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TEN TIMES TWO **By David Belke**

Cast

EPHRAIM, a cursed evil doer (appears to be in his thirties)

The HOST, a supernatural observer (ageless)

All the female characters are played by the same actor:

CONSTANCE (1399) a serving girl

Lady ELEANORE Penfield (1475) a lady in waiting

POLLY (1550) a swineherd

SISTER Francesca de la Cruz (1625) a nun

BETSY Parsons (1700) a young woman of London

SIMONE DeLongchamps (1775) a French spy

CATHERINE Ballantyne-Bell (1850) a Scotswoman visiting London

PRU Grevney (1925) an American socialite

WOMAN (2000) a modern businesswoman

CONSTANCE (2075) a historical interpreter

Setting: an inn (later a hotel restaurant, then a historic site) located in Edmonton (later London) from 1399 to 2075

Design notes: The set should be fairly neutral with the costumes carrying the responsibility of demonstrating the chronological setting. The Host can wear something fairly neutral, even anachronistically so considering his supernatural nature. For instance in the original production the Host wore a modern three piece suit with combinations of shirt sleeves and the occasional apron. In the 2006 production the host wore a vest and shirtsleeves reminiscent of a 19th Century clerk.

Act One, Scene One: October 31, 1399

(Night. A private room in an inn located in the town of Edmonton near London. A rough sideboard is located on the right wall, nearby is a similar table with matching chairs. There are few amenities. Although we can hear the sounds of other rather noisy celebrants in the inn or nearby, we see only one person seated at a table. He is not taking part in any sort of merrymaking. He sits at the table with papers and maps spread out before him

working by candlelight. He consults books and makes notations with a quill and parchment. The pile of papers suggests he has been at work for quite some time. An empty stein and the remains of a dinner sit to one side, emptied and now ignored. He is totally absorbed in his work to the exclusion of all else. This is EPHRAIM.

EPHRAIM is a handsome man who appears to be in the prime of life, although he possesses one of those faces that will change little from thirty years old to seventy. He is fit and dressed in the manner of a soldier, although he wears no insignia but he carries himself in manner that suggests experience and status.

Invisibly watching is the HOST. The HOST has the settled features of one who has lived an eventful life, but will probably not change much in the ensuing years. There is intensity in the eyes and a nimbleness of expression that suggests that there may be much more to the HOST than meets the eye. He watches EPHRAIM working with interest, but unnoticed. When he finally speaks it is though he is making a report to some unseen presence.)

HOST

The odd thing is that he should have moved on by now.

In the beginning he filled his life with pleasures, until every possible pleasure had been tasted and retasted. Now the only thing left to distract him from the tedium of the passing years is tormenting the world. Much like a child pulling the wings off butterflies.

Yes, my friends. The same old story.

With the usurper Henry on the throne and the former King Richard still alive in prison, the unsteady politics of this sceptre'd isle were too good a game for him to miss. As always his deviltries have been meticulous. Clockwork treasures of precise timing and underhanded strategy.

(As EPHRAIM works and the HOST reports, CONSTANCE enters through an inner door. EPHRAIM studiously ignores her. She carries a pitcher of ale.

CONSTANCE is a lovely woman, her beauty hidden under a few layers of kitchen grime and muss, but her eyes sparkle with intelligence. She possesses a lively wit and a fierce honesty. She works at the inn as barmaid and is dressed in a simple dress that remarkably enough shows her off in fine fashion.

While EPHRAIM continues working and CONSTANCE sets about doing her job of wiping down the table, clearing the dishes and refilling EPHRAIM's stein they do so with meticulous unconscious choreography. As soon as EPHRAIM lifts a document to study it, CONSTANCE is wiping the space it formerly occupied. As soon as CONSTANCE tips the

pitcher, EPHRAIM moves his stein beneath it. Neither of them is aware of their natural synchronicity.)

HOST (continuing his report)

Last week he arrived in little Edmonton town. Close enough to the London court to meet the King and yet far enough away that no one would mark his presence. A few whispered words to the monarch concerning the dangers of keeping a defeated foe alive. A few offhanded speculations about how rebel nobles need only a symbol to rally 'round. And suddenly the deadly game is in motion. And the fate of an imprisoned king is all but sealed.

But the odd thing is that he should have moved on by now. And yet he stays.

(The immaculate choreography misses a beat and EPHRAIM and CONSTANCE's hand touch. They immediately lock eyes. A moment is shared, but it is quickly broken with a little embarrassment on both sides.)

CONSTANCE (with a slight Irish lilt)

Sorry.

(EPHRAIM returns to his work, determinedly ignoring the moment. CONSTANCE bustles off, but pauses before her exit.)

HOST

Why?

(Making a decision, CONSTANCE returns to the table.)

CONSTANCE

Excuse me, sir, if you will, but there's something everyone here has been wondering. And it comes down to me since you'll be having none but me serve you, though you've not said a word to me in all this time. So asking I am. You see... all of us have been wondering what you've been doing back here away from all the house. (pause) No need to tell me if you're not wanting to.

(EPHRAIM makes no move from his work, but as she talks CONSTANCE has been craning over a shoulder trying to get a glimpse of the papers.)

EPHRAIM (without looking up)

Can you read?

CONSTANCE (quickly drawing back)

Nay. Of course not.

EPHRAIM
Good.

CONSTANCE
And what would you be doing if I said I could read? (Without even looking at her, EPHRAIM stabs a dagger into the table top.) How right they are when they say ignorance is bliss.

(EPHRAIM does not even acknowledge the comment. He continues scratching out notations. CONSTANCE begins humming to herself *Greensleeves*.)

HOST
Notice he's being uncharacteristically forgiving. No really. There are, after all, other places to put a dagger.

EPHRAIM
What is that infernal noise you're making?

CONSTANCE
It's called a song. It's something we common folk like to amuse ourselves with.

EPHRAIM
I don't find it amusing.

CONSTANCE
That's fair. I don't find you terribly amusing yourself.

EPHRAIM
You had best learn to tame that tongue of yours or else no man will have you.

CONSTANCE
And what makes you think I ha' no man already?

EPHRAIM (retrieving his dagger)
A few minutes of your company are enough to convince me that you are a maid. I think we had best end this conversation.

CONSTANCE
Then would you like to dance?

EPHRAIM
What?

CONSTANCE

Your men are celebrating All Hallows Eve. You look like you could use a break from your work and I'm in the mood to dance.

EPHRAIM

I do not... dance.

CONSTANCE

Oh you poor thing. I would be taking dancing over reading any day. Dancing makes a person sociable. All reading does is make a person nearsighted. Don't you agree?

EPHRAIM

This conversation is over.

CONSTANCE

As you wish. (turning to go) I'll allow you to plan your treason in private.

EPHRAIM

Treason?

CONSTANCE

(leaping for the opening) Ah. That caught your ear, didn't it?

EPHRAIM

What makes you think I plan such a thing?

CONSTANCE

You are in a disreputable inn whose only quality of note is obscurity. You have at hand a covey of quarrelsome knights and horse that bear neither badge nor sign of allegiance. I am no fool, sir. What you plan is either treason or the most secretive equestrian event ever staged.

HOST

Here it comes.

EPHRAIM

For a scullion you are remarkably clever.

CONSTANCE

Too clever some say.

HOST

He has no choice but to kill her now.

EPHRAIM
That seems so.

HOST
The only question now is how he will do the deed.

EPHRAIM (reaching for his dagger)
It's time to settle this once and for all.

HOST
A blade across the throat? A dagger through the heart?

CONSTANCE
Right you are.

(Quickly and suddenly CONSTANCE pulls EPHRAIM into an embrace and kisses him fully on the lips. EPHRAIM endures it stoically. When the kiss ends, he breaks away trying to keep some semblance of his dignity.)

CONSTANCE
There are some who say my kisses are sweeter than wine.

EPHRAIM
They obviously lack my experienced pallet.

HOST
Extraordinary.

EPHRAIM (returning to the table)
I wish to return to my work.

HOST
There should be bloodshed.

CONSTANCE
But we have kissed, sir.

HOST
There should be murder.

EPHRAIM
It would take more than a kiss to distract me.

HOST
But I actually think he's going to let her live.

CONSTANCE
Then I guess you win this bout.

HOST
He's giving up?

EPHRAIM
I never lose.

HOST (disbelieving)
Never...

CONSTANCE
Never?

EPHRAIM
Never. I always win in the end.

HOST (closing in for nearer observation.)
What is going through his mind?

EPHRAIM
There is still one matter that needs to be addressed. You know far too much.

HOST
There we are.

EPHRAIM
I dare not let you live.

HOST
Back on track.

CONSTANCE
There is, of course, a way of securing my cooperation.

EPHRAIM (laughing with some relief)
And what would you like in return for your sealed lips? Riches? My horse and men? Or perhaps you wish to bed me?

CONSTANCE

Please, sir. If I had wished to seduce you, you would not have been the wiser.

EPHRAIM

You think yourself subtle?

CONSTANCE

Subtle enough.

EPHRAIM

I have seen little evidence of it.

CONSTANCE

That's how subtle I am.

EPHRAIM

So what treasure do you desire?

CONSTANCE

I ask your name.

EPHRAIM

Is that all?

CONSTANCE

It is enough.

EPHRAIM

(beat) Ephraim.

CONSTANCE

Constance.

EPHRAIM (nodding at the introduction)

Constance.

CONSTANCE

Sir Ephraim. (beat) There is one more thing. One more question.

EPHRAIM

You are a maddening gadfly of curiosity, maid.

CONSTANCE

Constance, sir. My name is Constance.

EPHRAIM

Then leave me in peace, Constance.

CONSTANCE

It's about Old Tom-

EPHRAIM

Enough. Do not try my patience.

(EPHRAIM returns to his work. CONSTANCE hovers, uncertain whether to leave or go, but she watches him carefully.)

HOST

Our Ephraim is actually practicing... (searching for the unfamiliar word) restraint? Engaging in.... banter? Letting a potential threat go free? This is... Unprecedented.

Friends. With your permission, I should like to personally investigate.

(And now the HOST inhabits the same space as EPHRAIM. He approaches is subject cautiously having adopted the role of a harried and diffident inn keeper.)

HOST

Excuse me. Sir? I hope you were not disturbed.

EPHRAIM

What?

HOST

Constance, sir. I know she can be difficult.

CONSTANCE

Excuse me?

HOST

Silence, girl. You are disturbing our patron.

CONSTANCE

You have your nerve.

EPHRAIM

It would take more than a barmaid to disturb me. (beat) Who are you?

CONSTANCE

That's what I'd like to know.

HOST

I am the Host.

CONSTANCE

The host?

HOST

I attend the customers. Make certain you have what you desire.

EPHRAIM

I require peace and solitude.

HOST

I've been watching you, sir, and correct me if I'm wrong: but you *were* planning on leaving.

EPHRAIM

I am. I will.

HOST

Days ago?

EPHRAIM

I changed my mind.

HOST

As you say, sir.

CONSTANCE

And why did you do that?

EPHRAIM

Do you think I have nothing better to do than answer questions of everyone who happens to wander into the room?

HOST

Not at all, sir. But I am curious-

CONSTANCE

As am I. There's one thing. One small question. It's just I've been sort of waiting for the right moment, see? The fact is-

HOST

Have you not disturbed this gentleman enough, girl?

EPHRAIM

No. Let her ask her question. Then perhaps I shall finally be free of her.

CONSTANCE (with attitude)

You're too kind.

HOST (making a judgment)

Too kind indeed.

EPHRAIM

What is your question ?

CONSTANCE

Have you been here before?

EPHRAIM

Edmonton?

CONSTANCE

Yes.

EPHRAIM

(beat) No.

CONSTANCE

Oh. There you are then. Sorry to disturb you. (turns to go, then turns back) Have you met Old Tom, sir?

