

DECKED

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FADE IN:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A group of four adults -- DAD (37), TED (41), MOM (38), and WENDY (36) -- play an intense game of poker. Their faces are not visible, just their hands and torsos.

The players clutch their cards as chips fly and the pot grows ever bigger.

A forgotten little girl, FIONA (8), peeks up over the edge of table, watching the action.

DAD

Okay, I'll raise you ten.

TED

Oh, you're so bluffing. I'll just raise you another ten. Who's in?

MOM

Well, I think you're both bluffing.

FIONA

Why do the cards all have numbers on them?

TED

Wendy? You in?

WENDY

You bet I am! I call.

FIONA

And why do they have little hearts and diamonds?

TED

(showing his cards)  
Four kings! Which means it doesn't matter if you were bluffing or not!

DAD

Not bad. But I wasn't bluffing, and it does matter.

(showing his cards)  
Four aces.

The others groan and throw in their cards. Dad takes the pot.

WENDY

I should've known!

TED

Yeah, some host you are, taking all our money.

DAD

Hey, you're free to leave any time.

WENDY

No one leaves! Not until I get my money back.

FIONA

Why do four aces beat four kings? What's an ace anyway?

DAD

Honey, do you mind? We're trying to play here.

GRANDMA (74) appears, taking Fiona aside. The other adults' faces still aren't visible, but Grandma is down at Fiona's level, so we see her kind, friendly face just fine.

GRANDMA

Come on, Darling. Let's let the adults finish their game.

FIONA

It's a boring game. Cards are stupid.

GRANDMA

Oh, cards aren't stupid! And they're anything but a game -- at least they didn't start out that way.

FIONA

They didn't?

Grandma leads Fiona away from the poker game, into...

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where they sit by the COZY FIRE.

GRANDMA

The cards in a deck are all based on real people, and the numbers and symbols come from real events. In fact, there was a time when those numbers and symbols made the difference between war and peace.

(MORE)

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

And for one boy, they meant the difference between life and death.

FIONA

They did?

GRANDMA

You've really never heard the story behind a deck of playing cards?

Fiona shakes her head no.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Well, then, it seems I must be the one to tell it!

She pulls Fiona up onto her lap.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

It all happened many, many years ago. There was once a land with four kingdoms, each right next to the other. But these four kingdoms were all very different.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE KINGDOM OF SPADES - DAY

It's a great MEDIEVAL CITY. The buildings and towers are decorated with spades, as on a playing card. Many of the structures are also covered with ivy and divided by grassy parks, giving the whole city the feel of a college campus.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

One of those kingdoms was the Kingdom of Spades, and the people who lived there fancied themselves great thinkers.

As we explore the city from above, we peek into windows and see...

SCHOLARS arguing over documents.

INSTRUCTORS lecturing in seminars in front of rapt audiences.

STUDENTS in the library, at tables and in carrels, all reading books.

GRANDMA (V.O.)  
 And all those books and seminars?  
 It had led the citizens of the  
 Kingdom of Spades to the conclusion  
 that they were better and more  
 important than anyone else.

Still seeing the buildings from above, we move into the land  
 next to the Kingdom of Spades...

EXT. THE KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS - CONTINUOUS

It's a land of DAZZLING WEALTH! The buildings -- much more  
 lavish than the Kingdom of Spades -- are decorated with  
 diamond patterns. Ostentatiousness is in.

GRANDMA (V.O.)  
 Right next to them was the Kingdom  
 of Diamonds. And as much as the  
 people of the Kingdom of Spades  
 valued thoughts and ideas, the  
 people of the Kingdom of Diamonds  
 loved their wealth.

Once again, we explore the city from above, panning by  
 windows showing...

ACCOUNTANTS delicately weighing jewels and gold.

MERCHANTS AND CUSTOMERS haggling over prices.

PARTY-GOERS dripping with jewels, dancing and eating,  
 flaunting their fabulous wealth.

Leaving the Kingdom of Diamonds behind, we pass into the next  
 kingdom over...

EXT. THE KINGDOM OF HEARTS - CONTINUOUS

This is a land of DECADENCE AND PLEASURE. The Elizabethan-  
 style buildings are decorated with red hearts, along with  
 statues of cupid and other frills.

GRANDMA (V.O.)  
 Then there was the kingdom of  
 Hearts, where they mostly concerned  
 themselves with pleasure and  
 matters of love and romance.

As we view the kingdom from above...

HOT AIR BALLOONS in the shape of giant red hearts waft by.

Down in the street, a moonstruck LOVER serenades his lover's window.

In the city's other windows, we see...

ARTISTS painting and sculpting, and POETS dreaming.

CHEFS serving their diners sumptuous chocolate desserts and other decadent delights.

LOVERS kissing amid bright flowers and soft pillows, even as they slyly close the curtains on those outside.

And still we move on to one more kingdom...

EXT. THE KINGDOM OF CLUBS - CONTINUOUS

It's a land of MILITARY MIGHT AND WARFARE. The buildings are stark and armored. The only decorations are the simple black "clubs" symbols emblazoned on pennants and flags.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

And finally, there was the Kingdom of Clubs. Here the people valued physical might and military strength.

Panning the courtyards, we see...

SOLDIERS training for combat. Nearby, CHILDREN imitate their warrior-parents with training and play-combat of their own.

In the windows of the buildings beyond, we see...

BLACKSMITHS forging mighty weapons in the blaze of mighty kilns.

MEN AND WOMEN polishing their armor, and sharpening their weapons to ever-keener edges.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

The four kingdoms were very different, but over the years, they had learned to coexist. And the spot where all four kingdoms met had become a thriving central marketplace.

## EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

The marketplace -- A VAST PLAZA -- is divided up into four equal areas, each quarter made of a different kind of stone and each indicative of the kingdom itself (solid, frilly, etc.).

In the very center of the marketplace is A FOUNTAIN, but it too is divided up into four different sections, each done in the style of the kingdom it represents.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

The four royal palaces all faced that marketplace -- some said it was so the different kings and queens could always keep an eye on the others.

A ROYAL PALACE rises up on each side of the plaza -- every one a perfect symbol of its land. And each palace has a grand balcony that oversees the plaza beyond.

Meanwhile, A LARGE BANNER hangs down above each balcony. The colors and adornments on the banners are different (and befitting the kingdom), but they all have the same central symbol: a stylized "Y."

GRANDMA (V.O.)

The kings and queens of the different kingdoms only met in person once a year, at the Summer Festival, hosted in a different palace each year. And all through the year, they each displayed a banner on their palace marked with the letter "Y," to indicate that yes, they would be attending that year's festival. The kingdoms had been at peace so long that rumor had it they no longer even had banners for "no"!

(beat)

As for the people of these lands, they were as divided as the kingdoms. For except for the kings and queens and princes, the people of all four kingdoms were forced to wear numbers.

We keep moving in closer and closer.

And for the first time, we are close enough to get a good look at...

## THE PEOPLE

They all have a large patch with a number sewn into the front of their clothing, from "2" TO "10."

GRANDMA (V.O.)

And these numbers were very important, because they determined your worth. The higher the number, the better your lot in life. But unfortunately for the people with the lower numbers, there was no way to ever change them.

Moving back into the Kingdom of Spades, we finally come to...

A SMALL HOUSE. It's considerably more modest than those around it.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

This is the story of a boy named Erik. The highest number a person could be was ten, but Erik and his mother were twos. And that was as low as you could go without being convicted of a serious crime.

The front door opens.

A boy stands in the doorway, holding the hand of his mother, KATHERINE (40). This is ERIK, AGE 8. There is a "2" on both their chests.

Even so, the sun still shines, and Erik greets the morning with a big smile. He and his mother step forward into the waiting day.

INT. BUTCHER - LATER

A row of plump chickens dangles in the window. Erik and his mother wait their turn to be helped by THE BUTCHER.

But when Erik and his mother reach the counter, he takes one look at the numbers on their chests, and hands them only scraps of chicken -- feet and heads.

EXT. MARKET VENDOR - LATER

Erik and his mother stand with a waiting crowd in front of another VENDOR. The fresh fruit looks luscious on his cart.



But once again, the vendor looks at their numbers and hands them a few miserable-looking carrots and turnips.

INT. BAKER - LATER

While his mother buys bread -- day-old loaves -- Erik wanders into the street

EXT. THE STREET - CONTINUOUS

A group of BOYS about his age play ball. They're all nines.

Erik watches. ONE notices.

NINE

Did you wanna play with us?

ERIK

Sure!

The boy comes forward, offering Erik the ball.

Erik reaches out to take it...

...but instead the boy tosses the ball back to another boy and...

SMACK! He slugs Erik right in the face.

The boys all LAUGH.

ANOTHER NINE

Ha! You decked him good!

Katherine quickly pulls Erik away, hurrying them down the street.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ERIK'S HOUSE - DAY

It's morning several years later. The sun is shining, but not as brightly as before.

The door opens again. ERIK, AGE 12, stands in the doorway.

He's alone now, and noticeably more hesitant. But he still musters a small smile at the morning.

He steps out into the day.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Erik waits his turn at a shelf of books.

One by one, higher-ranked STUDENTS snatch books from the shelves.

By the time Erik reaches the shelf, the books are all gone.

INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY

Erik waits in line to enter a classroom. The PEOPLE in front of him all have higher numbers.

But when Erik reaches the door, the TEACHER takes one look at his "2," stops him, and puts up a sign that reads "Class Full."

SLAM! She closes the door right in his face.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Erik, food in hand, looks around for a place to sit. But all the tables seem to be full.

Erik finally notices an open seat -- but it's a table full of SIXES.

Warily, he approaches. Just as he reaches for the chair...

Another SIX steps in front of him, taking the chair.

BAM! He hits Erik with his elbow.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ERIK'S HOUSE - DAY

It's yet another morning -- the sky is overcast now. The door opens one more time. ERIK is now sixteen.

He's much more wary now, fearful of the world. But then, catching himself, he straightens his back and starts to step out into the street when...

SMACK! A group of THREES runs by, one of them punching him right in the face.

That's it -- Erik has finally had all he can take! He fights back tears.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

It wasn't fair, the way the higher numbers treated the lower ones. But there wasn't anything Erik could do about it.

