE HABERDASHER

The Queen does not understand.

What?

THE QUEEN

That's brilliant!

THE HABERDASHER
(to The Girl Bellboy)

What's brilliant?

THE QUEEN
(growing excitement)

Why didn't I think of it before?

THE HABERDASHER

Think of what? Tell me!

THE QUEEN
(utterly titillated)

Pause.

He will have been disappeared.

THE HABERDASHER

Oh!

THE QUEEN

Yes!

THE HABERDASHER

That's what we'll do!

THE QUEEN

It's perfect!

THE HABERDASHER

Yes!

THE QUEEN

Oh, my dear girl...

THE HABERDASHER
(to The Girl Bellboy)

THE QUEEN & THE HABERDASHER
(in unison)

...what would we ever do without you?

The Girl Bellboy beams with pride.

The American can take it no longer.

THE AMERICAN

What does that mean?

THE HABERDASHER

What do you mean 'what does that mean?'

THE AMERICAN

What are you going to do to me?

THE HABERDASHER

We've just said what we're going to do to you.

THE AMERICAN

But what does that mean? You're going to make me disappear?

THE HABERDASHER

No no no no no. You will *have been disappeared*.

THE AMERICAN

(confused)

That's what I said.

THE HABERDASHER

No it isn't. You said we were going "to make you disappear." But in point of fact, you will *have been disappeared*.

Beat.

THE AMERICAN

What's the difference?

THE HABERDASHER

Oh, it's all the difference in the world!

THE AMERICAN

STOP PLAYING WITH ME! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

The Haberdasher patronizes him.

THE HABERDASHER

Shhhhhh, there's no use getting yourself all worked up. It's going to happen all the same. Now, you don't deserve any explanations, but I'll give you one anyway. Because I'm a gentleman. And that still counts for something. The difference is this: if we were to *make you disappear*, that would be no better than throwing you off the roof or feeding you to the rats; someone might come looking for you. However...since you will *have been disappeared*...no one will come looking for you. It will be as if you have sunk into a deep, dark sea. A bottomless ocean. No one will come looking for you, because you will have never been.

Pause.

THE AMERICAN

You're insane.

THE HABERDASHER
(genuinely insulted)

I beg your pardon.

The American can't help but laugh.

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE PLAY,
BUT IT IS THE END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE.

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