EPHRAIM

Old Tom again?

CONSTANCE

Old Tom, sir. Have you met him?

EPHRAIM

The old man at the door?

CONSTANCE

No, that's Old Ned.

EPHRAIM

The one in the stable then.

CONSTANCE

No, that would be Old Pete. That's Young Pete's father and Old Ned's uncle. Old Pete's the ostler, Old Ned just lives down the road and likes to come in for a spell. Old Ned's eyes aren't what they used to be, nor are Young Pete's either. Strangely enough Old Pete can see better than Young Pete and of course better than Old Ned. But it was Old Tom I was talking about.

EPHRAIM

I couldn't tell.

CONSTANCE

The fact is Old Tom seems to remember seeing you nigh on sixty years ago. Back when the Black Prince got it into his head to invade France. Old Tom, his eyes are as sharp as ever they were, and Old Tom says you looked just as you did today. Sixty years ago.

EPHRAIM

Seems unlikely, doesn't it?

HOST

Unnatural to say the least.

CONSTANCE

There are stories, sir, of men. Mysterious men. Men who stir up trouble and delight in sowing mischief in the world. Starting wars. Toppling kings. Turning brother against brother-

EPHRAIM

Humanity is more than capable of creating its own miseries.

CONSTANCE

And what the stories say is that such men never die. They live 'tween heaven and hell. Cursed to walk the earth for all eternity. Who knows why?

EPHRAIM

I'm sure I don't.

HOST

Pride. That's what I've heard. It is always the one who thinks more of himself than the rest of the world.

EPHRAIM

But then the common stock of humanity is barely worthy of respect.

HOST

Or affection?

EPHRAIM

Yes. (turning to CONSTANCE) Now is your curiosity sated? Or must I kill you to get some peace?

CONSTANCE

Peace is easily gotten, sir. One needs but cut off one's own ears. But before you resort to self mutilation, sir, will there be anything else you'll be needing?

EPHRAIM

Tell my men to saddle up. We leave within the hour.

CONSTANCE

I hope it was nothing I said.

EPHRAIM

You have a high opinion of yourself. We have matters of our own. We must ride to Pomfret.

CONSTANCE

(smiling) Whatever you say, sir. (starts to exit)

EPHRAIM

One more thing. I just threatened your life.

CONSTANCE

Aye. I noticed that too.

EPHRAIM

Have you no fear, maid?

CONSTANCE

I could not stop you if you tried, sir. Although you would not have found it as easy a task as you might think. (she removes EPHRAIM's dagger from her bodice) Perhaps that kiss was more distracting than you thought. (exits humming *Greensleeves*)

(EPHRAIM watches her go in astonishment. He searches his person to confirm that the knife is indeed gone. He shakes his head in admiration.)

HOST

You know, I was wondering something myself. But now I seem to have an answer.

EPHRAIM

What are you talking about?

HOST

Myself and a few concerned parties were confused by your decision to stay here.

EPHRAIM

I had work to do. (beat) What?

HOST

We both know the real reason you stayed.

EPHRAIM

Oh?

HOST

Her.

EPHRAIM

Who?

HOST

Her.

EPHRAIM

The barmaid?

HOST

Her. You fancy her.

EPHRAIM

Me?

HOST
You.

EPHRAIM
Her?

HOST
Her.

EPHRAIM
Never.

HOST
Then why have you overstayed your time? Why have you insisted that she is the only one to serve you? Why do you let her talk to you that way?

EPHRAIM
She's only a serving girl. I have met and bedded dozens.

HOST
Then I suppose you could win her as you have so many in the past.

EPHRAIM
If I wanted to.

HOST
Why haven't you?

EPHRAIM
I've been busy. I've had work to do. Maps and stuff. You see all this stuff?

HOST
You're afraid of her.

EPHRAIM
You're awfully opinionated for an inn keeper.

HOST
Host. Not inn keeper. Are you afraid of Constance?

EPHRAIM
Of course not.

HOST

Prove it. I am willing to bet that you cannot win the love of that woman.

EPHRAIM

I am leaving.

HOST

Come back.

EPHRAIM

I have business elsewhere.

HOST

It can wait.

EPHRAIM (exiting)

I don't have time for this.

HOST

You have all the time in the world. (EPHRAIM freezes in the doorway, he turns to regard the HOST) All you need do is cause Constance to honestly confess her love to you.

EPHRAIM

Women say I love you with the passing of a breeze.

HOST

Ah, but to say it and to mean it. That is the germ of the wager.

EPHRAIM

And what do you get out of this?

HOST

An opportunity to observe you in action.

EPHRAIM

I will not perform for your amusement.

HOST

Think of it as a gentleman's wager. A challenge. A point of... pride.

EPHRAIM

(beat) I never lose.

HOST

Then this serving girl should pose you no difficulty. Have we a bet?

EPHRAIM

(pause) Done. (to seal the bargain the HOST and EPHRAIM grasp forearms, shake and then spit) At least this will provide some diversion. (he gathers his documents) I shall return in Spring.

HOST

I shall be here. *We* shall be here.

EPHRAIM

(snorts) Hardly a challenge. It shall be over in an instant. (EPHRAIM exits.)

HOST

(addressing his audience) My friends, I should like to propose an experiment.

The subject Ephraim seems to have unexpectedly and spontaneously developed an affection for the random factor Constance. This is the first time in over four hundred years of self centred life that the subject has cared for anyone save himself. So the question is: can one such as he, a malcontent, a manipulator and misanthrope, look beyond himself long enough to honestly win the love of an honest woman?

I think I shall enjoy dissecting him. It's so nice to have something to look forward to in the future.

(FADE OUT)

Act One, Scene Two: November 1, 1400

(The same inner room as the previous scene 10 months later. The place is quiet and empty. EPHRAIM enters directly from the road.)

EPHRAIM

Innkeeper! Host! Where is my bar maid?

(The HOST enters. There a grave air about him.)

HOST

You seem in high spirits.

EPHRAIM

It has been a most entertaining year. Open rebellion in Wales. A rising of the barons against the crown. And the former King Richard murdered in his prison cell.

HOST

A most entertaining year.

EPHRAIM

But as much as I enjoy your company, dear Host, I must ask you to send straight away for the barmaid.

HOST

Constance.

EPHRAIM

I have not forgotten our wager. And the way I feel today, I can win the heart of any wench alive.

HOST

What is your plan?

EPHRAIM

I have but to arrive and she shall have no choice but to love me. So where is...?

HOST

Constance.

EPHRAIM

Yes. Constance.

HOST

She waited for you. All through Spring she would wait outside the door with one eye on the road watching for your return

EPHRAIM

Well, she shall wait no longer. Where is the lucky strumpet?

HOST

She is dead.

EPHRAIM

What? (pause, then with a sly smile) You lie.

HOST

Last month. She was looking for you or perhaps news of your arrival. A soldier fleeing from the rebellions arrived and Constance went to meet him. The horseman was desperate to be on his way for it would mean his head if he was caught. But she was insistent and would not let him get away without a word about Sir Ephraim.

EPHRAIM

I see.

HOST

A bodkin was drawn. Before any knew what was going on the soldier was off and Constance was in the dust. (EPHRAIM is silent, weighing his emotions.) I have something for you. I believe she wanted you to have it. (The HOST removes the dagger from a pocket. He passes it to EPHRAIM who solemnly accepts it. Silence.)

EPHRAIM

I... see. (beat) So ends our wager.

HOST

As I recall, you agreed to win the love of a certain woman.

EPHRAIM

Who is now beyond my reach.

HOST

Perhaps not. Have you ever heard Old Pete talk of old souls? Old Pete believes, and it is a belief I share, that certain souls are reborn through the ages.

EPHRAIM

Ridiculous.

HOST

I believe Constance will come back. And if she does then our wager still stands. If you were to come back to this place in seventy-five years time say, then you might find her returned.

EPHRAIM

Seventy-five years?

HOST

That should be enough time for her to find her way back to this mortal plane.

EPHRAIM

But seventy-five years... (beat) What would happen if one were to come back in seventy-five years?

HOST

Hypothetically speaking, if one were to come back in seventy-five years, they would have to honour all their commitments.

EPHRAIM

Like our wager?

HOST

It would be a point of pride.

EPHRAIM

Hypothetically speaking.

HOST

And hypothetically, if *you* were to come back...

EPHRAIM

Yes?

HOST

You would have another opportunity to get Constance to say she loves you.

EPHRAIM

But what makes you think she would return here? Theoretically she could return anywhere in the world.

HOST

I would be willing to trust in Fate.

EPHRAIM

You don't know Fate the way I do.

HOST

I am only speaking in theory.

EPHRAIM

Of course.

HOST

Of course. (beat) Then the wager stands?

(He holds out his hand to renew the handshake. EPHRAIM studies this for a moment and then grasps the HOST's forearm.)

EPHRAIM

In theory.

(They spit)

HOST

Good. (EPHRAIM begins to exit) 'Til 1475 then?

EPHRAIM & HOST

Hypothetically.

(EPHRAIM exits)

HOST

(addressing the audience) Yes, I know. This will take a little longer than expected. But time is hardly the issue, is it? Now one more thing. Can I get the proper forms to make an application to Fate? Amongst other things, I need to arrange a rebirth.

(BLACK OUT)

Act One, Scene Three: November 1, 1475

(The Inn, seventy five years later. Little has changed in the intervening years. The HOST wipes down EPHRAIM's old table. EPHRAIM confidently enters.)

HOST

Can I help you?

EPHRAIM

I have come to woo and win a woman's heart.

HOST

Try down the street. On the corner where the sailors gather.

EPHRAIM

I am looking for the barmaid Constance.

HOST

Ah. You must be Ephraim.

EPHRAIM

You know me?

HOST

I am a descendent of this inn's host who you met so many years past.

EPHRAIM

Now that you mention it, I do see some passing family resemblance.

HOST

My father insisted you'd be coming back, but I could scarce believe it. A man who lives forever.

EPHRAIM

You get used to it.

HOST

The wager is still on. We have been waiting for your return. My father and my father's father. We have all been told to expect your coming on this date. November 1, 1475.

EPHRAIM

Fine, fine. Send me the woman. I'm off to France come morning. I can hardly wait to escape this miserable island.

HOST

I am sorry that you have suffered.

EPHRAIM

Oh, I've found ways to amuse myself. I set up a diverting little contest between the Lords York and Lancaster. You have no idea how whimsical it is to organize a war based on floral arrangements. But enough. Send in Constance.

HOST

There is something I should warn you. About Constance...

(Lady ELEANORE Penfield enters. Physically, she looks exactly like CONSTANCE, but that's where the resemblance ends. She is dressed as a lady of the court. She carries herself with regal bearing of one used to looking down on people. She carries a palm sized book.)

HOST
(bowing) Milady.

ELEANORE
I was hopeful thou might have some word about the carriage.

HOST
The ostler is replacing the wheel even as we speak.

ELEANORE
Fugit irreparabile tempus. (translation: we cannot stop time in its tracks) In the meantime I thought I should come in here and read my psalter. The air in the common house was getting far too... (notices EPHRAIM) common.

HOST
What ever pleases milady.

(ELEANORE seats herself at the table, paying not a moment's attention to EPHRAIM posed heroically at the table's end. She reads.)

EPHRAIM
So. Benn a while. (shares his laugh with the HOST, ELEANORE pointedly refuses to notice, EPHRAIM takes a masculine pose) You know you love me. And I like you. So what do you say? Just tell me how much you adore me and we can both be on our way. (pause) Hello? Hello. (ELEANORE ignoring everything, continues reading) I thought you said you couldn't read.

ELEANORE
Pardon?

EPHRAIM
Just making conversation.

ELEANORE
Thou art making a thing in which no one has any interest but thee.

EPHRAIM
(pause) So. You read. That's kind of special. Do you know *Caesar's Commentaries*?