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

Erik wanders, looking glum, trying to read a tattered, faded book.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

But then one day, a pair of traveling jesters came to town. Real jokers, they were.

A CROWD has gathered up ahead.

Erik works his way through the people to see what's attracted their attention.

It's two PERFORMING JESTERS (or "jokers") -- a man (36) and a woman (35) in tassels and jinglebells. Rather than numbers on their chests, they both wear the letter "J".

They're putting on a show, acting completely ridiculous.

Or is it so ridiculous? As part of their show, they place fake numbers on their chests, one higher and one lower. The one with the higher number mercilessly abuses the one with the lower number.

But then the lower-ranked one suddenly switches the numbers -- and the power dynamic switches too.

Back and forth they go, constantly switching the numbers, seeing their fortunes rise and plummet.

THE AUDIENCE LAUGHS hysterically.

NEARBY

MARCUS FOWLER (42), the Captain of the Palace Guard (and a ten), browses the food carts, pushing aside lower-numbered people and simply helping himself to whatever looks good. He's accompanied by two dour-faced LIEUTENANTS (also tens).

He and his lieutenants spot the performance of the jesters. They descend.

FOWLER

Okay, that's enough!

The jesters look at him, seemingly not understanding.

FOWLER (CONT'D)

I mean it!

But now the jesters incorporate Fowler and the guards into their act -- surreptitiously replacing their numbers with lower ones.

THE CROWD LAUGHS again, but Fowler is furious.

FOWLER (CONT'D)

Don't you people understand? The numbers are important! Without them, there'd be chaos!

THE CROWD KEEPS LAUGHING as the Jesters continue to torment Fowler.

FOWLER (CONT'D)

Stop that this instant!

(to the crowd)

The next person who laughs will be arrested!

That SILENCES THE CROWD. It quickly disperses.

But when Fowler and his guards look for the jesters, they seem to have disappeared along with the crowd.

FOWLER (CONT'D)

Where'd they--?

(to his lieutenants)

Find them! Now!

With the show over, Erik moves on. But the higher-numbered people push him aside.

With a weary sigh, Erik steps into an alley to wait for the crowd to clear.

Something JINGLES in the darkness behind him.

It's the jesters.

ERIK

Oh. You.

They seem fascinated by the book in his hand.

ERIK (CONT'D)

You better be careful. That was Marcus Fowler back there -- the Captain of the Palace Guard.

One of the jesters distracts Erik while the other snatches his book.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Hey! What are you doing?

Using misdirection again, the jester tosses the book away.

It slides toward a sewer grate.

WHOOSH! It disappears down inside.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Are you crazy? I have to pay for that!

But somehow ... the jesters are gone again.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Thanks a lot.

With another weary sigh, he peers down into the sewer.

The book is caught on a ledge below -- but out of reach.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Dang it!

He lifts the grate, then squeezes down into the sewer.

INT. THE SEWER - CONTINUOUS

Erik climbs down into the cavernous brick tunnels.

He reaches for the book.

But A STRANGE WIND BLOWS down from the open sewer above him, tipping the book into the water with a...

SPLASH!

ERIK  
No! It's gonna be ruined!

But at least it floats.

Balancing on the narrow ledge at the side of the tunnel, Erik follows after the book.

It leads him deeper into the sewers.

INT. SEWER CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

It's a central chamber where sewer channels from four different directions all meet and disappear down a big central drain to an underground river.

THE CEILING is made up of four different sections -- all of a different kind of a stone that meet in a "four corners"-type spot.

Erik must now be directly under the fountain in the middle of the central marketplace.

Before he can grab the book, it gets sucked down the central drain.

This so figures! He slumps in defeat.

But just as he does...

TALLY (O.S.)

Criminey!

It's a girl -- TALLY (16) -- a two like Erik, but from the Kingdom of Diamonds. She's got soot on her face and a wisecrack on the tongue -- she's a guttersnipe if ever there was one. She also wears a frayed accountant's visor -- maybe to hide the lifetime of disappointment in her eyes.

ERIK

What?

TALLY

The bank note!

She's come out of one of the other sewer tunnels, following a dollar-bill-like BANK NOTE floating in the water.

But it's too late. It's quickly sucked down into the river too.

TALLY (CONT'D)

Cripes! That was a whole pound!

ERIK

What happened?

TALLY

No one else was willing to come down here after it.

ERIK

You're from the Kingdom of Diamonds.

TALLY

Wow, you Spades really are sharp,  
aren't ya?

But now someone else enters from the third chamber -- it's VICTOR (17), a two from the Kingdom of Hearts. He's black, and his bearing is formal, even pompous, but his face is bright and open. Even before this trip into the sewer, his hose and frilly finery had clearly seen better days.

He's following A ROSE floating on the water.

VICTOR

In haste I beseech thee, do snatch  
it from the runnel!

TALLY

Huh?

VICTOR

Grab the rose!

ERIK

Oh!

Erik reaches for it, but it quickly slips down the drain along with everything else.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Sorry.

VICTOR

Oh, woe is I! I vowed to retrieve  
the rose that slipped from Milady's  
fingers. I am not worthy of her  
hand!

TALLY

Is she a two too?

VICTOR

Milady proudly bears the number  
nine.

TALLY

Then you wouldn't be worthy even if  
you'd got it.

BRINN (O.S.)

Stupid gleekin' sewer!

Yet another person appears, from the fourth chamber: BRINN (17), a butch, bold, sometimes foul-mouthed girl from the Kingdom of Clubs.

She's also a two, wearing studded leather armor, and hurrying after yet another object floating in the water -- a PRIZE RIBBON.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
Grab that!

TALLY  
What is it?

BRINN  
My ribbon of valor!

They try to stop it -- but it too disappears down the drain.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
Puking pignuts!

VICTOR  
Fair maiden ... thou speakest with  
a colored tongue.

She sticks out her tongue, tries to look at it.

BRINN  
Looks the same to me.

TALLY  
Where the hell are we anyway?

ERIK  
I think we're under the marketplace  
-- the place where all four  
kingdoms meet.

VICTOR  
Hark, I am Victor! Who be you  
three?

BRINN  
(teasing)  
Hark, I'm Brinn.

ERIK  
Erik.

TALLY  
Tally.

ERIK  
We're all twos. Four of a kind.

BRINN  
But what are you doing here?



ERIK

I guess we all followed something  
into the sewers -- something  
valuable.

TALLY

And none of us found it again. That  
figures.

VICTOR

With that rose, I just know I  
could've finally won Milady's hand.

BRINN

With that ribbon, my dad would've  
had to admit what I can do on the  
field.

TALLY

I coulda had somethin' to eat.

ERIK

And I don't even know how I'm gonna  
pay for that book.

Beat.

TALLY

Well ... I guess I should get back.

ERIK

Yeah, me too.

But still they all linger.

BRINN

It's funny. I don't wanna go back  
up.

TALLY

Me neither. And this is the sewer.

VICTOR

'Tis true. Pray tell, why is that?

ERIK

Because down here we're all the  
same.

They all smile and nod. That's it!

BRINN

Being a two bites like a horsefly.

TALLY

Ya got that right.

ERIK

It won't always be like this.  
Someday things'll change.

TALLY

Things don't change. Not for us  
anyway.

VICTOR

They might! No one knows what the  
morrow may bring.

TALLY

That's what people always say, but  
even if things do change, who says  
they'll be better? Maybe they'll be  
even worse.

BRINN

Tottering tosspot, ain't you a ray  
of sunshine?

TALLY

It's true though. You know it is.

ERIK

Well, I know how we could make  
things a little bit better.

VICTOR

How?

ERIK

We could all meet here again  
tomorrow. Same time?

They all think, then, one by one, they smile at the idea --  
even Tally.

EXT. ERIK'S HOUSE - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

KATHERINE (PRELAP, V.O.)

Uh, don't take this the wrong way,  
but you've smelled better.

INT. ERIK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Erik and his mom clean up after dinner.

ERIK  
 Sorry. I went looking for something  
 in the sewer.

KATHERINE  
 I hope you found it!

He thinks.

ERIK  
 Maybe something even better.  
 (beat)  
 Mom?

KATHERINE  
 Hmm?

ERIK  
 Did people always have to wear  
 numbers?

KATHERINE  
 Erik! You know better than to talk  
 about that.

ERIK  
 Please, Mom. There's nothing about  
 it in the library -- I've looked.

She crosses to the door, makes sure there's no one listening,  
 then closes and LOCKS IT.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
 Well?

KATHERINE  
 All I know is that people have had  
 to wear numbers since before my  
 grandparents were born.

ERIK  
 I bet it was the kings and queens.  
 The same way they divided the land  
 into kingdoms.

KATHERINE  
 I suppose you're right.

ERIK  
 It's not fair.

KATHERINE  
 No, it's not.

ERIK  
Someone needs to change things.

KATHERINE  
Oh, Erik.

ERIK  
What?

KATHERINE  
People have tried to change things.

ERIK  
Yeah? Who?

She opens a hiding place in the floor, pulls out a shirt with a number "4" on it. It's decorated with hearts.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Dad?

She nods, holding it longingly.

KATHERINE  
He was determined that we be together. Our different numbers were one thing, but different kingdoms? That's against the law.

ERIK  
Why didn't you leave?

KATHERINE  
And go where? The four kingdoms stretch all the way to the ocean. Besides, he wanted to change things. So they killed him. They would've killed us too, but he refused to betray us. He died so that I could live -- so that you could live.

ERIK  
I hate these kingdoms. I hate being a two!

KATHERINE  
Well, there's one good thing about being twos.

ERIK  
What's that?

KATHERINE

As long as we're on the bottom ...  
we don't have anything left to  
lose.

ERIK

I don't care. Somehow I am going to  
change things -- for both of us.

She stares at him with tears in her eyes -- tears of pride,  
but also tears of fear.

KATHERINE

That's exactly what your father  
said.

ERIK

Don't worry. It'll be different for  
me.

But at that, she looks down at the shirt again -- and the  
concern grows stronger in her eyes.

ERIK (CONT'D)

What?

KATHERINE

He said that too.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Erik walks to school, being pushed aside by others even now.