ELEANORE
(sighing) I read Latin and Greek, sirrah. *Satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. (enough eloquence, too little wisdom)*

HOST

And what about English?

ELEANORE

'Tis a peasant's tongue appropriate for herding sheep and selling eggs at the daily market.

EPHRAIM

We are certainly in agreement there. The sooner I am out of England, the happier I'll be.

ELEANORE

Another point of agreement, sirrah. The sooner thou art out of England, the happier I'll be. *Ite, missa est. (go, the mass is ended)*

(ELEANORE reads. EPHRAIM stares at her, then he pulls the HOST off to converse.)

EPHRAIM

What happened to her?

HOST

She is Lady Eleanore Penfield now.

EPHRAIM

Then that isn't Constance.

(While reading, ELEANORE begins to hum *Greensleeves*. EPHRAIM stares at ELEANORE.)

HOST

I would say that there is still something of Constance buried in there.

EPHRAIM

Then it's only a matter of reacquainting her with my charm. (crosses to ELEANORE still absorbed in her book.) Has anyone ever told you that you are the most beautiful woman in the world?

ELEANORE (beat, considers)

Yes.

EPHRAIM

Oh (beat) Do you want to see my dagger? (makes a rude gesture with his dagger)

ELEANORE
Host? Where are my men?

EPHRAIM
Perhaps this will restore some memories.

(EPHRAIM boldly kisses ELEANORE. ELEANORE pushes him away.)

ELEANORE (leaving, to the HOST)
Hitch up the horses. We're leaving.

HOST
But they're still attaching the wheel.

ELEANORE
Then we'll go on three.

(ELEANORE tries to leave, but EPHRAIM remains in pursuit, blocking every exit)

EPHRAIM
You love me. Admit it! (to HOST) Tell her!

ELEANORE
Thou must allowst me to leave.

EPHRAIM
Your father told you the story. And your father's father.

HOST
My father told me not to water the wine. Who listens to fathers?

ELEANORE
Dost thou know who I am?

EPHRAIM
You love me.

ELEANORE
I am Lady Eleanore Penfield.

EPHRAIM
You have to love me.

ELEANORE

I wait upon the queen.

EPHRAIM

And no one's leaving this room until you admit it.

ELEANORE (pause, then)

If I told thee that I loved thee wouldst thou let me go?

EPHRAIM

Yes.

ELEANORE

I love thee. Now may I go?

EPHRAIM

No.

ELEANORE

Why not?

EPHRAIM

You have to honestly mean it when you say it.

ELEANORE (pause)

Host?

HOST

Yes, milady?

ELEANORE

I have a small favour to ask of thee.

HOST

Yes milady.

ELEANORE

I leave the manner to thy choosing, but I would be greatly obliged if some time in the next minute or so thou foundest some way to render this lunatic unconscious.

HOST

Me?

ELEANORE

Or simply restrain him in some way. I am open to suggestions.

EPHRAIM (drawing his dagger and threatening)

No one is going anywhere. Not until somebody loves me.

HOST

Milady, perhaps it would be best if you allowed this gentleman a moment of your time. I know he seems a little unbalanced, but he is... Milady?

ELEANORE (Frozen, she stares at the dagger in EPHRAIM's hand.)

That dagger. I have the strangest sense... Is it possible that I might have seen it before?

EPHRAIM

You took this knife while you kissed me.

ELEANORE

I kissed you?

(EPHRAIM and ELEANORE start closing together.)

EPHRAIM

Do you remember how you felt?

ELEANORE

I'm not sure...

EPHRAIM

Do you remember what you said?

ELEANORE

It was so long ago.

HOST

Fascinating.

EPHRAIM

Temporis ars medicina fere est. (time is a great healer)

HOST

He has reached her.

ELEANORE

Tempus omnia revelat. (time reveals all things)

HOST

After all these years.

(They are closing for a kiss. The HOST watches with fascination.)

EPHRAIM

Constance?

ELEANORE (Irish lilt)

Aye?

HOST

Extraordinary.

EPHRAIM

Tell me that you love me.

ELEANORE

Why?

HOST

Because then he'll win the bet.

(The moment freezes. Then ELEANORE strikes EPHRAIM a blow that throws him to the ground.)

ELEANORE

Bet? Am I to be the prize in some sort of vulgar contest?

EPHRAIM

It's nothing like that.

HOST

Though something awfully similar.

ELEANORE

If I ever see either of thee again I shall have thee arrested or thrown in chains or worse.
Good evening, sirs.

(ELEANORE wheels out of the room. EPHRAIM painfully lifts himself from the ground. He retrieves his dagger from where it fell. The HOST watches silently.)

HOST

Well, that settles the wager, sir. You came very close there, but I think we've established that-

EPHRAIM

She recognized me.

HOST

What?

EPHRAIM

That was Constance. I nearly had her.

HOST

But had is not the same as having, sir.

EPHRAIM

I've only just learned the rules of this game.

HOST

All is done.

EPHRAIM

I must try again.

HOST

She'll have you arrested.

EPHRAIM

Give her another seventy five years and she'll calm down.

HOST

Seventy five years?

EPHRAIM

She'll be coming back. And when she does, I'll be waiting.

HOST

You're coming back?

EPHRAIM

And when I return it shall be in a manner sure to dazzle the eyes and soften even the coldest heart. I shall play the lord and shower her with silks and jewels and the finest things of this world. How could she resist me then?

HOST

But...

EPHRAIM

'Til 1550 then. I look forward to meeting your son's son's son. (he starts to exit and then pauses in the door.) Did you see? For a moment there, just a moment, she knew me.

(EPHRAIM exits. The HOST is left alone. He addresses the air as he has before.)

HOST

Well. It looks like he's coming back. Based on the slightest possibility of her return. Amazing.

At least he believed me when I said I was a descendent.

In the meantime we had better get on the paperwork again. After all, if we're to be expecting a lord, we really should have a lady waiting for him, eh?

De bono et malo. (come what may)

(FADE OUT)

Act One, Scene Four: November 1, 1550

(The Inn seventy five years later. There are some signs of the advancing years, but on the whole the back room has remained much the way it has. The HOST sets an elegant spread in preparation for two diners.

EPHRAIM enters. He is dressed in a fine, noble Tudor costume. He walks with the air of a man resigned to his Fate, and it is not a pleasant one. Spotting the wine, he crosses over and pours himself a draught. He downs it in a single gulp.)

HOST

There you are, sir. Find your lady, did you?

EPHRAIM

Yes, yes. I did.

HOST
And where is she?

EPHRAIM
Outside. Tending to her... things.

HOST
The meal is prepared just the way you instructed. Although I did have the devil's own time poaching the quail's eggs. I'm afraid they're a little runny.

EPHRAIM
I don't think that will matter.

HOST
No. I imagine the two of you will be spending the evening gazing into each other's eyes. (EPHRAIM visualizes this for a moment and then downs a huge swig of wine.) I suppose she was very impressed by the silks you brought.

EPHRAIM
Very impressed. In fact she blew her nose in them.

HOST
Excuse me?

POLLY
(off stage) Effy!

EPHRAIM
Ah here comes the delicate blossom now.

(POLLY enters tornadically. A peasant girl, barefoot and dressed in the very filthy raiment of one who herds swine for a living. She is very excited by the unexpected turn her day has undergone.)

POLLY
Whoosh! Will ye look at this place. I heard they had places like this and all, but I never seen one as fancy as this. An' look here. Yet another room and still they got wood on ground.

HOST
Wood on ground?

EPHRAIM

She's very impressed with flooring.

POLLY

Look at this Effy, they put blanket on table.

EPHRAIM

It's a tablecloth, Polly. It keeps the crumbs off the table.

POLLY

Oh, ye won't have to worry about crumbs on table. Not way I eat.

HOST (aside to EPHRAIM)

If you want to surrender the wager, I would completely understand.

EPHRAIM

Not on your life.

HOST

It's not my life that's on the line, sir.

EPHRAIM

Just fetch me a bottle of wine. This campaign shall be won in the hour.

(The HOST crosses to the sideboard to fetch and pour some wine, but he keeps one eye on the action at the table. POLLY has been inspecting the meals laid out for them. She is humming *Greensleeves*. EPHRAIM steels himself for the task at hand.)

EPHRAIM

Lovely song you're humming. A folk ballad is it?

POLLY

Folk sing it, yeah.

EPHRAIM

That's *Greensleeves* isn't it?

POLLY

Wha?

EPHRAIM

That's the title of the song?

POLLY

Don't recall much about sleevery in song.

EPHRAIM

Isn't that the one about the knight pledging his undying love to a lady in green sleeves?

POLLY

Oh, I think you got that mixed up. You see it's a story about this traveling knight who comes to this farm, see? Now farmer says "You stay away from my daughter you dirty knight" and knight promises. But that evening in barn-

EPHRAIM

Yes. I can see. Completely different.

POLLY

It's a very funny song. There's this bit with sheep-

EPHRAIM

Is that wine ready yet?

HOST

The wine's been corked. I'll fetch another bottle, sir.

EPHRAIM

Hurry. (HOST exits) So. Polly. You said you were hungry?

POLLY

Aye. I've naught to eat in all time I've come to market late as I am.

EPHRAIM

But you've traveled all the way from Blackpool. Surely you must have had something to eat.

POLLY

Ah, pigs ate all turnips I was carryin'. I've naught but what I could dig up 'long road. Found a lovely carcass in brambles. That kept me goin' for a day or two. But you know that's not hardly enough.

EPHRAIM

I know what you mean. Two days of carcass and I'm ready for something new.

POLLY

I wasn't even planning to stop here, 'cept bridge got washed out and I didn't want to get pigs wet.

EPHRAIM

God forbid *they* should be washed.

POLLY

So, is it time to eat now or are we waitin' for everyone else to show up?

EPHRAIM

There is no one else, my sweet. This meal is just for the two of us.

POLLY

All this? Lord love ye, Effy, but ye sure know how to show girl a good time. Shall we dig in?

EPHRAIM

In just a moment. I want to tell you how irresistible I find you.

POLLY

You can do that while we eat. Come on. (immediately starts shoveling food in her mouth)

EPHRAIM

As I was saying-

POLLY

What's matter? Aren't ye going to dig in?

EPHRAIM

I have no need to eat. I am sustained by the mere sight of your delicate beauty.

POLLY

Oh, Effy. (beat) So can I have what's on your plate?

EPHRAIM

Sure. Why not?

(POLLY dumps the food from EPHRAIM's plate on to her own and resumes eating.)

HOST

(entering) So, how's it going? Have you won her heart?

EPHRAIM

I keep reaching for her heart but apparently her stomach is getting in the way.

POLLY

Hey! Did ye make this stuff?

HOST

Lord Ephraim supplied the ingredients, I merely prepared the meal.

POLLY

Good on ye. Have ye eaten yet?

HOST

Not yet. I have other duties-

POLLY

Well, pull up chair and dig in. Effy's not eating. He's eating my beauty. Right?

EPHRAIM

I find you absolutely spellbinding. I adore-

POLLY

Come on. There's enough of this stuff to go 'round. (The HOST sits. POLLY pours some of the mixture from the two plates back on to what is now the HOST's plate. He smiles weakly.) Dig in. It's good.

EPHRAIM (to HOST)

Better than carcass.

POLLY

God's honest truth.

EPHRAIM

Please, Polly. We must talk. The food will still be here.

POLLY

I don't know. (indicating the HOST) That one seems to have a lean and hungry look about him.

(POLLY is about to dig in again, but EPHRAIM grabs her jaw and her attention.)

EPHRAIM

Polly, listen to me. What I am about to say is very important. Are you listening?

POLLY

Ye're not letting me eat, so I guess I have no choice.

EPHRAIM

Has anyone ever told you that you are the most beautiful woman in the world?

POLLY

(pause, then laughing) Oh, go on wit' ye.

EPHRAIM

No, it's true. It's really true.

POLLY

Oh. Pull t'other. (lifts her leg nearly suffocating EPHRAIM and the HOST with the stench)

EPHRAIM

No. Really. I honestly think that you're really, really, really... beautiful.

POLLY

Well, I do tries to take care of meself.

EPHRAIM

And it shows.

POLLY

My Da says I'm prettiest of all his girls.

EPHRAIM

I have no doubt.

POLLY

Mind ye, he's blind and all.

HOST

I have no doubt.

EPHRAIM

You're the dawn after a long, dark night of solitude. You're the perfect rose left unplucked for none would dare touch its refinement. You are a nonpareil.

POLLY

Whoosh. A girl could really fall for man like you.

EPHRAIM

Are you saying you love me?

POLLY (there is a moment of connection)

Ephraim...?

EPHRAIM

Yes?

POLLY (the moment is quickly dropped)

Ye goin' to have that bun?

EPHRAIM

Polly, please. We are meant to be together. Forever. It's destiny.

POLLY (chewing on the bun, considering)

Listen, Effy. I like you. I really do. But come on. What are we supposed to do? Move out to father's pig farm together? Excuse me for thinking so, but I don't see a lord like you pourin' slop out in Blackpool.

EPHRAIM

Then come live with me and be my love.

POLLY

Well, I can't really see that workin' either. You live in palaces like this place wit' wood on ground and more'n one room and fancy dinners. You probably even pal around with people who bathe for fun. Flattered as I am, it's not goin' to work. Sorry. 'Ere, ye got any more of this stuff?

HOST

I have a pheasant on the spit. Then oranges and mince pie to follow.

POLLY

Can ye wrap it all up for me? Pigs need to be fed.

EPHRAIM

You're feeding pheasant to the pigs? How could you?

POLLY

Like I said, Effy. We come from two different worlds you and I. You have spreads like this every day I'm thinking, but if pigs aren't healthy then it's a long cold winter for us all.

EPHRAIM

Polly. Please don't go. (impulsively) I'll move on to the pig farm with you. I'll give up everything to be with you.

POLLY (smiling wistfully)

Thank ye for the meal, Effy. Ye've given me a story to tell, that's for sure.

(POLLY goes to exit, then pauses. She rushes back to EPHRAIM and kisses him fully on the lips)

POLLY

Don't worry ye'll find your girl. Just keep tryin'. (While the two have been talking, the HOST has been packing the meal into a basket. POLLY crosses over to get the sack, the HOST winces as POLLY takes the packed meal. She starts to exit, but seeing the morose EPHRAIM she pauses, then sings to the tune of *Greensleeves*)

"The knight and maid
laid down in hay
to spend the night most sweetly

She embraced her knight
and said with fright.
'tis that your sword or are ye just happy to meet me?"

(POLLY smiles proudly and exits.)

HOST

Did you mean that?

EPHRAIM

What?

HOST

Did you really intend to follow her to the pig farm?

EPHRAIM

Don't be stupid. Next time it will be better.

HOST

Next time?

EPHRAIM

This time she actually said she liked me. It's bound to go better next time. (getting up)

HOST
What makes you so certain?

EPHRAIM
How could it go any worse? (exits)

(BLACK OUT)

Act One, Scene Five: November 1, 1625

(The inn. EPHRAIM, dressed in Elizabethan costume is seated at one end of the bare table unsure as to how to proceed. At the other end of the table sits SISTER Francesca de la Cruz, a Spanish nun. She smiles innocently. Throughout this scene nobody moves from their chairs. Silence. EPHRAIM screws up his courage.)

EPHRAIM
Has anyone ever told you-?

SISTER
What?

EPHRAIM
Never mind.

SISTER
(Silence) Señor Ephraim may I say something rather personal?

EPHRAIM
I rather you didn't.

SISTER
But I must. You see... Were it not for my vows I think I could fall completely in love with you.

EPHRAIM
That's just what I was afraid of.

(Silence.)

(FADE OUT.)

Act One, Scene Six: November 1, 1700

(The same room of the Inn. The HOST enters. He lays out two new table settings. He is surprised by the appearance of his unseen audience.)

HOST
What?

Well, I happen to think it's proceeding very nicely.

That's not the point. The point is that the subject has changed. Each encounter has been altering him. Look at the last one. He didn't even try hitting on that nun.

One more time and we'll shut it down. It's cost us nearly every favour we've had with the forces of Destiny and we have pushed the laws of probability to the breaking point, but mark my words: today is the pay-off. After all, she can't come back twice as a nun, can she? Can she?

(EPHRAIM enters. He is dressed as a Georgian sea captain, fine but not as overblown as he was before. He has a determined look on his face. The HOST puts on his role, to EPHRAIM)

May I help you, sir? That is, if you are indeed the gentleman I've heard so much-

EPHRAIM
Oh, stop pretending.

HOST
I'm not sure-

EPHRAIM
You're the same man. I might be willing to accept the same family running the same Inn in the same place after all this time, but after three hundred years the blood and faces don't breed that true.

HOST
Yes. I suppose you would know.

EPHRAIM
Who are you? What are you?

HOST

Merely an objective observer.

EPHRAIM

I will not be your plaything. Not yours. Not Fate's. Not the heavens' themselves.

HOST

Watch yourself. That's the kind of hasty words that got you into this mess in the first place. The Almighty doesn't like it when his creations start spitting in his face. You could end up regretting it for the rest of your life. And for some of us that is a very long time indeed.

EPHRAIM

I suppose you would know.

HOST

We would know. So. What have you been doing with yourself? We lost track of you after the Great Fire.

EPHRAIM

I spent a few years in Yorkshire. Tried my hand at some farming.

HOST

Oh for God's sake, why?

EPHRAIM

Just to see what it was like. I raised cattle. Geese. Pigs.

HOST (taken aback by this unexpected turn)

Really? That's... Well... Are you ready to spring your trap?

EPHRAIM

The trap was sprung over a year ago, dear Host. That's when I arrived here. Well before you came to set your little stage.

HOST

Clever boy.

EPHRAIM

I wasn't going to be caught by surprise again.

HOST

And I suppose you have spent all this time searching the town for her?

EPHRAIM

I found her. Months ago. I've been spying on her ever since.

HOST

And who is she this time?

EPHRAIM

Elizabeth Parsons, also known as Betsy. Daughter of William Parsons, a fairly prosperous merchant in Cheapside. Unmarried. Fond of needlepoint and reading. Perhaps a little overly romantic judging from her choice of material. She plays the violin.

HOST

And what is her favourite song?

EPHRAIM (vocalizes some of the tune, ending with:)

Greensleeves.

HOST

A good sign.

EPHRAIM

She has an older sister, married. And a younger sister, also married.

HOST

That must be a bit uncomfortable for her.

EPHRAIM

Ripe for the picking I'd say. She lives with her parents, a handful of servants and a couple of dogs, one of which she has strangely enough named Ephraim.

HOST

Sounds to me that the memories are pretty close to the surface this time around. So you will meet her tonight?

EPHRAIM

I met her three weeks ago. And with the information at hand it was simple enough to adopt a guise that would win her admiration and her heart. I am Captain Reginald Hander, a gentleman of adventure and daring.

HOST (frowning)

A lie?

EPHRAIM

A stratagem. And one that fascinated her in an instant. I have visited her every day and tonight we dine out away from home for the first time. Here.

BETSY (offstage)
Captain?

EPHRAIM
Coming.

(EPHRAIM goes to the door and in a moment escorts in BETSY Parsons on his arm. She is a shy woman dressed in a modest floral outfit. She is full of nervous anticipation.)

BETSY
Oh, this is so lovely.

EPHRAIM
And private.

BETSY
Almost indecently so. (noticing the HOST) Good evening, sir. You must be our host.

HOST
That I am.

BETSY
Captain Hander said that you be providing us with a dinner tonight.

HOST
If it pleases you.

BETSY
I thank you. This is most kind.

EPHRAIM
Come now, Miss Parsons. Shall we be seated? (EPHRAIM helps BETSY into her seat. Once she is seated he gives a small kiss on the cheek. She blushes. The HOST helps seat EPHRAIM. Aside to HOST) As I said. Simplicity itself.

HOST
Like a wolf amongst the lambs.

EPHRAIM

Indeed. (to BETSY) I thought we should start with a little wine before dinner.

BETSY

Lovely. Although not too much. I have a tendency to get a little tipsy.

EPHRAIM

Host...?

HOST

I shall keep it coming.

BETSY

This is very exciting, Captain.

EPHRAIM

Please, Miss Parsons. If you would do me the honour of calling me Reginald.

BETSY

I don't know if I could.

EPHRAIM

I think you could.

BETSY

Very well. Reginald. Then you must call me Betsy. All my good friends do.

EPHRAIM

Then I shall call you Betsy. (BETSY laughs.) Something the matter?

BETSY

No. Nothing. It's just sounds so nice when you say it.

EPHRAIM

Betsy. (she laughs) I enjoy saying your name. Betsy.

BETSY

(laughing prettily) Now you're making me blush.

EPHRAIM

Betsy. Betsy. Betsy.

(Each mention of her name provokes BETSY into renewed giggles. BETSY starts to choke. The HOST rushes over with a glass of wine. EPHRAIM looks on with concern.)

EPHRAIM

I'm sorry. Shall I give you a moment to compose yourself?

BETSY

No, no. It's fine. I would be ever so happy if you should continue your story.

EPHRAIM (he has forgotten all about the story)

Hmm? Oh yes. My last voyage. Where was I before we stepped in?

BETSY

You had washed ashore on the African coast. You had found the maidens captured by marauding Moors and you were fighting your way through the jungle to your ship.

EPHRAIM

Oh, yes. Did I tell you about the run in with the cannibals?

HOST

Cannibals?

BETSY

Yes, you did. Very thrilling.

EPHRAIM

Did I tell you about escaping the quicksand?

HOST

Oh, good grief.

BETSY

I was breathless.

EPHRAIM

And what about the tigers?

BETSY

How you wrestled them singlehandedly?

HOST

In Africa?

EPHRAIM

Did I tell you about the old abandoned city we found in the jungle?

BETSY

There was an old abandoned city?

EPHRAIM

Yes. Completely empty.

HOST

Isn't that just like an abandoned city?

EPHRAIM

All the walls were covered with vines and such. The jungle had swallowed it whole.

HOST

Strange. I would think it very hard to swallow.

EPHRAIM

As luck would have it, our ship came into view within the hour. We started burning foliage to act as a signal to our vessel.

BETSY

And did they see it? Did they see it?

EPHRAIM

Oh yes, indeed. But that's when we made the most amazing discovery of all. We removed more and more vegetation from the walls for our fire. And that's when we could see it.

BETSY

See what? See what?

EPHRAIM

The gold. The entire city was made from gold. Every wall, every face, every brick in the street: solid gold.

BETSY

Oh my goodness. What did you do?

EPHRAIM

As soon as the ship anchored we loaded as much as we could carry and returned home.

BETSY

And what did you do? With all that gold?

EPHRAIM

I did what any normal captain of the sea would do. I created a trust fund for the widows and orphans of men lost at sea. Of course, I hope to return to that lost city some day. There is a dreadful need for a pension for old sailors.

BETSY

What a wonderful sentiment.

HOST

The biggest load of stratagem I have-

EPHRAIM

- The sea and my honour. That is all I need to satisfy me. Rather shall I say, was all.

BETSY

Was?

EPHRAIM

I thought I had everything I needed in this world. Until the day I arrived at your shop.

BETSY

Oh, Captain Hander.

EPHRAIM

What a stroke of fortune that I happened to be in need of some broadcloth and found you behind the counter. To think that if I had not needed to replace the curtains in my cabin then we should never had met.