He passes a building marked "Workers for Hire." MEN AND WOMEN  
are lined up, waiting for employment.

A TAILOR talks to the PROPRIETOR.

TAILOR

Got any fours?

PROPRIETOR

That I do!

He nods a couple of FOURS forward.

Next up, a FISHERMAN speaks to the proprietor.

FISHERMAN

Got any sixes?

PROPRIETOR

Nope.

FISHERMAN

Are you sure?

PROPRIETOR

I said no! Now go fish!

Up ahead, Erik once again spots the performing jesters, busking for the crowd.

Erik hurries forward, but by the time he gets there, they've somehow moved on.

ERIK

Where did they...?

He spots the jesters again, farther down the street.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Hey! You guys threw my book into the sewer!

But they don't seem to hear him.

And when he steps forward to confront them, they've once again disappeared into the crowd.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Stop! I wanna talk to you!

Erik chases them.

But somehow they always slip away from him.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Stop running away! I mean it!

He spots them one more time, just inside...

EXT. A DARK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The jesters glance over at him -- almost like they know he's following them.

They disappear into the shadows.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Are you kidding me?

Erik stops at the entrance to the alley. Their bells JINGLE from somewhere inside.

He follows the sound.

He comes to an opening in the wall -- a secret passage in the stone that's been left ajar.

From inside, the bells of the jesters JINGLE again.

Furious, Erik follows.

INT. STORAGE CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

It's a forgotten storage chamber, filled with dusty old furniture and tapestries and the like. But without windows or lights, it's too dark to make much out.

ERIK

Look, I don't know why you guys  
can't just admit...

But the room seems deserted.

The secret passage SLIDES CLOSED behind him. There's no latch or knob to open it again, just sheer stone.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Great. Just great.

He turns back to the room...

...and spots the tassel from one of the jester's costumes sticking out under a tapestry.

ERIK (CONT'D)

(approaching)

This isn't funny. I need to get to  
school!

But the tassel is part of the tapestry: it's not the jesters in hiding after all.

A bell JINGLES -- it comes from a nearby servants' staircase.

ERIK (CONT'D)

Hello? Are you there?

But there is no response.

With no other choice, he starts up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

It's sumptuously decorated -- whoever lives here is loaded.

Erik spots a PORTRAIT on the wall of the King of Spades (which looks like a playing card, but without the bottom half).

ERIK  
 (to himself)  
 Wait a minute. This is the royal  
 palace!

Erik spots a single jinglebell on the floor farther down the hallway.

He hurries toward it, picks it up.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
 (whispering)  
 This isn't funny! You need to tell  
 me how to get out of here!

But it's too late: SOMEONE IS COMING up the main stairway!

Erik ducks inside the closest door.

INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's even more lavish than the hallway outside.

The door starts to open right behind him.

He ducks behind the furniture.

Three people enter the room: THE KING OF SPADES (55), THE QUEEN OF SPADES (54), and Marcus Fowler (the Captain of the Palace Guards, from the encounter on the street).

QUEEN OF SPADES  
 (to the room)  
 Jack? Where are you?  
 (to Fowler)  
 Where's the prince?

FOWLER  
 I'm sure I told him to meet us  
 here.

A TOILET FLUSHES loudly behind a door in the back of the room.

THE PRINCE OF SPADES (19) emerges from the bathroom.

PRINCE OF SPADES  
 Calm down, Mother. I'm right here.



QUEEN OF SPADES

That makes such a racket! We must speak to the royal engineers to see if they can come up with something quieter -- some kind of royal flush.

As she speaks, the characters are lined up in this order: Fowler (a ten), the Prince of Spades, the Queen of Spades, the King of Spades, and Erik (hiding behind the divan).

PRINCE OF SPADES

So? What was so important that we all meet?

QUEEN OF SPADES

I have decided on the plan for the Summer Festival.

KING OF SPADES

We decided. It's my plan too!

QUEEN OF SPADES

Of course it is, my king.

KING OF SPADES

And soon I can rule as the one true king of all four kingdoms!

QUEEN OF SPADES

Indeed, my king!

The prince rolls his eyes, but the queen glares at him with a disapproving scowl.

QUEEN OF SPADES (CONT'D)

Now the plan is this. In two days time, the royal banquet of Summer Festival will be held here at the Palace of Spades. But the night of the banquet...

She holds up a LETTER on frilly stationary.

QUEEN OF SPADES (CONT'D)

First, a torrid love letter, apparently from the King of Hearts to the Queen of Clubs, will be intercepted by the King of Clubs.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT - FLASHFOWARD

It's the Summer Festival dinner attended by the royals and their retinues.

A FOOTMAN "accidentally" delivers the letter to the KING OF CLUBS (39), a serious bad-ass.

The king opens it and reads it.

He growls in fury.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

The Queen of Spades holds up a DIAMOND NECKLACE.

QUEEN OF SPADES

Next, this necklace, recently stolen from the Queen of Diamonds, will find itself around the neck of the Queen of Clubs.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT - FLASHFORWARD

A THIEF, dressed as a waiter, deftly swaps necklaces on the neck of the QUEEN OF CLUBS (55).

A moment later, the QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (59) notices the necklace:

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

(outraged)

That's my stolen necklace!

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

The Queen of Spades holds up an ENGRAVED PLACE CARD.

QUEEN OF SPADES

Finally, the place card of the Queen of Diamonds will find itself in the hands of the King of Hearts -- and he'll see this.

The queen turns the place card over, revealing a VICIOUS CARTOON DOODLE of the King of Hearts.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT - FLASHFOWARD

Fowler "accidentally" drops the place card near the KING OF HEARTS (55), a man easily caricatured. The king spots the doodle and stands up, outraged.

KING OF HEARTS  
(to the Queen of Diamonds)  
How dare you!

QUEEN OF SPADES (V.O.)  
The other kings and queens are  
such simpletons they'll easily fall  
for the deceptions.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT - FLASHFOWARD

The banquet descends into TOTAL CHAOS -- the kings and queens shouting insults at each other as their guards fight amongst themselves even as they try to drag the royals to safety.

QUEEN OF SPADES  
Chaos will break out then and  
there, and an all-out war between  
them is sure to follow.

At the banquet, the Queen of Spades watches the chaos, grinning imperiously.

CLOSE ON the face of the Queen as we...

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

The Queen of Spades has the same imperious grin.

QUEEN OF SPADES  
Then we can simply sit back and  
watch the other three kingdoms  
destroy themselves. And when  
they're done, our forces will swoop  
in and seize control!

PRINCE OF SPADES  
An excellent plan, Mother!

Listening, Erik stiffens in horror. Under him, THE FLOOR CREAKS.

No one notices except for Fowler. He scans the room, curious.

QUEEN OF SPADES

Marcus? What is it?

FOWLER

Nothing. It is a most impressive plan, your majesty.

KING OF SPADES

It's my plan too! I was the one who thought to do place cards in the first place.

FOWLER

Yes, your majesty -- an essential contribution.

QUEEN OF SPADES

The plan will work! And then I--  
(to the king, sweetly)  
I mean, you ... will rule as you were meant to rule!

KING OF SPADES

As I was meant to rule!

QUEEN OF SPADES

(to the king)  
Now come, let us go find some of those scones and marmalade you like so much.

KING OF SPADES

And strawberries and cream?

QUEEN OF SPADES

Indeed, my king.

The king, queen, and prince exit -- but Fowler lingers.

FOWLER

(to the room)  
Whoever you are, you're either very brave or very stupid.

Fowler begins to search the room, looking behind furniture and throwing aside tapestries.

It's only a matter of time before Erik is discovered.

So, when Fowler is distracted, Erik dashes for the curtains.

He makes it -- barely.

FOWLER (CONT'D)  
Show yourself, and even now you may  
know my mercy!

Fowler searches again, with increasing urgency:

FOWLER (CONT'D)  
(opening a wardrobe)  
Ha!

Meanwhile, Erik slips into the toilet. He peeks out at  
Fowler...

...who finishes searching the room.

Fowler stops, perplexed: was there no one there after all?

FOWLER (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
I need a holiday.

He turns to go.

INT. THE TOILET - CONTINUOUS

Erik relaxes, leaning back against the toilet itself --  
accidentally hitting the flush mechanism.

The FLUSH is ridiculously loud.

INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fowler whirls on the bathroom.

He crosses to it, throwing open the door.

But now the room is empty.

EXT. THE LEDGE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Erik stands perched precariously.

INT. THE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fowler scans the room, spots the window. He throws it open  
and looks outside.

EXT. THE LEDGE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Erik is gone now -- the ledge is clear.

But there are FOOTPRINTS in the pigeon droppings.

Fowler climbs out the window in pursuit.

EXT. THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Erik hurries across the roof.

He comes to a row of large, decorative spades made of metal.

BEHIND ERIK

Fowler arrives, out of breath.

Fowler glances around -- but the roof seems deserted.

One by one, he looks behind each of the giant spades, but there's no one there.

He looks over at the last spade -- and sees Erik crouched behind it.

He draws his sword and approaches.

FOWLER

I seeeee you.

But as he approaches, Erik pulls back hard on the metal spade.

He releases it, and ... SMACK! It slaps forward, hitting Fowler, causing him to stumble backward.

Erik flees.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Erik comes to the edge of the roof and looks down -- it's a very long way.

He gauges the distance between the next closest roof -- ridiculously far.

He jumps...

...and just barely makes it!

He scurries upright and runs, desperate to get away.

Fowler arrives on the first roof -- and immediately spots dislodged shingles on the roof across the gap.

He jumps too, making it easily.

EXT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Through two open windows, a WIFE talks to her HUSBAND with a CHILD nearby. They're all spades. In the other room, another MAN and WOMAN wait, both diamonds.

WIFE

They can't stay! It's against the law for them to even be here. Besides, with the two of them and three of us, this is just a full house!

UP ON THEIR ROOF

Erik runs quickly by -- and leaps for the next roof over.

The moment he's gone, Fowler appears, in hot pursuit.

EXT. YET ANOTHER ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Erik passes a row of clotheslines, all heavy with clothes.

He comes to the edge of another roof and hesitates.

BACK ON FOWLER

He hurries across the roof.

UP AHEAD

A darkened figure leaps from one roof to the next.

Fowler jumps after him.

EXT. THE NEXT ROOF OVER - CONTINUOUS

Fowler grabs for the figure on the roof ahead of him.

FOWLER

Got you!

He pulls out his sword again and jams it deep!

But ... it's not a person at all. It's a dummy made up of a pair of longjohns stuffed with other clothing from the clotheslines. It's wearing Erik's shirt.

Fowler whirls back toward the roof he came from.

Erik, shirtless, disappears inside an open window.

Fowler growls, but doesn't give chase -- Erik is too far away.

Fowler looks back at the stuffed dummy. He immediately zeroes in on the "2" stitched to its front.

He scowls, furious.

ERIK (PRELAP, V.O.)  
This means war.

INT. SEWER CHAMBER - DAY

It's the next day, and Erik has met Tally, Victor, and Brinn again, as planned.

Erik is telling them everything he's learned:

TALLY  
War?

ERIK  
The King and Queen of Spades -- well, mostly the Queen. They're determined to be the rulers of all four kingdoms!

BRINN  
Half-faced hedge pigs! Well, the Clubs'll bash their brains in.

ERIK  
Not if they have to fight the Diamonds and Hearts first. Don't you see? She's playing the kingdoms against each other.

VICTOR  
And be not so certain the Hearts will fall to your swords. There is no more powerful motivator in all the universe than love.



TALLY

Try greed -- and the Diamonds got  
lotsa that. They also got the money  
to pay for mercenaries.

ERIK

We need to stop it.

TALLY

The war? Why?

ERIK

Don't you see? This is how we can  
finally change things!

BRINN

What?

ERIK

If we can stop the war, we'll be  
heroes. They'll have to raise our  
numbers then!

BRINN

It'd sure get my dad's attention.

VICTOR

And I'd finally win the hand of  
Milady!

TALLY

That's crazy. We can't stop a war.

ERIK

We can if we tell the other kings  
and queens what's really happening.

EXT. THE PALACE OF DIAMONDS - DAY

Erik and the others approach the GUARDS at the door to the  
palace.

ERIK

(to his friends)  
Everyone ready?

BRINN

Let's do it!

TALLY

I still say this is crazy.

ERIK  
 (to the guards, boldly)  
 We seek an audience with the King  
 of Diamonds!

The guard takes a look at the "2" on his chest. Then...

SMACK! He decks him in the face -- and down he goes.

EXT. THE PALACE OF CLUBS - LATER

Erik and his friends approach the GUARDS in front of this palace.

Erik, sporting a nasty black eye, is more wary now.

ERIK  
 Excuse me--

Before he can get another word out, a guard decks him -- and down he goes again

EXT. THE PALACE OF HEARTS - LATER

Erik and his friends stand before the GUARDS in front of the final palace. Erik, woozy now, has a black eye and a bloody nose stuffed with cotton.

ERIK  
 Uh, how about someone else talk to  
 them this time?

TALLY  
 But you're doing such a good job!

He glares at her.

TALLY (CONT'D)  
 Okay, fine, I'll do it.

She faces the guards.

TALLY (CONT'D)  
 Excuse me, we seek an audience with  
 the King of Hearts!

Noting her "2," one of the guard starts to slug her.

But Tally ducks.

The guard ends up decking Erik instead -- and down he goes one more time.

EXT. DESERTED ALLEY, KINGDOM OF HEARTS - LATER

The four friends take stock in a hiding place near the Palace of Hearts. Erik is so bruised and battered he can barely stand.

The alley is filled the detritus of the kingdom -- old hearts and ribbons, discarded roses, etc.

BRINN  
Okay, so asking for an audience  
didn't work.

ERIK  
(woozy)  
Urp.

He starts to fall, but Brinn prods him upright.

VICTOR  
What do we do now?

TALLY  
Maybe we could sneak past the  
guards.

ERIK  
(still woozy)  
Akk.

He starts to fall again, but now Victor tips him upright.

BRINN  
(to Tally)  
How?

OUT AT THE CASTLE

A DELIVERY PERSON carries a large bouquet of roses up to the gate. The guards let him pass.

BACK IN THE ALLEY

Tally glances at the garbage all around them.

TALLY  
I have an idea. Help me gather this  
stuff up.

They all turn away at the same time, leaving Erik standing alone. Without support from the others...

...he topples over with a painful-sounding THUD.

Tally and the others look back, chagrined.

EXT. THE PALACE OF HEARTS - LATER

Tally and the others have assembled a MASSIVE HEART-SHAPED VALENTINE out of the garbage in the alley.

Victor, in disguise as a delivery person, wheels it toward the palace.

Now we see that Tally, Brinn, and Erik are crammed awkwardly inside.

TALLY

Mmmm mmmm mm mm mm mmmmm!

ERIK

What?

TALLY

I said, your foot is in my mouth!

ERIK

Oh! Sorry.

TALLY

(from inside, whispering)

Remember, it has to be delivered in person!

VICTOR

I know, I know!

(to the guards)

I come bearing a Valentine for the king!

GUARD

Valentine's Day was four months ago.

VICTOR

Do my ears deceive me? Does thou dare to put a time-limit on love? Does one count the beats of an aching heart? Should one measure the length of a lingering sigh?

The guards exchange a glance, then shrug, allowing Victor and his valentine inside.

INT. ENTRYWAY, THE PALACE OF HEARTS - CONTINUOUS

Inside the palace, PEOPLE bustle about -- guards and servants and messengers and courtiers, all on the way to somewhere important.

Grand stairways lead to the upper floors. The entire castle is filled with flowers and statues.

A COURTIER approaches Victor.

VICTOR  
Good greetings! I bear a delivery  
for the king!

He points to a nearby room.

COURTIER  
Place thy gift yonder.

From within the heart, Tally surreptitiously kicks him.

VICTOR  
(wincing)  
Uh, t'was prevailed upon me most  
emphatically to deliver it to the  
king in person.

COURTIER  
Impossible!

Beat.

VICTOR  
Look! Those love birds have escaped  
their cage!

COURTIER  
Where?

While his back is turned, Victor ducks behind a statue of cupid -- mimicking it perfectly, upraised leg and arm and all.

The courtier turns back, sees Victor is "gone," then sighs and pushes the valentine into the delivery room with the piles of other gifts for the king.

INT. GIFT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Erik, Tally, and Brinn crawl out of the valentine, a little worse for wear. Victor joins them.

Erik and Tally peek out into the lobby.

ERIK  
 (to Tally)  
 At least you got us inside.

TALLY  
 What?

ERIK  
 It was a good plan. You're smart.

Beat.

TALLY  
 It was obvious.

BEHIND THEM

Brinn notices a big box of chocolates nearby.

BRINN  
 Oh!

She dives in. Victor watches her disapprovingly.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
 What? I never had lunch.

VICTOR  
 Hast thou ever been told that such  
 behavior is unlady-like?

BRINN  
 Not without losing a limb.

TALLY  
 (to the group)  
 Now!

At that, they all make a dash to a large stone heart halfway up the stairs. They hide behind it, all crammed together.

BRINN  
 (to Victor, whispering)  
 Besides, what about you?

VICTOR  
 Pray tell, what about me?

BRINN  
 Why do you talk like that?

VICTOR  
Does thou misunderstand my  
discourse?

BRINN  
I don't see why you can't talk  
normal!

TALLY  
(to the group)  
Now!

They make a dash to another tight hiding place at the top of the stairs, behind a planter.

But Victor and Brinn continue their whispered sparring:

VICTOR  
(to Brinn)  
In my kingdom, we speaketh the  
language of love!

BRINN  
The language of idiots is more like  
it.

VICTOR  
(sputtering)  
At least I don't natter like a  
drunken sailor!

BRINN  
That'd be easier to understand!

TALLY  
(to the others)  
Now!

And onward they dash!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hallway is lined with doors.

Desperate to get out of the open, Erik leads his friends down the hall, opening each door in turn and peeking inside.

We hear from THE OCCUPANTS of each room as they're all caught in flagrante delicto.

Erik opens the first door:





The artwork is all very romantic -- couples embracing, women walking on wind-swept cliffs.

There are also art supplies -- including bags of dry plaster of Paris.

Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn look around, but there's no place to hide.

BRINN

Now what?

TALLY

I have another idea.

ERIK

We're listening!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The guard search for Erik and his friends. They enter...

INT. THE ART STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

The guards glance around.

The room seems empty except for the canvases and half-finished sculptures.

But now...

There are more sculptures than before.

Erik and his friends have covered themselves with plaster of Paris dust. They now stand frozen among the sculptures, pretending to be sculptures themselves.

They all have expressions of terror on their faces.

The guards look around the room, confused.

Awash in all the plaster dust, Victor suddenly NEEDS TO SNEEZE. He desperately tries to HOLD IT BACK.

But he can't!

VICTOR

Ah-choo!

GUARD #1

(to Guard #2)

Gesundheit.

GUARD #2

(to Guard #1)

Gesundheit.

They stare at each other, immediately suspicious.

But at the same time, the King of Hearts enters the room behind them -- a bumbling, insecure fop.

He's accompanied by the royal PAINTER (65) -- long-suffering and resentful.

KING OF HEARTS

(to the painter)

I shall look regal, right? Because I want my royal portrait to capture my true essence!

PAINTER

(through gritted teeth)

So thou hast said, your majesty. Many times.

The king notices the guards.

KING OF HEARTS

(to the guards)

What is thou purpose here?

GUARD #1

We saw intruders, your majesty.

KING OF HEARTS

Well, there's no one in here.

With bows, they leave.

Meanwhile, the painter notices the "statues" of Erik and the others (and the horrified expressions on their faces).

PAINTER

Your majesty, it pains me to suggest that perhaps the talents of the Prince of Hearts do not necessarily lie in the arts.

KING OF HEARTS

Definitely regal! I must look a king! After all, this painting is for the ages.

PAINTER

Quite so, your majesty.

The king takes his place in front of a velvet backdrop while the painter uncovers a half-finished painting.

IN THE PAINTING (which looks like the top half of a playing card), the king looks handsome and extremely regal.