BETSY

And then you asked if anyone had ever told me I was the most beautiful woman in the world. I nearly fainted.

EPHRAIM

I must speak from my heart. Betsy.

BETSY

When my sisters got married, I was happy for them of course. But I felt as though I had been left behind somehow.

EPHRAIM

Perfectly natural, my dear.

BETSY

I should have had more trust. Destiny had been saving me for the moment I would meet the most wonderful person in the world.

EPHRAIM (modestly)
Me?

BETSY

So brave, so strong, so courteous, so kind. You have a great heart in you, Captain. Reginald. (beat) I have something I wish to share with you, Reginald. It seems an almost silly thing, but-

EPHRAIM

You can speak freely with me, Betsy.

BETSY

I dreamed of you last night. Now I am blushing again.

EPHRAIM

I am flattered. Please. You must tell me your dream.

BETSY

Very well then. I dreamed I was in a hotel. In fact it greatly resembled the one we're in.

HOST

Strange that.

BETSY

I heard a knock upon the door and through the window I could see that it was you Captain Hander. And you desperately wanted in

HOST

Imagine that.

BETSY

I ran to the door and flung it open, but you had vanished. I had just closed the door when there was another knock upon the door. It was you again. Another Captain Hander. I opened the door and once again you were gone. Four times this happened. But the fifth time I opened the door and there you were. And we embraced. And we were happy. And we would be for all of time.

(Silence.)

EPHRAIM
Some dream.

BETSY
But only a dream...

EPHRAIM
No...

(She has more to say, but she reaches out to touch EPHRAIM's hand. They connect for a moment. The same connection they shared three hundred years ago. Silence. Music drifts in.)

BETSY
Would you... Would you care to dance?

EPHRAIM
Pardon me?

BETSY
I would be greatly honoured if you would ask me to dance.

EPHRAIM
I'm sorry, but I do not dance.

BETSY
Then I shall teach you.

(BETSY leads EPHRAIM to the centre of the room and then draws him in. After a few tenuous steps, they fall into rhythm. Both BETSY and EPHRAIM keep their focus on one another. The HOST watches. After a few moments EPHRAIM is enjoying himself.)

BETSY
Not so hard, is it?

EPHRAIM
No. Not at all. I think I'm actually enjoying this.

BETSY
Honestly?

EPHRAIM
Honestly. (He twirls her around, lost in the moment.)

BETSY

I can hardly wait to see your ship.

EPHRAIM

My ship?

BETSY

And meet your crew. You've told me so much about them I feel like I know them. Jimmy Spyclass the lookout. Tommy True, your first mate. And of course good old Salty Pete the gunner.

EPHRAIM

Oh yes. They 're a good crew.

BETSY

I want to travel the world with you.

EPHRAIM

Sorry?

BETSY

Who would have thought in their wildest dreams that I would find a man as good as you?

HOST

So this is how it ends.

BETSY

So loyal-

HOST

With a lie.

BETSY

So noble-

HOST

With deceit.

BETSY

So true-

HOST
He's won the wager.

BETSY
Though it's fearfully forthright, I must speak from my heart. Captain Hander. Reginald. I must confess I I-

EPHRAIM (breaking the dance)
No!

HOST
What?

EPHRAIM
No.

BETSY
What...?

EPHRAIM
I'm not the person you think I am.

BETSY
Reginald, please-

EPHRAIM
My name is Ephraim, not Reginald. I'm not noble. I'm not daring. I'm not anything like that. I don't even own a boat.

BETSY
Ephraim?

EPHRAIM
Betsy, listen to me. Forget you ever met me. Forget this ever happened. Just forget everything.

(EPHRAIM dashes out)

BETSY
What's going on? What just... What just happened?

HOST

I'm not exactly sure. But I may have won a bet.

(FADE OUT, END OF ACT ONE)

Act Two, Scene One: Somewhere Else

(A dark land of limbo and half light. There is the sound of muttering and movement as if some unseen audience were in attendance. The HOST steps into a spot of light and the sounds slowly fade away. The HOST addresses the unseen audience.)

HOST

My friends, colleagues, interested parties. I hope you have all had time to read over the literature. At this time I am willing to answer any questions from the floor.

Yes. I am convinced that the subject Ephraim was undergoing some sort of change, although without further data I am unwilling to speculate as to its exact nature.

Oh, absolutely. The random factor Constance certainly contributed to the instability of the experiment. In fact I would- What?

(suddenly formal and professional) Sir. Yes, sir? On the contrary, sir. I believe I have remained impartial throughout the entire investigation. However-

Of course I'm aware of the date. It's been seventy-five years since-

Go back?

But the experiment is over. I haven't even bothered to arrange another return. In fact Fate won't even give me the proper forms. And I couldn't even guess where Ephraim is. It's over and-

I've been busy. I had to work on my report. It takes time to prepare all the charts and stuff. And then, of course, the title page- Yes, sir. A most unsatisfactory report it is. Even with the title page.

Stop what? I just can't... I'm not sure I can return him to what he was. What would be the-

Certainly I would like to investigate.

Certainly I'm not happy.

Certainly I want to keep my job.

We can't have uncertainty, I understand, sir.

Then if there are no further questions.... Yes? No, I don't know who wrote the book of love. Look it up yourself.

I'm off. Thank you for your attention. I hope I remember the way back...

(There is a clap of thunder and BLACK OUT)

Act Two, Scene Two: November 1, 1775

(The back room of the Inn. Again. There have been a few more minor changes and the silver candle sticks and plates reflect the period. The HOST enters with a bottle of wine and two glasses. He surveys the room. The HOST puts out the tablecloth and candlesticks and then sits at the table. He waits. And waits. And waits.)

HOST

It's so empty. I wonder where they are now? She's probably in a better place. But him. He's probably in a far more hellish place. Manchester maybe.

(EPHRAIM suddenly enters. He is dressed in a rough traveling costume of the late Georgian era.)

EPHRAIM (spotting the host, unbelieving)
You!

HOST

I don't believe it.

EPHRAIM

What are you doing here? This is London, not Edmonton. I was given an address in London.

HOST

I fear Edmonton is little more than yet another neighbourhood absorbed into the capital. Nothing remains the same except you, me and this room.

EPHRAIM

If you're here, does that mean...?

HOST

Just the two of us. She's not coming back this time.

EPHRAIM

I... see.

HOST

So. What have you been up to? Where have you been? It's been a while.

EPHRAIM

Damn your eyes.

HOST

Excuse me?

EPHRAIM

I wanted to put that bloody wager behind me. But you're just like everyone else in this godforsaken country. Think you can control other people. Think you're so much better. Damn you. Damn you all!

HOST

Time has not improved your manners.

EPHRAIM

I've been living in America.

HOST

Ah.

EPHRAIM

I had to get away from this place. And her.

HOST

Surely Betsy Parsons was not that frightening.

EPHRAIM

Absolutely terrifying. She was ready to give me her heart and soul without hesitation.

HOST

(sarcasm) Oh yes. Completely horrific.

EPHRAIM

And what could I give her in return? No life, no likes, no dislikes, no home, no love. What was I? Nothing but a fiction. It was horrible. I had to escape.

HOST

The colonies. I should have seen your hand in it all. The revolution, the bloodshed, the terror.

EPHRAIM

People are perfectly capable of starting wars without my help, you know.

HOST

Then what have you been up to?

EPHRAIM

I have been living in solitude, deep within the forests of Virginia. I was quite surprised when I wandered into Philadelphia. The whole city was in an uproar.

HOST

Nothing disturbs the peace like war.

EPHRAIM

And do you know what they are fighting for?

HOST

Something to do with free tea?

EPHRAIM

They are fighting for liberty.

HOST

Oh, that old thing.

EPHRAIM

They are actually fighting for a cause.

HOST

I should think by this time you could see through such rhetoric.

EPHRAIM

I signed up on the spot. For the last few months I have been working for the American Congress and they have trusted me. Can you imagine such a thing? Trusting *me*? It's a whole new world over there.

HOST

Then why are you over here?

EPHRAIM

I am here to meet with a member of the French Ambassador's delegation. They are sympathetic to our cause.

HOST

Probably just looking for another way to stick it to the British. And how shall you recognize this French master of espionage?

EPHRAIM

He is to say "White Queen to King's Bishop Four" and I am to reply "Red King to King's Seven".

HOST

Bravo. Well read. We can wait together.

(silence)

EPHRAIM

You know, I have spent a great deal of time trying to figure out exactly what you are.

HOST

I am your host. Care for some wine?

EPHRAIM

Just a little. I have to keep my head clear.

HOST (pouring drinks)

I do wish things had gone better for you. You came so very close a couple times. Except with the nun. (laughs)

EPHRAIM

Well, yes. Except with the nun. Could you blame me?

HOST

Hardly. Although it was most entertaining to watch you struggle with that decision. (raising his glass) To long life?

EPHRAIM

God, no.

HOST

To lost opportunities then.

(The glasses clink. They drain their glasses. The HOST regards EPHRAIM.)

HOST

(pause) Do you ever think about her?

EPHRAIM

Every day, every hour, every minute. Everything I do I measure against her approval. For her, I try to be a better man. She is not coming back is she?

HOST

Fate would not be so kind.

EPHRAIM

Just as well. I wouldn't even know what to say.

(While the two have been speaking, a figure wrapped in a traveling cloak skulks into the room. She has been cautiously approaching EPHRAIM. This is SIMONE, the latest incarnation of CONSTANCE and a member of the French ambassador's delegation. She is dressed dark and plainly so as not to attract undue attention, but for SIMONE even plainly is more elegantly dressed than most people. She whispers to EPHRAIM.)

SIMONE

White Queen to King's Bishop Four.

EPHRAIM (turning to reply)

Red King to-

(EPHRAIM stops short as he recognizes the face before him. The HOST chokes on his wine.)

EPHRAIM

It's you.

SIMONE
Oui. C'est moi. (dramatically) Simone DeLongchamps.

HOST
I don't believe it.

SIMONE
You are Ephraim from the Americas?

EPHRAIM
Yes. That is what they call me. Please sit down. Have a seat. Sit. Please.

HOST
Remarkable.

SIMONE
'Ave you not something to say to me?

EPHRAIM
What? Oh yes. "Red King to King's Seven".

SIMONE (indicating the HOST)
Can 'e be trusted?

EPHRAIM
Him? Sure. I've known him for ages.

SIMONE
Tres bien. We must act quickly.

EPHRAIM
Yes. Of course. Do you want some wine?

HOST
Allow me. (starts pouring another glass)

SIMONE
Non, please. You must listen.

EPHRAIM
Of course. (beat) Will you excuse me for a moment?

SIMONE

But-

(EPHRAIM pulls the HOST aside for a private conference.)

EPHRAIM

I thought you said she wasn't coming back.

HOST

It just might just be someone who resembles her.

EPHRAIM

It's her.

HOST

Actually if you look closely, she doesn't really look much like Constance.

EPHRAIM

She doesn't?

HOST

I'll admit it takes a trained eye, but if you'll notice she's about an inch shorter.

EPHRAIM

How can you tell?

HOST

Look closely. Her mouth's a little wider, her eyes are a slightly paler shade of green and her ears are a little wider apart.

EPHRAIM

Now that you mention it...

(SIMONE starts singing *Greensleeves* to herself. EPHRAIM and the HOST freeze and stare.)

SIMONE

Please, Monsieur-

EPHRAIM (leaping into action)

Call me Ephraim. I would be very pleased if you just called me Ephraim.

SIMONE
Ephraim. D'accord.

EPHRAIM
That's nice. Now we're more like friends.

SIMONE
Please. Lives depend upon you delivering this information.

EPHRAIM
I understand.

SIMONE
We must allow for no mistakes. Zis must be done according to plan. Comprendre?

EPHRAIM
God, you're gorgeous when you're authoritative.