In other words, it looks nothing whatsoever like the actual king.

KING OF HEARTS

Well?

PAINTER

A perfect likeness so far, your majesty.

KING OF HEARTS

A weapon!

PAINTER

Pardon me, your majesty?

KING OF HEARTS

I must be holding a weapon in my portrait! The King of Diamonds is holding an ax in his!

PAINTER

Ah...

KING OF HEARTS

A sword! I shall wield a sword!

He grabs a sword from a nearby shelf of props and swings it awkwardly, slicing a painting and decapitating a statue in the process.

KING OF SPADES

But how shall I hold it?

The king happens to be holding the sword horizontally behind his head.

PAINTER

Stop. There. Yes -- that's it!

KING OF HEARTS

What? Behind my head?

The painter, suddenly energized, begins to paint.

PAINTER

Yes, that's perfect!

KING OF HEARTS

But won't it look like I've jabbed  
the sword in my head? Like I've  
just committed suicide?

PAINTER

Yeahhhh. I mean, no! Absolutely  
not! It looks very regal, your  
majesty!

KING OF HEARTS

Are you ... certain?

PAINTER

Absolutely! A little deeper, your  
majesty -- so it's jammed all the  
way into thy skull.

KING OF HEARTS

What?

PAINTER

Nothing! That's it, perfect.  
Extremely regal.

Erik and Tally exchange a glance, then step out from their  
hiding place.

ERIK

Your majesty...

KING OF HEARTS

What? Who art thou?

ERIK

We know something important about  
the Summer Festival -- something  
you must know!

PAINTER

Your majesty, shall I summon the  
guards?

KING OF HEARTS

No, wait.

(to Erik)

What about the Summer Festival?

ERIK

There is a plot against you by the  
Queen of Spades!

KING OF HEARTS

How hast thou come to know this?

ERIK  
I snuck into the Palace of the  
Spades, and I overheard them.

KING OF HEARTS  
That's impossible! No one could  
ever sneak into the royal palace  
without being...  
(beat)  
Oh.

VICTOR  
Thou must give warning to the other  
kings and queens!

KING OF HEARTS  
Yes, indeed...

But as he stares at Erik and the others, the dust begins to  
fall from their chests.

Their "2"s are suddenly visible.

KING OF HEARTS (CONT'D)  
Saint Valentine! Thou art twos!

ERIK  
Yes, but that doesn't mean we're  
not--

KING OF HEARTS  
Guards!

The guard enter again.

KING OF HEARTS (CONT'D)  
Seize them!

ERIK  
But--!

BRINN  
Horny toads, we gotta go!

She yanks Erik, Tally, and Victor to the open window.

EXT. THE CASTLE WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

It's a long way down.

VICTOR  
What do we do?

Tally spots something out in the sky.

TALLY  
I think we're in luck!

EXT. HOT AIR BALLOON - CONTINUOUS

It's one of the massive, heart-shaped balloons from before. The basket is occupied by a MAN (28) and a WOMAN (27) -- lovers in mid-romance.

MAN  
Oh, my darling, my soul aches for a way to express the depth of my love for thee!

WOMEN  
Yes, my love? What would thee do?

MAN  
Why, if I could, I would pull the stars down from the heavens and give them to thee one by one!

At that exact moment, Brinn plummets down from above, directly into the basket of the balloon.

THE BALLOON BUCKLES.

WOMEN  
Oh, dear.

MAN  
This isn't exactly...

SLAM! Tally has followed Brinn down. THE BALLOON ROCKS WILDLY.

BAM! Victor has followed her down, landing on the man in the balloon. He shrieks.

WHAM! Erik has landed too.

With each new body, THE BALLOON SWINGS AND CAREENS DANGEROUSLY.

MAN (CONT'D)  
My darling! Are you okay?

WOMAN  
(wedged in)  
To tell the truth, I've been better.

TALLY  
Criminey! We're sinking too fast.

MAN  
I guess that's what happens when  
you put six people in a balloon  
that was designed for two!

ERIK  
Someone's going to need to jump.

MAN  
I know! How about the four people  
who weren't invited in the first  
place?

Brinn spots GUARDS gathering down below.

BRINN  
We have another problem.

Tally fiddles with the balloon mechanisms.

TALLY  
If we can just maneuver it over  
toward that tree...

It works!

TALLY (CONT'D)  
I think we can make it. Ready?  
Let's go!

One by one, the four of them jump into a tree, which is on  
the other side of a wall, safely away from the guards.

Meanwhile, the man and the women are alone in the balloon  
again.

Beat.

MAN  
Or perhaps I could just compose  
thee a symphony.

WOMAN  
Yes, I think I'd prefer that.

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - LATER

Erik and his friends take stock while sitting at the central  
fountain.

BRINN

So much for warning the other  
kings.

TALLY

No one's going to take us seriously  
as long as we're twos.

They fall silent, looking around the marketplace...

AT THE FOOD STANDS, where the higher numbers get the better  
food while the lower ones are pushed aside.

ACROSS THE COBBLESTONES, where a TWO sweeps garbage while a  
NINE passes by in an expensive carriage (tossing out more  
garbage).

AT A GROUP OF CHILDREN playing a game. A TWO watches the  
higher numbers with envy ... until one comes over and decks  
him in the face.

ERIK

We need to disguise ourselves.

BRINN

As what?

ERIK

Higher numbers. They'll listen to  
us then.

VICTOR

But...

ERIK

What?

VICTOR

That's against the law. If we be  
caught...

ERIK

Do you have a better idea?

INT. FASHION SHOP, KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS - DAY

Tally sorts through expensive clothing, all sporting  
embroidered 8s, 9s, and 10s.

She is approached by a snooty SALESPERSON. Behind them both,  
Brinn enters, unseen.



The salesperson notes Tally's "2" -- and so begins an exchange similar to the one in Pretty Woman:

SALESPERSON

May I help you?

TALLY

You got nice stuff. How much is this?

SALESPERSON

I don't think it would fit you.

TALLY

Well, I didn't ask if it would fit, I asked how much it was.

SALESPERSON

It's very expensive.

TALLY

Look, I got money to spend in here!

SALESPERSON

I don't think we have anything for you. You're obviously in the wrong place. Please leave.

BEHIND THEM

As the saleswoman has been focused on humiliating Tally, Brinn has been piling her arms high with clothes.

Still unseen, she exits.

TALLY

(to the salesperson)

Well ... I guess you're right. Bye!

EXT. FASHION SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Tally finds Brinn waiting outside, merchandise in hand. Tally and Brinn smile broadly at each other, then hurry away.

INT. BATHHOUSE, KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS - DAY

PEOPLE bathe in hot pools.

TWO MEN in towels walk to...

INT. THE DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where Erik and Victor are just finishing dressing.

ERIK

Ah! After a nice bath like that, I almost hate putting on clothes again!

VICTOR

Thou speakest the truth!

They turn to reveal that they're both now wearing EXPENSIVE CLOTHING, one marked with an 8, one with a 9.

They nod to the men in the towels.

ERIK

Good day to you, sirs!

MAN

Good day.

They exit.

The men open their lockers to reveal Erik and Victor's frayed and frumpy clothing.

EXT. ALLEYWAY, KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS - DAY

Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn stare out at the Palace of Diamonds. They're all wearing their better, higher-numbered clothes.

BRINN

So now what?

ERIK

Now we just need to get inside.

TALLY

Good luck with that. Diamonds take security very seriously.

THE GUARDS at the door do seem especially vigilant.

BRINN

Frog's bladders! Well, maybe there's another way in.

TALLY

No, that's the only way in or out. I'm sure of it.

A TOILET FLUSHES somewhere nearby.

Erik and Tally look down at a nearby sewer grate -- then exchange a dubious glance.

INT. HALLWAY, THE PALACE OF HEARTS - DAY

A door in the hallway is marked "W.C." The sign reads "Occupied."

A well-dressed MATRON exits.

A few moments later, Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn all emerge behind her, hair wet and pulling on and zipping up clothing.

VICTOR

May I suggest that we all vow to never mention this again?

ERIK, TALLY, AND BRINN

Agreed!

The matron does a double-take.

Victor bows to her.

INT. THE THRONE ROOM, PALACE OF DIAMONDS - CONTINUOUS

The whole room is bejeweled and bedazzled. Five COURTIERS wait in the wings, all Diamonds with differing numbers.

MAN

Does anyone else think it's warm in here?

WOMAN

Why, yes, I do feel flush!

Waving fans, the five Diamonds stand together in a row (making a "flush").

Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn enter.

A COURTIER approaches.

COURTIER

It's about time you got here! What was the hold-up?

BRINN

You really don't wanna know.

COURTIER  
Well, come on, the king and queen  
are expecting you.

ERIK  
They are?

She leads them across the room.

COURTIER  
But aren't you a little young to be  
a jewel appraiser?

ERIK  
A jewel appraiser? Right -- a jewel  
appraiser!

COURTIER  
And why are there four of you?

ERIK  
Uh, I thought the king might want a  
second opinion. And, uh, a third  
and a fourth one too.

She stops at a reinforced door.

COURTIER  
You'll find them in here. And  
whatever you do...

ERIK  
What?

COURTIER  
(a weary sigh)  
Oh, never mind.

She turns and walks away.

Confused, Erik KNOCKS.

When no one answers, he pulls the door open, and they all  
step into...

INT. THE ROYAL TREASURY - CONTINUOUS

It's a vast chamber piled high with treasure: mounds of gold  
coins, stacks of gold bricks, gold and silver armor and  
weapons, chests of jewels, plates, crowns, etc.

They stand in awe of all the wealth -- especially Tally.

The Queen's voice echoes out from somewhere deeper within the chamber:

QUEEN OF HEARTS (O.S.)  
 Eighty-seven thousand nine hundred  
 and fifty-eight, eighty-seven  
 thousand nine hundred and fifty-  
 nine...

ERIK  
 They probably won't be expecting  
 all four of us. Why don't you guys  
 stay here?

Victor and Brinn stay behind, but Tally shakes her head.

TALLY  
 This is my turf.

Erik and Tally follow the sound of the counting.