SIMONE
If you are not going to listen to me-

EPHRAIM
I'm listening. I really am.

HOST
Shall I go get dinner then?

SIMONE
We have no time for dinner. We have 'ardly time for this barely respectable bottle of wine.

EPHRAIM
Yes. We have a job to do. People depend upon us.

SIMONE
Exactiment. Lives may be lost or saved depending on what we do. I 'ave 'ere a map. It shows the disposition of troops around Boston. I also 'ave a document that details the size of the forces stationed in New York and New Jersey.

EPHRAIM
How did you get this?

SIMONE
A little caution, a little guile and a little potion in a certain officer's drink.

EPHRAIM

This could save hundreds of lives.

SIMONE

As the flame of democracy burns brightly in the New World, it is my hope that it may kindle a beacon of freedom in the Old World as well. Don't you agree, monsieur? Monsieur? Ephraim?

EPHRAIM (sincerely)

You are the most beautiful woman in the world.

SIMONE

What?

EPHRAIM

And when you say the word democracy your nose crinkles up just a little? Like an adorable little bunny rabbit.

SIMONE

'Ave you not heard a word I said?

EPHRAIM

Yes, of course. Democracy, freedom, blah, blah, blah. Let's have dinner.

SIMONE

(beat) You must go. I 'ave arranged for your immediate transportation back to New York.

EPHRAIM

But I just got here. Surely we can get to know one another.

SIMONE

I am a spy. You are a spy. We are not supposed to get to know one another. We are supposed to be mysterious.

EPHRAIM

Are you sure you don't want some more wine?

HOST

I've got some cheese in the back.

SIMONE (gathering the documents)

I am going.

EPHRAIM

Do you want to go dancing?

SIMONE

It is my opinion that any further association would only endanger my life.

EPHRAIM

But we can write to each other, right?

SIMONE

Ephraim. Monsieur. I hope you will not take this the wrong way, but you are quite possibly the worst spy I have ever met.

EPHRAIM

All right. I'll do it. I'll go. For you.

SIMONE (pause, then gives him the documents)

For freedom. (she kisses his cheeks, there a held moment) Ephraim?

EPHRAIM

Yes?

SIMONE

If I ever see you again... I will kill you on sight. (exits)

EPHRAIM (after savouring the moment, turns to the HOST)

I told you that was her.

HOST

So what are you going to do?

EPHRAIM

You heard her. She wants America to win. I'll make sure they do. It will be my gift to her.

HOST

I thought you were fighting for a cause.

EPHRAIM

I'm fighting for something even better now. I'm fighting for her.

HOST

Just be careful you don't end up stopping an English bullet.

EPHRAIM

Can't happen. I have to come back in seventy-five years don't I? Good night, dear Host.

HOST

Good night, Ephraim. (EPHRAIM exits into the night.) This whole thing has taken on a life of its own. But what-? (suddenly aware of the unseen presence)

Oh hello. Yes, I'm still here, sir. (then with slow realization) Haven't you been watching? Oh. An earthquake you say? The city all but destroyed? Thousands lost? *Tens* of thousands. Yes, I would imagine that was distracting.

Ephraim? Well, actually... No. No one showed up.

Yes, it is a shame. But that's Fate for you. Totally unpredictable.

(FADE OUT)

Act Two, Scene Three: November 1, 1850

(The Inn has become a hotel and the back room is now the private room of a restaurant but much remains the same. The latest incarnation of CONSTANCE is a proper middle class Scotswoman of comfortable means. CATHERINE Ballantyne-Bell has just finished her meal and is delicately dabbing her mouth with her napkin. She hums *Greensleeves* as she looks about for assistance. She rings a small bell to summon the HOST.)

HOST

Will there be anything else, Miss Ballantyne-Bell? Might I offer a dessert?

CATHERINE

Och, you are too kind. I should go. These past few days have been most strenuous.

HOST

After a meal like that, one should always allow time to digest.

CATHERINE

It was certainly a stroke of luck that I happened upon this hotel. And then to discover that I was the winner of the... What did ye call it?

HOST

The Dinner Lottery, Miss. Every hundredth customer wins a free meal. And besides we couldn't allow such a lovely woman such as yourself to escape into the streets could we?

CATHERINE

A true gentleman would nae suggest such a thing.

HOST

What a thing?

CATHERINE

That I would be found walking in the...

HOST

Streets?

CATHERINE

Aye.

HOST

Apologies, Miss. I'm afraid my manners are still catching up with the modern sentiments.

CATHERINE

Sentiments are fickle things, dear Host. (beat) Apology accepted. I am nae sure why I am being so forgiving towards ye. Are ye absolutely certain we've not met?

HOST

Absolutely certain.

CATHERINE

Still, I *do* like ye. Though ye have taken me away from everyone and hidden me in this private room. What am I to make of that?

HOST

Miss Ballantyne-Bell, I am only determined to see you well taken care of. Nothing more.

CATHERINE

(beat) Very well then. If you are so determined then perhaps I *will* ha' that dessert.

HOST

Excellent. (clearing dishes) We have some lovely raspberry tortes and some delightful plum pudding.

CATHERINE

Bring them both. I seem to have developed a prodigious appetite of late.

HOST

I understand. (CATHERINE picks up a book to read as the HOST begins his exit to the kitchen when he spots EPHRAIM entering the back room. EPHRAIM is dressed in a suit and overcoat of the period. He looks like a typical Victorian business man. He carries a bouquet of flowers. The HOST rushes over.) There you are. Where have you been? She just ordered dessert.

EPHRAIM

You started without me?

HOST

What was I supposed to say? "Hold on, Miss. We're expecting the man who's fancied you since the Middle Ages"?

EPHRAIM

You could have phrased it in a more pleasing manner.

HOST

The longer this takes, the more likely my employers will find out what's going on. Go!

EPHRAIM

Not so fast. This must be done in a genteel fashion.

HOST

Genteel? You?

EPHRAIM

I've spent the last few years learning propriety.

HOST

I thought you were charging across the world spreading democracy at bayonet point.

EPHRAIM

After the Revolution I *did* take a troop of riders to fight for freedom in Canada. Turns out Canadians don't want liberty. Just peace and quiet and long, warm summers.

HOST

So what did you do?

EPHRAIM

I opened a bank.

HOST

You went from idealistic frontier revolutionary to banker?

EPHRAIM

In Canada it's a natural progression. For the last ten years I have lived and prospered as Mister John Ephraim of Toronto. A respectable man of business.

HOST

Another stratagem?

EPHRAIM

I have invented a worthy life. A life we can share.

HOST

Good. I think

EPHRAIM

Who is she this time?

HOST

Catherine Ballantyne-Bell. Her father runs an investment house in Edinburgh. She's spending a few months here with her maiden aunt.

EPHRAIM

Is she unmarried?

HOST

Yes. But there is one other-

EPHRAIM

Would you say she is of a romantic nature?

HOST

Romantic? (beat) Oh yes, I would say very romantic. Go.

EPHRAIM (crosses over to CATHERINE and drops to one knee)

Excuse me, Miss Ballantyne-Bell, but I am determined to make your acquaintance. I am John Ephraim, a humble pilgrim who has left his distant Canadian home in search of love and has found it in thee. Dearest Catherine, I suspect you are an innocent in the ways of romance. And no doubt you dream of the rapturous release that beckons the budding blossom of your heart. But if you allow me, I shall introduce you to a love eternal. A love everlasting. Please, dear Catherine, allow me to acquaint you with the special adoration that only two can share.

CATHERINE

Believe me, sir. I am very well acquainted with the special adoration that only two can share. (She stands. She is very pregnant.) A true gentleman would nae draw attention to such delicate circumstances.

EPHRAIM

I didn't realize... (glances to HOST) I didn't know.

CATHERINE

I am sorry I've upset your delicate Canadian sensibilities, Mr. Ephraim. I came to London to avoid such disruptions. Perhaps it's best I go.

EPHRAIM

No. Wait. I don't mean to make a scene. I'm sorry, Miss Ballantyne-Bell. A gentleman should be more considerate of a lady's feelings.

CATHERINE

You consider me a lady, sir?

EPHRAIM

I consider you the most admirable creature on the planet, Miss. And the loveliest.

CATHERINE

My head is no longer turned by empty flattery, Mr. Ephraim.

EPHRAIM

I say what I honestly feel, Miss Ballantyne-Bell. I see you have already enjoyed dinner. Would you do me the honour of allowing me to share a dessert with you? That is, if the circumstances don't seem too scandalous?

CATHERINE

Scandal has become an all too familiar companion, Mr. Ephraim. I suppose he could use the company.

EPHRAIM (holding chair for her)

Host? If you would be so kind?

HOST

I shall fetch the desserts. (The smiling HOST bows and exits.)

CATHERINE

So. Ye wish to make my acquaintance?

EPHRAIM

The fact is I am quite taken with you, Miss Ballantyne-Bell.

CATHERINE

And yet I do not recall ever meeting ye before.

EPHRAIM

But you are just like a woman I met many years past.

CATHERINE

And ye believe I resemble her.

EPHRAIM

I believe you are her.

CATHERINE

Then this is some supernatural attraction you feel for me, Mr. Ephraim?

EPHRAIM

Supernatural and sincere.

CATHERINE

I must inform ye that I have no such feelings for you, sir.

EPHRAIM

I am certain I can win your affections, Miss.

CATHERINE

Then we find ourselves in an interesting position, do we not? You wish to win my admiration, whereas I find myself in need of a spouse.

EPHRAIM (pleased)

Me?

CATHERINE

We'll see. You have noted my present condition and the fact that I am currently unattached. At home I feel the shaméd whispers and finger pointing of my so-called virtuous neighbours. This has convinced me to take measures to protect my good name.

EPHRAIM

Such as delivering the child here in London?

CATHERINE

Me plan is to return to Edinburgh wi' the wee bairn and claim it as the orphan child of a relative. However even that charade will do little to silence already suspicious tongues.

EPHRAIM

Then what would you ask of me?

CATHERINE

If I were to return home wi' a husband...

EPHRAIM

Perhaps one who says he has a child by a previous marriage...

CATHERINE

Do ye see what I am saying?

EPHRAIM

Clearly, Miss Ballantyne-Bell.

CATHERINE

Are ye a man of business, Mr. Ephraim?

EPHRAIM

I am a Canadian banker.

CATHERINE

Close enough. Perhaps we can come to some sort of bargain?

EPHRAIM

What do you suggest?

CATHERINE

What would you require?

EPHRAIM

You already have my heart, Miss.

CATHERINE

This is business, not romance. State your terms, sir.

EPHRAIM

Then I ask the opportunity to win your love.

CATHERINE
Through what methods?

EPHRAIM
Courtesy. Familiarity. Affection.

CATHERINE
Courtship?

EPHRAIM
If so required.

CATHERINE
In a manner designed to please me?

EPHRAIM
I see no other way of it working.

CATHERINE
But only after we are wed.

EPHRAIM
Agreed.

CATHERINE
Agreed. (they perfunctorily shake hands) And what form shall this courtship take?

EPHRAIM
I was thinking poetry to start.

CATHERINE
Sonnets or ballads?

EPHRAIM
Whatever is more pleasing to you.

CATHERINE
Do ye know Shakespeare?

EPHRAIM
I did.

CATHERINE
I am fond of Elizabethan verse.

EPHRAIM
Then I shall only recite the Elizabethans. Agreed?

CATHERINE
Agreed.

(They shake hands)

EPHRAIM
And I would be expecting to take you out.

CATHERINE
Prior to delivery or after?

EPHRAIM
Whichever fits your schedule.

CATHERINE
And where would ye take me?

EPHRAIM
The park?

CATHERINE
The river?

EPHRAIM
The zoo?

CATHERINE
The gardens?

EPHRAIM
A concert?

CATHERINE
The theatre?

EPHRAIM
Done.