Before long, the mass of coins and jewels becomes more ordered -- stacked in neat piles and rows.

They come to KING (60) and QUEEN (59) OF DIAMONDS.

They're both wearing medieval hazmat suits, complete with surgical masks and gloves.

They're counting the treasure as they neatly stack and order it.

ERIK  
 Uh, your majesties?

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
 Stop! Don't move! Don't touch  
 anything!

ERIK  
 Huh?

The Queen of Diamonds foists protective gear at them.

KING OF DIAMONDS  
 Put these on, put these on!

ERIK  
 But we're here to warn you--

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
 Don't breathe, don't breathe! Not  
 until you put the mask on!

Erik and Tally slip on the equipment.

The king holds up a large gem.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (CONT'D)

Now the first order of business is  
this diamond.

ERIK

Your majesties, the real reason  
we've come is--

KING OF DIAMONDS

The clarity is good, but we're  
worried about the cut.

ERIK

Yes, but I think--

TALLY

You should be. It's affected the  
brilliancy.

Tally takes the gem, then borrows an eyeglass and examines  
it.

TALLY (CONT'D)

The hue is off. The carat is good,  
but the grade is suffering.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

What about this one?

He hands her another jewel.

TALLY

Now this is a precious gem. Look at  
the tone. It's flawless.

The King and Queen examine it.

Meanwhile, Erik and Tally confer quietly:

ERIK

You sound like you really know what  
you're talking about.

TALLY

I do. It's just that no one's ever  
listened to me before.

Erik's smiles, impressed.

TALLY (CONT'D)

What?

ERIK

You're just not who I thought you were.

TALLY

(bristling)

Who'd ya think I was?

ERIK

You're not much for compliments, are you?

TALLY

I dunno. This is the first time I've ever gotten any.

ELSEWHERE IN THE TREASURY

Victor and Brinn wait, fidgeting. Brinn notices a tiara in the treasure. Victor notices her noticing.

VICTOR

Such a diadem would well enchant thou visage.

BRINN

I don't know what any of those words mean.

VICTOR

Don this coronet and watch the angels take emerald hue with envy.

BRINN

That wasn't any better.

He picks it up, thrusts it at her.

VICTOR

Put it on!

BRINN

Why?

VICTOR

To see if it becomes you.

BRINN

To see if I become more like Milady, you mean.

VICTOR  
Oh, thou looketh nothing like she.

BRINN  
Thanks a lot! Jolthead!

VICTOR  
I just meant--

Brinn picks up a golden helmet, thrusts it at him.

BRINN  
Here! You put this on!

VICTOR  
What? Why?

BRINN  
Because, lover-boy, I think you  
need to butch up!

VICTOR  
I do not!

She slams it on his head.

BRINN  
Come on -- dontcha wanna look nice  
for Milady?

VICTOR  
Fine! Then you put this on!

He shoves the tiara on her head.

She picks up a silver chest plate, tries to put it on him.

BRINN  
And you also need this!

He picks up a diamond necklace and attempts to put it around  
her neck.

VICTOR  
And you need this!

Brinn picks up golden bracers.

BRINN  
And these!

Victor picks up a jeweled bracelet.



VICTOR

And this!

They continue snatching treasures from the piles around them, trying to wrestle them onto the other.

But then Victor grabs one more piece from the pile, and...

...SKITTER...

A handful of gold coins cascades down from somewhere higher up in the pile.

Victor and Brinn freeze.

But ... nothing more happens. The coins stop moving.

Victor and Brinn both sigh in relief.

And then THE WHOLE PILE OF COINS COLLAPSES around them!

This starts a CHAIN REACTION in the treasury -- one pile of coins and treasure upsetting the pile next to it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I think we're screwed.

BRINN

That was good! I knew exactly what you meant!

INT. THE ROYAL TREASURY - CONTINUOUS

Tally confers with the King and Queen on their gems:

TALLY

Now compare these two. See the difference in the fire?

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

I'm impressed. You really know your stuff.

TALLY

Yeah, I do.

She looks to Erik.

TALLY (CONT'D)

And we know something else. We've come to give you a warning.

## KING OF DIAMONDS

A warning?

Something RUMBLES ... a LOW BOOM rolling out across in the treasury, like distant thunder.

It's getting closer ... and louder.

The king and queen exchange a wary glance.

Then A WAVE OF TREASURE SWEEPS OVER THEM, obliterating their neatly-stacked rows.

## QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

My treasure! My beautiful--!

The King, Queen, Erik, and Tally are all swept away.

## QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (CONT'D)

Noooo!

## TALLY

Try to stay on top of it!

They all try to climb to the top of the churning, jangling mass.

But that's easier said than done!

The room has an overhead SYSTEM OF METAL CARTS on ceiling tracks -- used for carrying gold and treasure.

As the treasure lifts them up, Erik reaches for one of the carts, and just manages to grab it.

He climbs up into it, then reaches for Tally.

## ERIK

Grab my hand!

He pulls Tally up even as the King and Queen get swept away.

## QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Noooo!

## KING OF DIAMONDS

Ahhhh!

As for Erik and Tally, their weight on the conveyor system causes it to start moving.

## TALLY

What's that?

## ERIK

Oh, no.

TALLY

Huh?

He nods to the end of the conveyor system, where the carts automatically dump their contents into a MASSIVE KILN AND CRUCIBLE -- used for turning coins into gold bricks.

The crucible is filled with SIMMERING MOLTEN GOLD.

And they're going to be dumped right into it!

ERIK

What do we do?!

Tally looks down, but it's already now a long fall onto pointed weapons and jewelry.

ERIK (CONT'D)

We'd never make it!

TALLY

The carts must lower.

Tally tries to lower it.

TALLY (CONT'D)

It's stuck!

Even as they try to dislodge the cart, they glide ever closer to that crucible full of molten gold.

ELSEWHERE IN THE TREASURY

Victor's and Brinn's heads pop up from within a pile of CHURNING TREASURE.

They're covered with a mishmash of armor and jewelry.

Brinn is now wearing a tiara, seriously askew.

VICTOR

I knew it! It brings out the sparkle in thine eyes!

BRINN

(droll)  
Really?

The treasure around them STOPS MOVING ... for the time being at least.

With it all piled so high, Brinn is very close to a CANDLE CHANDELIER hanging just over their heads.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
I think I can reach it!

She does, pulls herself out of the treasure.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
(to Victor)  
Got it! Grab my hand.

But at the same time, the mound of treasure STARTS TO COLLAPSE AGAIN.

The treasure FALLS AWAY, leaving them both dangling precariously from the swaying fixture.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
Hold on! I'll pull you up!

VICTOR  
Forsooth, I fear...

His hand slips and...

DOWN HE PLUNGES!

He lands right on his crotch with a painful-sounding CRUNCH.

BRINN  
(delicately, from above)  
Are you okay?

VICTOR  
(wincing)  
No! I landed right on the family jewels.

At that, he holds up royal jewels -- a crown, scepter, etc. -- engraved with the king and queen's crest.

But at least the treasure seems to have STOPPED MOVING again.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
I'll be okay so long as naught disrupts the gold.

From Brinn hanging above, a SINGLE PEARL drops down. It BOUNCES with a quiet CLATTER.

Victor holds his breath.

Nothing happens.

Then the entire mound of treasure STARTS MOVING AGAIN.

BACK IN THE CART

Erik and Tally slide ever closer to the crucible full of molten gold.

They're still trying to dislodge the cart.

ERIK

We need something to cut through --  
something hard!

TALLY

Criminey!

She digs into her pocket and holds up the large diamond she was appraising for the king and queen.

With the pointed edge, she WHACKS AWAY at the cable...

Over in the crucible, the molten gold BUBBLES AND BOILS.

The cart glides closer.

ERIK

Hurry!

TALLY

I'm trying!

It finally gives way.

The cart falls!

ERIK AND TALLY

Whoa!

THUNK! They land on a mound of treasure. With one end of the cart tipped open like a wheelbarrow, it looks and acts like a sled on snow.

All around them, THE TREASURE STILL CHURNS.

But now they ride it like a toboggan. It almost looks fun!

TALLY

Yayuh!

As they ride across the mounds of treasure...

Victor and Brinn come SURFING OVER A HILL, using gold shields as their surfboards.

BRINN

Hey-ho!

VICTOR  
(cutting loose)  
Wee-hoo!

ERIK  
Where are the king and queen?

They call out from a nearby SINKHOLE in the treasure.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
Over here! Help us!

TALLY  
I have an idea.

CLOSE ON the King and Queen, waist-deep and sinking in the treasure like it's quicksand.

A large rope of pearls falls around the king like a lasso. It's attached to a series of gold necklaces all tied together, making a safety line.

A similar lasso falls around the queen.

ERIK  
Don't struggle!

They pull the King and Queen from the sinkhole.

Around them, the treasure finally COMES TO A STOP.

Erik, Tally, Victor, Brinn, and the King and Queen of Diamonds happen to be right near the treasury door.

KING OF DIAMONDS  
You saved our lives.

ERIK  
What? No.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
You did! How can we ever repay you?  
You may have your pick of treasure!

ERIK  
Actually, we don't want treasure.

But Tally is already scooping up diamonds.

TALLY  
Speak for yourself!

ERIK  
We wanted to warn you.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Warn us?

The door to the treasury opens.

A MAN stands in the doorway -- a gem appraiser, complete with fitted eye-glass.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (CONT'D)

Who are you?

APPRAISER

Your highness, didn't you call for a gem appraiser?

KING OF DIAMONDS

But if you're the appraiser...?

She turns to Erik and Tally, who have no immediate answer.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Guards!

ERIK

But we just saved your--

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Guards!

TALLY

(to the others)

Run!

Victor and Brinn scramble for the door. Tally pulls Erik after her.

INT. THE THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Victor, Brinn, Erik, and Tally run back the way they came.

ERIK

We just saved their lives! It's not fair!

GUARDS appear.

TALLY

Let it go!

They run toward the far exit, into the hall.

But the guards follow!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The guards burst out into the hallway.

But ... it's deserted. Where could Erik and the others have gone?

The guards spot the door marked "W.C." Once again, the sign reads "Occupied."

With a smug smile, a guard throws open the door.