CATHERINE
Done.

(They shake hands)

EPHRAIM
I suppose we should discuss the matter of residence.

CATHERINE
We shall reside together.

EPHRAIM
In Toronto?

CATHERINE
In Edinburgh.

EPHRAIM
My business is in Canada.

CATHERINE
Merge it with me father's.

EPHRAIM
Would he be agreeable?

CATHERINE
I would convince him.

EPHRAIM
I have little doubt of your persuasive powers, Miss Ballantyne-Bell.

CATHERINE
Then we are agreed?

EPHRAIM
Agreed. (they shake again) Shall we share a bedroom?

CATHERINE
Must we?

EPHRAIM

I would insist on some form of proximity.

CATHERINE

Is it not enough to share the same household?

EPHRAIM

Intimacy is a major strategy in achieving my goals.

CATHERINE

To win my affection.

EPHRAIM

I hope you will someday say you love me.

CATHERINE

I can see how some form of acquaintance would help.

EPHRAIM

I'm afraid I must insist.

CATHERINE

Would you be satisfied with adjoining rooms?

EPHRAIM

With a connecting door?

CATHERINE

But only accessible on weekends.

EPHRAIM

Weekends and holidays.

CATHERINE

Done.

EPHRAIM

Done.

(They shake hands.)

CATHERINE

'Til death do us part?

EPHRAIM
Those are the standard terms.

CATHERINE
And if ye should die before me?

EPHRAIM
Won't happen.

CATHERINE
And if I die before you?

EPHRAIM
We renegotiate.

CATHERINE
Agreed.

EPHRAIM
Agreed. (they shake hands) Then if there are no other terms to discuss, Miss Ballantyne-Bell...?

CATHERINE
I believe we have reached consensus, Mr. Ephraim.

EPHRAIM
Then we are to be wed. (beat) When?

CATHERINE
I would think as rapidly as possible.

EPHRAIM
In lieu of a proper contract might we not have a kiss to seal the deal?

CATHERINE
If you insist.

EPHRAIM
I do.

CATHERINE

Very well. (they kiss, though it starts as pure business it slowly takes on aspects of love, when they part she is a little dazed, a confused moment of possible recognition)
Ephraim?

EPHRAIM

Yes?

CATHERINE

Yes!

EPHRAIM

Do you love me?

CATHERINE

(eagerly) We shall work on that. (reconstructing her demeanor) In the meantime, Mr. Ephraim, we should find an agreeable minister to seal our matrimonial pact.

EPHRAIM

As you say, Miss Ballantyne-Bell. There is no reason for you to bear this shame alone.

CATHERINE

Shame, sir?

EPHRAIM

The shame of the child.

CATHERINE

Do you think my child is something to be ashamed of?

EPHRAIM

Don't you?

CATHERINE

I wish to protect my reputation, sir. As well as my child's.

EPHRAIM

I only remarked on the disgrace of your condition.

CATHERINE

The small minded folk of Edinburgh might think this a dishonour, but not I.

EPHRAIM

I'm sorry. I meant no insult.

CATHERINE

Is this how you regard one who shall be your child as well? A disgrace?

EPHRAIM

It is simply the way of the world.

CATHERINE

Then you are willing to endure the abject humiliation of being me child's father?

EPHRAIM (graciously)

Of course.

CATHERINE

(beat) You said ye wished to win my affections, sir. Ye said ye wish me to confess my love. Suffice it to say that you have failed miserably, sir.

EPHRAIM

I meant no-

CATHERINE

Consider our agreement voided, sir. (starts for exits)

HOST (entering with desserts)

Miss Ballantyne-Bell. Will you not be staying for dessert?

CATHERINE

It has been a pleasure to make your acquaintance, dear Host. As for this gentleman, could ye please tell him that I found our encounter quite memorable. Tell him I know not what misdeeds he may have committed in the past, or what ones may follow. But I hope that when he is finally judged may he find a more humane critic than himself. (exits)

HOST

Well. She seems... definite.

EPHRAIM

Quite definite.

HOST
Pity.

EPHRAIM
Yes.

HOST
(beat) Seventy-five years then?

EPHRAIM
Seventy-five years. (exits)

(BLACK OUT)

Act Two, Scene Four: November 1, 1925

(Same place as always. There are a few twentieth century amenities scattered about, but once again things remain largely as they were. The HOST pokes his head in. Assured that all is well, he rushes in and starts laying out place settings on the table. He is working quickly and efficiently. But he is stopped short when he hears the unseen presence.)

HOST (hand in cookie jar)
Oh, hello. It's you, sir. Oh, nothing official. It's a hobby of mine. Setting tables, yes sir. You have no idea how soothing it is.

What's that? Well, I'll be. I think you're right. This does look like the same place- Has it been seventy-five years? Where does the time go?

Ephraim? Isn't he stirring up trouble in Asia? Here? I doubt it. Why would he come back here?

Right away, sir. I'll find him. You can count on me. And a report, of course. A thorough report. I'll leave right away. As soon as I finish here. Don't worry, sir. We'll find him.

(The HOST breathes a sigh of relief. He then scans about the room.) Where the hell *is* he? (EPHRAIM enters, once again well dressed in the manner of the period) There you are.

EPHRAIM
Is she here?

HOST

She just went up to her room to freshen up.

EPHRAIM

She's a guest?

HOST

I told her that there was a gentleman who wanted to see her. She was quite intrigued.

EPHRAIM

Good.

HOST

Her name is Prudence Grevney. She is an American socialite vacationing in Europe. She is traveling with her sisters, but they're spending the night at the theatre. It'll just be the two of you.

EPHRAIM

Perfect.

HOST

There's some dinner rolls along with some wine and brandy on the sideboard. The kitchen is preparing your meal. I'll have it delivered to your table.

EPHRAIM

Aren't you staying?

HOST

My employers want to see me and I can't let them find me here with you.

EPHRAIM

It won't be the same without you hovering over us.

HOST

We don't want it to be the same. We want you to succeed this time.

EPHRAIM

That we do.

(EPHRAIM and the HOST repeat their handshake and spit from 1399.)

HOST (straightening EPHRAIM's tie and flattening his lapels)
Don't bargain. Don't pretend. Just be honest. Be yourself and there's every possibility that you will succeed.

EPHRAIM
Just so long as she isn't a nun, swineherd or spy. How do I look?

HOST (appraising)
Almost human.

EPHRAIM
Who are you? Really?

HOST
I am your Host. (starts to leave)

EPHRAIM
My friend.

HOST (freezing in his exit)
What?

EPHRAIM
My friend.

HOST
We have met all of nine times over the course of five hundred and twenty five years. You must excuse me if I don't think that the basis for a close relationship.

EPHRAIM
My life is such that I must constantly move lest people learn the nature of my... condition. You are the only person I see regularly. Besides her. I know you are risking much by helping us. I want you to know I appreciate it.

HOST (searches for something to say)
You're... welcome.

EPHRAIM
Thank you.

HOST (grasping his shoulder)
"Once more unto the breach, dear friend..."

(The HOST dashes out. EPHRAIM watches him go and then settles by the table. PRU Grevney enters laughing. She is a well dressed party girl of the 1920's. She is a little tipsy. EPHRAIM rises at her entrance. PRU spots EPHRAIM and smiles broadly. She crosses over to him coquettishly.)

PRU

Will you look at you?

EPHRAIM

Miss Grevney. My name is John Ephraim the Third. I have been looking forward to this meeting.

PRU

Will you look at you? I was told there was some chap who wanted to see me, but the waiter didn't tell me he was such a handsome devil.

EPHRAIM

It's always a pleasure to accept a compliment from such a beautiful lady as yourself. I have arranged dinner for the two of us. I hope that wasn't too presumptuous of me.

PRU

No, no, not at all. As long as you're paying. (Laughs loudly at her joke)

EPHRAIM

Have no fear.

PRU

John. I like you.

EPHRAIM

Thank you. I like you too. Excuse me for asking, but have you been drinking?

PRU

I was just upstairs freshening up. I'm very fresh. Got anything to drink?

EPHRAIM

There is some wine and brandy. Allow me-

PRU

I can serve myself, ducks. (pouring herself a drink) Charity and Virtue won't let me have a drop.

EPHRAIM

Your sisters, I presume?

PRU

Stuck up old prigs is what they are. I came on this trip to have a little fun and all they want to do is visit historical sites and (with attitude) go to the theatre. You've got to live life to the fullest. After all you only go around once, don't you?

EPHRAIM

Possibly.

PRU

You got to make hay while the sun shines.

EPHRAIM

As you say-

PRU

You got to get it while the getting's good.

EPHRAIM

So I've heard.

PRU

Three dead crows are better than a pancake any day, right?

EPHRAIM

I'm not really sure, Miss Grevney-

PRU

(shuddering) Oooh. Not Miss Grevney. You make me sound like a school teacher.

EPHRAIM

Prudence then.

PRU

Not Prudence either. I never believed in it, why should I be named after it?

EPHRAIM

I have to call you something.

PRU

Everyone outside the family calls me Pru. (tastes the wine, makes a face) I'm having Scotch. (removes a hidden flask from her leg garter) You want a shot? (takes a swig)

EPHRAIM

Thank you. Pru. (drinks)

PRU

Don't mention it. John. So tell me. The waiter said you wanted to see me. He didn't exactly say why.

EPHRAIM

I wanted to meet you.

PRU

Is that all? I was hoping for something a little more exciting.

EPHRAIM

Well, we're having dinner.

PRU (bringing glasses to the table)

Oh come on. I can see that glint in your eye. That's a sporting glint. What do you want, John?

EPHRAIM

I want to... get to know you.

PRU

Boy, you Europeans don't waste any time do you?

EPHRAIM

I didn't mean-

PRU

Shouldn't you be asking me what I want?

EPHRAIM

What do you want, Pru?

PRU

I want to have fun. I want to go to a party and stay up all night. I want to sing. I want to dance. Do you know how to Charleston, John?

EPHRAIM
I've seen it done.

PRU
Take me somewhere where the music is hot and the gin is cold. If you help me then I'll be your friend forever. I've come all the way from Cincinnati, don't I deserve some fun?

(She does a few Charleston steps humming a jazz version of *Greensleeves*. EPHRAIM joins in and is soon swept away with enthusiasm.)

EPHRAIM
All right. Let's do it.

PRU
So you'll show me a good time?

EPHRAIM
The best time to be had in all London.

PRU
Oh, John. Aren't you just the best bloke? I love you.

EPHRAIM
What was that?

PRU
I said I love you.

EPHRAIM
Do you mean it?

PRU
Yeah.

EPHRAIM
You love me?

PRU
I love you. I love Scotch and I love dancing and, God, I love being out of Ohio. Come on, John. Let's go. (beat) Is something wrong?

EPHRAIM

You're saying you love me?

PRU

Sure. Can we go now?

EPHRAIM

I've been waiting for this moment...

PRU

I've got cabin fever and I want to burn down the cabin.

EPHRAIM

This doesn't feel right.

PRU

What is it?

EPHRAIM

You really love me?

PRU

Yeah. Sure. I just want to go, okay?

EPHRAIM

Why doesn't this feel right?

PRU

Okay, we were having a good time and now you're all down. What's going on here?

EPHRAIM

I've been waiting for... someone to tell me that she loves me.

PRU

Boy, you English are really hard up for affection.

EPHRAIM

And now that it's finally happened, I don't know, something's wrong.

PRU

You just need cheering up. Come on. We'll take the booze. (rushes out of the room and then rushes back in) All right. I think I can see what the problem is here. You've been waiting a long time for someone to say they love you? But the kind of love you're looking

for isn't something that just pops out of someone's mouth. The kind of love you're looking for is something that grows with time. You're looking for the kind of love that comes from two people sharing their lives together. That takes time. Growing old together. Living a life together. You see what I'm saying?