The bathroom is empty, but the (big and blocky) TOILET GURGLES. It's just finished flushing.

INT. THE SEWER TUNNELS - MINUTES LATER

ERIK

Well, that could've gone better.

TALLY

Ya think?

She looks down at four small diamonds in her hand -- all that she managed to save from the treasury.

TALLY (CONT'D)

At least it wasn't a total loss.

BRINN

So what now? We try to sneak in and talk to the King of Clubs?

They stop and peer out one of the sewer grates. From there, they can see...

EXT. THE PALACE OF CLUBS - CONTINUOUS

SOLDIERS do exercises in the area in front of the castle, attacking stuffed dummies with pikes and bayonets.

It's a cross between Braveheart and 300 -- with some of the orcs from The Lord of the Rings thrown in.

The King of Clubs is the scariest bad-ass of 'em all!

KING OF CLUBS

(a blood-curdling howl)

AAAARRRRRRRRRRGGGGHHHH!



INT. THE SEWER TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Erik and Victor slump in despair.

BRINN  
(clueless)  
What?

VICTOR  
There's naught we can do to stop  
the war now.

ERIK  
We're twos -- no one ever listens  
to us anyway.

Tally thinks. Then:

TALLY  
No.

They all look at her.

TALLY (CONT'D)  
(to Erik)  
You were right before. This is our  
chance to change things for  
ourselves -- to be something more  
than twos.

ERIK  
Really?

TALLY  
Really.

ERIK  
So what do we do?

She thinks.

TALLY  
Well, we know what the Queen of  
Spades is planning. And tomorrow is  
the Summer Festival. So we ... go  
there and stop 'em!

VICTOR  
But what happens if we get caught?

They hear a COMMOTION from outside the sewer and turn to  
look...

EXT. THE PALACE OF CLUBS - CONTINUOUS

The guards and their king have now destroyed the dummies -- they're slashed open, feathers flying everywhere.

But still the soldiers attack, slicing off limbs -- and the king gives a particularly nasty coup-de-grace to the throat!

INT. THE SEWER TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Erik and his friends react, sinking deeper into the slime.

INT. ERIK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

DISHES CLINK quietly.

INT. ERIK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Erik and his mother clean up after dinner.

KATHERINE  
You're awfully quiet.

ERIK  
No, I'm not.

But he falls quiet again.

KATHERINE  
Erik. What is it?

ERIK  
Mom, trust me, it's better if you don't know.

KATHERINE  
Well, can you give me a hint?

ERIK  
I have a chance to do something important, and if I succeed, everything will change for us for the better.

KATHERINE  
And if you fail?

ERIK  
You'll be fine, but I'll lose everything.

KATHERINE  
Everything?

ERIK  
(loaded)  
Everything.

Katherine has to sit. Erik sits next to her.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
I know what you've always said --  
that the one good part of being a  
two is that we don't have anything  
left to lose. But that's not true,  
is it?

He touches her hand.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
Even as a two, I still have a lot  
to lose.

KATHERINE  
So do you risk it all for a chance  
at something better?

Erik nods.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)  
The question is--

ERIK  
I know what you're going to say.  
How am I going to feel if I take  
the risk and lose everything?  
That's just it: I don't know!

KATHERINE  
That's not what I was going to say.

He looks at her.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)  
The question is, if you don't do  
it, how are you going to feel  
knowing you had a chance for  
something better and you didn't  
even try?

Erik thinks, smiles.

INT. MARKETPLACE - NIGHT

It's after midnight, and the marketplace is deserted, but Erik wanders.

Tally speaks from the shadows.

TALLY

Hey.

ERIK

Oh. Hey there. You couldn't sleep either, huh?

TALLY

Nah.

ERIK

Are we really going through with this?

TALLY

I guess so.

ERIK

Well, I hope you're wrong about tomorrow always being worse than today.

TALLY

I didn't say tomorrow is always worse. I said it can be. Besides, it's after midnight now. It's already tomorrow.

ERIK

Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

TALLY

I guess that's the point. We don't know.

ERIK

So ... this might be our last night on earth.

TALLY

I guess that's true too.

ERIK

So ... how should we spend it?

TALLY

What?

ERIK

Seems silly to waste our last night  
on earth on sleep.

She grins.

TALLY

It sure does.

EXT. CRYSTAL GREENHOUSE, KINGDOM OF DIAMONDS - NIGHT

It's after hours, and Erik and Tally explore the deserted  
displays -- not flowers, but BEAUTIFUL CRYSTALS in the shape  
of plants.

EXT. OBSTACLE COURSE, KINGDOM OF CLUBS - NIGHT

Laughing, Erik and Tally race each other up ropes, over  
walls, and through obstacles.

INT. RESTAURANT, KINGDOM OF HEARTS - NIGHT

Erik and Tally snatch delicious desserts from a distracted  
chef, then take it to...

EXT. A PARK, KINGDOM OF HEARTS - NIGHT

...where they sit on the grass quietly eating it, looking out  
over a romantic, moon-lit lake.

ERIK

Can I make a confession?

TALLY

Sure.

ERIK

I'm scared.

TALLY

I know. Me too.

ERIK

We don't have to go through with  
it.

TALLY  
Yeah, but then what?

ERIK  
Maybe things'll get better anyway.

TALLY  
Maybe they will.

ERIK  
But you don't really believe that.

TALLY  
No, I guess I don't. Sometimes things do get better for people like us -- maybe I was wrong about that. But they don't get better on their own. People have to make 'em better.

ERIK  
You think we can do it?

Tally thinks, then stands.

TALLY  
It's late. I should be getting home.

ERIK  
I'll walk you back to the marketplace.

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - NIGHT

The area is still deserted, but the FIRST PALE LIGHT OF MORNING GLOWS in the distance.

Erik and Tally walk in silence to the fountain in the middle of the square.

They linger by the water.

Tally sees REFLECTIONS of the decorations on the fountain.

TALLY  
Look. A diamond, a club, a spade.  
But there's no heart.

ERIK  
Yeah, there is.

TALLY

Where?

ERIK

Here.

He takes her in his arms, kisses her.

The kiss grows more passionate.

But Tally breaks away, her eyes brimming with emotion.

TALLY

We can't go through with it!

ERIK

Why not?

TALLY

What if it doesn't work? I wanna be with you! That's how I know we can make things better.

ERIK

No. This is why we have to go through with it.

TALLY

Why?

ERIK

Because we're from different kingdoms. This is the only way we can be together.

They kiss again as DAWN BREAKS at last.

But along with the rising light comes the sound of the MARKET COMING ALIVE: the MURMUR of voices ... the SQUEAKING of carts on wheels.

Reluctantly, Erik and Tally pull away from each other.

They turn for opposite sides of the marketplace.

TALLY

I'll see ya tonight.

ERIK

By this time tomorrow, everything will be different.

TALLY

One way or the other.

She turns to go.

He watches her leave, more determined than ever.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - DAY

It's later that same day, and THE SUMMER FESTIVAL is in full swing.

MUSICIANS PLAY AND SING ... PEOPLE eat and dance.

The day passes -- THE SUN FALLS IN THE SKY.

Before long, it's evening.

As the shadows grow longer, we sink down THROUGH THE PAVEMENT, into the sewers underneath...

INT. SEWER CHAMBER - NIGHT

In the chamber directly under the marketplace, Erik waits for the others.

From one chamber, Tally appears.

TALLY  
(quietly)  
Ready?

ERIK  
You know I am.

TALLY  
What if the others don't show?

But at the same time, Brinn makes a dramatic entrance from out of her chamber.

BRINN  
Time to knock some heads!

Erik and Tally smile.

ERIK  
What about Victor?

He makes a dramatic entrance of his own.



VICTOR

Well met, good friends! Now let us  
go pluck the plum of destiny!

Brinn rolls her eyes -- but can't help but smile.

ERIK

Okay, so here's the plan...

We see the same FLASHFORWARD as before, at the banquet of the  
summer festival, but now the details are changed:

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT - FLASHFORWARD

The four kings and queens and their retinues sit around a  
grand table.

ERIK (V.O.)

Once the other kings and queens  
have arrived at the banquet, the  
Queen of Spades will try to turn  
them against each other. It's our  
job to prevent that from happening.

The footman delivers the letter to the King of Clubs. But  
this time, the footman is Victor.

When the king opens this letter, it's blank!

Meanwhile, the thief tries to slip the stolen necklace around  
the Queen of Clubs.

But Brinn, dressed as another footman, intercepts him:

BRINN

Pardon me, your highness, mind  
tight your valuables. I'm told  
there is a thief at large.

QUEEN OF CLUBS

Is that so? Why, thank you.

She clutches tightly at her jewelry.

Not far away, Fowler drops the place card near the King of  
Hearts.

But Erik, also dressed as a footman, shadows Fowler, and the  
instant his back is turned (and before the King of Diamonds  
can notice), Erik reaches down to retrieve the card.

INT. SEWER CHAMBER - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Erik stares at the others.

ERIK  
Any questions?

They all shake their heads.

Erik extends a hand. The others add theirs.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
No matter what happens tonight, we  
are four of a kind. Always.

VICTOR, TALLY, AND BRINN  
Four of a kind!

EXT. THE PALACE OF SPADES - NIGHT

The royalty arrive for the banquet in carriages -- the kings, queens, and princes from the kingdoms of Hearts, Diamonds, and Clubs. Each is accompanied by GUARDS and COURTIERS -- all dressed in their kingdom's finest.

The palace doors open, admitting them inside...

INT. THE BALL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where they're greeted by the King, Queen, and Prince of Spades, and their GUARDS and COURTIERS.

The PRINCE OF CLUBS stops at an elaborate arrangement of flowers and feathers, plucking one of the feathers and sticking it into his hat (as on the playing card).

ELSEWHERE IN THE HALL

A group of THREE YOUNG MEN (20s) confer:

MAN #1  
(excited)  
I'm on the dance card of the  
Duchess of Spades!

MAN #2  
(thrilled)  
I'm on the dance card of the  
Countess of Diamonds!

MAN #3  
 (dejected)  
 I got the Old Maid.

He nods to a WOMAN, seemingly an old crone bundled up in a cloak by the coat-check. His friends look appropriately disgusted.