EPHRAIM

But people can fall in love in an instant.

PRU

Love at first sight? Yeah, yeah. But even then I think they know one another. Way down deep they recognize one another. (beat, there is a brief moment of recognition which catches her by surprise, then she pulls away to compose herself) Listen to me getting all philosophical here. I'm talking way too much. Do you still want to go dancing?

EPHRAIM

No. Not really. I have some thinking to do.

PRU

Come on. This is the one night I have to really blow off some steam and I need a dancing partner. I can show you the night of your life.

EPHRAIM (beat, then smiling)

You might at that. No. Go ahead. I'm sorry. But I'm glad we had this time together, Pru.

PRU

Listen, if you see my sisters promise you won't blow the whistle on me. I'll love you forever.

EPHRAIM

Have a good time, Pru.

PRU

I always do. (She starts to exit, but then pauses. She returns and kisses EPHRAIM fully on the lips. He is surprised and moved. This kiss lingers. But eventually PRU breaks it.) Keep trying, John. You'll find what you're looking for. It just takes time. (exits)

EPHRAIM

If only it were that easy.

(Suddenly the HOST dashes in.)

HOST

Is she still here?

EPHRAIM
She's gone.

HOST
Did she say it?

EPHRAIM
Yes.

HOST
Did she mean it?

EPHRAIM
Sort of.

HOST
You've got to get out of here. They're on their way.

EPHRAIM
Who?

HOST
You know who. They've figured it all out. If they catch you-

EPHRAIM
What do you think you are? My guardian angel?

HOST
Quite the opposite. Now go.

(EPHRAIM quickly exits. The HOST is left alone. He relaxes a bit, knowing EPHRAIM has escaped. There is a low roll of thunder. The HOST is suddenly aware of an invisible, angry presence.)

HOST
Ah. There you are, sir. So nice to see you again. How can I help you?

Oh dear.

(There is a sinister crash of thunder and BLACK OUT)

Act Two, Scene Fve: November 1, 2000

(The same place. A WOMAN sits alone at the table. The latest incarnation of CONSTANCE seems to be a business woman. She is sensibly dressed as if she has just gotten off work. She closes down her laptop and gathers her things. She pays her bill and leaves a tip for the waiter. She doesn't see EPHRAIM enter. He is dressed in a shabby overcoat. He has seen far better days. And although he holds back a little at the sight of the WOMAN, but he has a mission and propels himself forward. She is startled by his appearance and starts to rise from her seat.)

EPHRAIM

Please. You don't know me, but I have to tell you something. It's important. I have to tell you... I'm giving up. This is the tenth time I've come here. Every time I've been looking for something. I've tried lying to get it. I've tried trickery, persuasion, even honesty. But it's not going to work. The fact is you can't give me what I'm looking for. It's something we would have to build together.

But we can't do that. It could never be a fresh start for me. And that's all it will ever be for you. We'd never be in the same place at the same time. Maybe there would be a brief moment of connection, but I know now I need more than that.

What I'm trying to say is that I won't be coming back.

But I want you to know that I still carry the memory of our every encounter. And don't worry. It doesn't matter if you remember them or not. I just wanted you to know that.

(The WOMAN has been listening intently and uncertainly. She starts to go, but stops as EPHRAIM speaks again.)

Except... I've been thinking over all the times we met. Every time there's something I've wanted to say. I never got the chance. Maybe I never let myself have the chance. But I really have to say it now. Or else I never will.

I love you. I always have. I always will.

So that's it. That's all I have to say. Except for good-bye.

(The WOMAN starts to exit. She pauses and then looks back. She makes up her mind. EPHRAIM sees her and waits with faint hope.)

WOMAN (certain)
Good-bye.

(The WOMAN exits. EPHRAIM waits for a moment. Finally the HOST enters.)

HOST
Hello, Ephraim.

EPHRAIM
I knew you'd be showing up.

HOST
I'm sorry. But it's over. I have no choice.

EPHRAIM
Who are you?

HOST
I am your Host.

EPHRAIM
And before that?

HOST
Before that? I was just like you. A cursed and contrary human creating chaos and calamity in the world. And I was good at it. So good I was offered a promotion. I was assigned the duty of observing people like you. Like us.

EPHRAIM
And your employers are interested in such things?

HOST
Evil is their stock and trade. That's why they have to shut you down.

EPHRAIM
Me?

HOST
We started this experiment simply to see how this woman was affecting you. But then you started to care about her. And it changed you. And if you could change, then so could any of us. That's too frightening a prospect for my employers to endure.

EPHRAIM
Do what you have to. I'm tired.

HOST

Come with me. (guiding EPHRAIM to an exit) You might be happy with my solution.

EPHRAIM

How can I be happy? I've lost her forever.

HOST

Nonsense. You never lose.

(The HOST guides EPHRAIM out into the dark.)

(FADE OUT)

Act Two, Scene Six: November 1, 2075

(There is the sound of the unseen audience. The HOST steps into the same spot he held at the beginning of the Act. The noises quiet down.)

HOST

Final report. Concerning the matter of the subject Ephraim. Filed this day. November 1st, 2075.

As we all know we ran into some problems with this particular experiment. Drastic measures were required before there was any contamination. As a result it was shut down and dismantled on November 1st in the year 2000.

At this time I feel I can deliver some conclusions. The subject Ephraim was changing, growing if you will. That seems certain. And I am also certain that the catalyst was his affinity for the random factor Constance. And by that I mean love. However for the purposes of this report, that can only be conjecture on my part. We may never actually know.

I cannot speculate as to whether or not this was a unique case. It seems we all have it within ourselves to become something else. For better or for worse. Who knows what we may become if given a second chance? Or more.

(Behind the HOST, the lights rise on the familiar old Hotel room. It is now a historic site. CONSTANCE enters. She is dressed the same way she was in first scene, but it is now a costume rather than her everyday wear. The name tag and modern shoes are something of a giveaway.)

As to the other matter... As you all know, this will be my last report. Ever. I readily admit

my misconducts in this case and accept my demotion. Do what you must. Strip me of my powers.

(The world of the Hotel begins to include the HOST)

CONSTANCE

(noticing the HOST, speaks with same lilt as Act One, Scene One) Hello?

HOST

Return me to the creature I was.

CONSTANCE

Excuse me?

HOST

Send me back to Earth. I have no choice in-

CONSTANCE

Can I help you?

HOST

(now fully in the world) What? Oh, hello. (wondering) So quickly?

CONSTANCE

Is something the matter?

HOST

No. Nothing. It's just... I wasn't expecting to find myself here so soon.

CONSTANCE

I'm sorry. Do I know ye?

HOST

I'm your new host.

CONSTANCE

Oh. Wonderful. Welcome aboard. We were told you were coming.

HOST

Yes. I pulled a few strings while I still had some influence.

CONSTANCE

You'll love it here. I certainly do. It feels like home, y'know? The National Trust has done a first rate job preserving this place. It has quite a history.

HOST

That I do know. (regards the table with some melancholy)

CONSTANCE

You've been here before?

HOST

Off and on over the years. Off and on...

CONSTANCE

We'll have to get you fitted for a costume. What you're wearing hardly fits any time period. And then I'll introduce you around. I'm sure you'll... Is something the matter?

HOST

No. Yes. It's just... It's just the last time I was here... Years ago. I lost a friend. He died here.

CONSTANCE

Oh. I'm sorry.

HOST

No. It was for the best. He had a long, long life. And he was so miserable in the end. It was the kindest thing. It was worth the gamble.

CONSTANCE

Gamble?

HOST

Sometimes you just have to trust in Fate. Because Fate can be kind. Especially in matters of the heart. (we hear the hum of *Greensleeves* before EPHRAIM enters, dressed in a contemporary fashion. He carries a sketch pad under one arm. HOST smiles.) Well, looks like we have a guest. Right on time.

CONSTANCE

Do you know him?

HOST

In a manner of speaking.

CONSTANCE

I've been keeping my eye on him since he arrived. There's something about him...

HOST

Here. Why don't you talk to him? Welcome him.

CONSTANCE

No. Me?

HOST

It's all part of the job, isn't it? Go on. Go.

(A little confused, CONSTANCE approaches EPHRAIM who is now sketching. Unsure how to strike up a conversation she decides to step into his line of sight. EPHRAIM looks up and finds himself looking at CONSTANCE.)

CONSTANCE

Doing some drawing are you?

EPHRAIM

Is that all right?

CONSTANCE

Of course. (pause, takes the plunge) May I see?

EPHRAIM

(considers, then with a smile) Sure. (passes his sketchbook)

CONSTANCE (flipping through the book)

Well. You're really quite good, aren't you? That's the stable. The common room. And... (pointing to a sketch in the pad) Is that what I think it is?

EPHRAIM

It's a dagger. Some medieval relic. I saw it in the other room. It caught my eye.

CONSTANCE

It's one of my favourite pieces here.

EPHRAIM

Yes. Mine too. It's still not quite right. It's still missing something. (takes the sketchbook and returns to the drawing)

(CONSTANCE looks back at the HOST. He waves her on encouragingly. CONSTANCE turns back to EPHRAIM and steps forward.)

CONSTANCE

What was that tune you were humming?

EPHRAIM (considers, then with smile)

It's *Greensleeves* I think.

CONSTANCE

Or some other song about knights, yeah.

EPHRAIM

It's been running around in my head ever since I arrived here.

CONSTANCE

Fascinating. Listen. I hope you won't think I'm being forward, but- How would you like to have a drink with me? We could share a bottle of wine. Maybe something...

EPHRAIM

French?

CONSTANCE

Yeah.

EPHRAIM

Are you asking me out?

CONSTANCE

If you're interested.

EPHRAIM (pause, considers, then with smile)

Sure. Why not? You know what they say: You got to make hay while the sun shines.

CONSTANCE

You got to get it while the getting's good.

EPHRAIM

Three dead crows-

EPHRAIM & CONSTANCE

Are better than a pancake any day.

CONSTANCE
Right.

EPHRAIM
Right.

CONSTANCE & EPHRAIM
Right...

(They regard each other with wonder at this shared thought.)

CONSTANCE (beat, indicates her nametag)
Constance.

HOST
(to himself) The easiest possible solution.

EPHRAIM (introducing himself)
Matthew.

HOST
A fresh start.

EPHRAIM
Hello, Constance.

CONSTANCE
Hello, Matthew.

EPHRAIM
Pleased to meet you.

CONSTANCE
Likewise.

(They shake hands and hold the grip, there is a lingering moment of deep though fresh recognition, silence, then:)

EPHRAIM
So...

CONSTANCE

So... (with smiles CONSTANCE and EPHRAIM move to an exit, then she remembers the HOST) Oh. Sorry. I nearly forgot... Are you going to be all right here by yourself?

HOST

I should be. It's nearly closing time.

CONSTANCE

Then if you don't mind...

HOST

Go ahead. (caressing her face with tenderness) Time's a-wasting.

CONSTANCE (crossing to EPHRAIM)

By the way-

HOST

(to audience) Yes, my friends.

CONSTANCE

-do you dance?

EPHRAIM

Love it.

HOST

Things *do* change.

CONSTANCE

Me too.

HOST

For better or for worse.

CONSTANCE

Maybe we should go some time?

HOST

Only time will tell.

EPHRAIM

Love to.

HOST
So...

EPHRAIM
Constance?

CONSTANCE
Yes?

HOST
If there are no further questions?

EPHRAIM
Has anyone ever told you... ?

CONSTANCE
What?

EPHRAIM
You are the most beautiful woman in the world?

HOST
Going...

CONSTANCE
Not lately.

HOST
Going...

CONSTANCE
But I certainly wouldn't mind hearing it again.

(The HOST watches CONSTANCE and EPHRAIM exit together, then turns to audience.)

HOST (wistfully)
Time's up.

(BLACK OUT)

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