But the older woman in question slides off her cloak, revealing a shapely body in a revealing, fashionable dress (and a cougar-skin stole!).

OLD MAID  
 Hello, boys!

ALL  
 Hell-ooo!

OVER BY THE BAR

A CROWD waits in line -- three EIGHTS (different suits), three TENS (different suits), and a sequence of SPADES (from "7" to "10").

BARTENDER  
 What'll everyone be having?

EVERYONE  
 Gin.

They all look at each other.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

A sumptuous dinner is being served. The royals and their retinues eat and talk in somber tones.

ON A BALCONY ABOVE

Erik, Victor, and Brinn, all dressed as footmen (sixes), secretly watch it all. Tally is with them, dressed in black.

ERIK  
 Is everyone ready?

TALLY  
 As we'll ever be.

ERIK  
 (to Tally)  
 You sure you know what you're watching for?

TALLY  
I'm not the one you should be  
worried about.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Rows of FOOTMEN stand behind the tables, waiting to be of service.

One by one, in various places around the room, Erik, Victor, and Brinn step out to join the other footmen.

Fowler enters the room, surreptitiously holding the forged letter for the King of Clubs. He gives it to a FOOTMAN and points to the King of Clubs.

Then he nods to the Queen of Spades, who smiles ever-so-slightly.

ON THE BALCONY

Tally makes a subtle signal to Victor.

He leaves the row of footmen, on the move to intercept the letter.

But he passes someone on their way to the grand table, someone he recognizes:

VICTOR  
Milady?

MILADY (18) turns -- beautiful, but snooty and imperious.

MILADY  
Yes?

VICTOR  
It is I, Victor!

MILADY  
I know not anyone named Victor.

VICTOR  
I have wooed thee for months! I  
have sent thee chocolates and  
flowers and sonnets.

Her face is blank.

MILADY  
I...

VICTOR

Two days ago, I followed a rose  
that fell from thine hand into the  
sewers!

MILADY

Oh. Oh! You!

She laughs -- viciously and cruelly.

Victor pales. Still laughing, Milady calls a FRIEND closer.

MILADY (CONT'D)

Eleanor, remember the fool who  
followed that rose into the sewer!  
This is he!

Now the friend laughs too -- and Victor shrinks in utter  
humiliation.

ELSEWHERE IN THE ROOM

Fowler nods to the thief, dressed as a waiter and all set to  
exchange the necklace of the Queen of Clubs.

ON THE BALCONY

Tally makes a subtle signal to Brinn, who moves to intercept  
the thief.

But Brinn too runs into someone expected: one of the guards  
near the King and Queen of Clubs is her own FATHER (35).

BRINN'S FATHER

Brinn?

BRINN

Dad? What are you doing here?  
(noting his "7")  
And where's your two?

BRINN'S FATHER

(whispering)  
Shhh! No one knows my real number!  
What are you doing here? And  
where's your two?

BRINN

Uh, I can't say.

BRINN'S FATHER

You have to go!

BRINN

What? I can't!

BRINN'S FATHER

Now! Before you end up getting us  
both arrested!

BRINN

Dad, I can't leave yet. Just  
pretend I'm not here!

She tries to move on, but her dad grabs her and won't let her go.

BRINN'S FATHER

Brinn, please! You have to go!

AT THE SAME TIME

Fowler, now carrying the forged place card, moves toward the King of Diamonds.

Erik shadows him.

Fowler slips the place card onto the table near the king (who is currently facing away).

But Fowler turns unexpectedly back toward Erik, putting himself between Erik and the place card.

They do an awkward dance, trying to get around each other.

ON THE BALCONY

Tally watches the events below. So far, nothing has gone the way it's supposed to.

Victor is still stewing in embarrassment -- while the footman with the letter approaches the King of Clubs.

Tally motions to Victor again -- her signals grow increasingly wild.

But he ignores her.

Tally looks desperately around for something she can use to get his attention.

Finally she finds it: the balustrade of the balcony is made of thin, hollow metal bars. She manages to get one free -- she's got a blow-gun.

But what can she use for ammo?

With a sigh, she pulls out the four small diamonds she saved from the treasury.

WHOOSH! She blows one.

It misses -- and BOUNCES into a NOBLEWOMAN's soup.

HER COMPANION

How's the soup?

NOBLEWOMAN

It's very rich.

He samples the soup, then senses the diamond in his mouth. He examines it with his fingers

HER COMPANION

Quite.

WHOOSH! Tally blows a second diamond.

THWACK! This one hits Victor in the neck.

This gets his attention. He nods to her, then hurries to intercept the letter.

MEANWHILE

Brinn's Father holds onto Brinn, even as she struggles to get free -- and even as the thief and his stolen necklace edges closer to the Queen of Clubs.

WHOOSH! Tally blows a diamond at Brinn's Father, trying to get him to let her go -- but she misses.

She only has one diamond left.

WHOOSH!

THWACK! It hits Brinn's Father, causing him to finally release her.

She hurries off to intercept the thief. Brinn and Victor, at least, are back on track.

But she sees that Erik is still standing face-to-face with Fowler, and Tally is out of diamonds. There's no way she can help!

DOWN ON THE FLOOR

Erik tries to look down -- to hide his face from Fowler.

But recognition dawns in Fowler's eyes:

FOWLER

You!

Fowler glances around the room -- and immediately spots Victor and Brinn and even Tally up on the balcony. Fowler's no dummy: surely they're here to interfere with the Queen's plot!

Erik tries to make a mad dash around Fowler, reaching out for the place card.

But just as he's about to touch the card...

The king looks down and sees it.

He casually picks it up -- snatching it right out of Erik's fingers.

ACROSS THE ROOM

The original letter is delivered to the King of Clubs. He starts to open it.

A MOMENT LATER

The thief deftly swaps necklaces on the neck of the Queen of Clubs.

ANOTHER MOMENT LATER

Fowler spins around and grabs Erik.

He turns to nearby guards and speaks under his breath, pointing out Victor, Brinn, and Tally:

FOWLER (CONT'D)

That boy and those two girls.  
Capture them -- quietly! Quickly!

The guards move in!

The King of Hearts reacts to the vicious doodle on the place card.

KING OF HEARTS

That's not funny!  
(to the Queen of Diamonds)  
How could you!

But the Queen of Diamonds has already noticed the necklace on the Queen of Clubs.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

My necklace! My stolen necklace!



And the King of Clubs finishes the love letter.

He growls, then stands, faces the King of Hearts, and withdraws his sword.

ERIK

No! It's a trick! It's a--

But Fowler puts his hand over Erik's mouth, silencing him.

At the same time, guards descend on Victor, Brinn, and Tally, capturing and silencing them too.

CHAOS ERUPTS across the room. The guards of the different kingdoms encircle their royals and begin to fight, even as they work their way to the exits.

The Prince of Spades, meanwhile, is in the middle of a fight with the PRINCE OF HEARTS (21).

The Prince of Spades pokes the Prince of Hearts in the eye.

PRINCE OF HEARTS

Hey!

Holding his eye, he pokes the Prince of Spades back, also in the eye.

All around them, THE CHAOS CONTINUES.

The Queen of Spades watches it all with barely contained glee.

And, helpless, Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn are dragged away by the guards.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DUNGEON, KINGDOM OF SPADES - NIGHT

Erik and his friends have been banished to the kingdom's darkest, dankest prison cell.

They're all wearing dingy prison garb -- the numbers on their chests are now "1s."

They're each by themselves in different parts of the cell. Erik stands by a small, barred window, forlornly looking out.

Victor approaches Brinn, sitting by the door. She's trying to make a weapon out of loose rock.

BRINN  
What is it, lover-boy?

VICTOR  
I'm sorry.

BRINN  
For what?

VICTOR  
Mostly for before, for making you  
feel bad about yourself.

BRINN  
You didn't make me feel bad.

VICTOR  
For acting like a jackass then. I  
see now that you're exactly who you  
should be.

She thinks, smiles.

BRINN  
I'm sorry too -- for making fun of  
the way you talk. That's who you  
are.

VICTOR  
Fair maiden, thy words sing to me  
like a lark at the break of day  
arising!

BRINN  
(cheeky)  
Don't push it.

Tally joins Erik by the window. Outside, A NEW DAY DAWNS.

TALLY  
How you doin'?

Erik scoffs.

TALLY (CONT'D)  
What?

He nods to the dawn.

ERIK  
Yesterday I said that by this time  
tomorrow, everything would be  
different. It's different all  
right! You were right all along.  
(MORE)

ERIK (CONT'D)

I was crazy to think we could be heroes -- that things could ever be better for us.

Tally takes his hand.

TALLY

At least we're together.

He pulls his hand away.

ERIK

Don't you get it? We failed! The Queen of Spades won! Now there's going to be a war, and we're locked in a dungeon and sentenced to die, and it's all my fault! I'm such a joke.

FIRST JESTER (O.S.)

You're not a joke.

In the cell across the hall, the two jesters step out of the shadows (in their usual clothing, not prison garb). The First Jester is male, the Second Jester female.

FIRST JESTER (CONT'D)

Or if you are, you're not a very funny one. We're the jokers here!

At that, the two jesters put on an impressive show -- JUGGLING and SPINNING THINGS, using make-shift prison items: bent metal plates, a bucket, dead rats.

Weirdly, Victor, Tally, and Brinn also seem to recognize them.

VICTOR, TALLY, AND BRINN

You?

ERIK

(to his friends)  
Wait. You know them?

TALLY

They're why I went into the sewer in the first place. They dropped that bank note.

VICTOR

They caused Milady to drop her rose!

BRINN

They stole my ribbon.

ERIK

(to the jesters)

You're the reason the four of us  
met in the first place? But ...  
how? And why?

SECOND JESTER

Because the world needs jokers --  
and always will. We just did what  
jokers always do -- we shook things  
up!

The Second Jester shakes the First Jester, who is still  
juggling, causing all the items to fall.

ERIK

So this is all your fault!

SECOND JESTER

Our fault?

ERIK

You were the ones who led us all  
into that sewer! And me into the  
palace of the Queen of Spades.

SECOND JESTER

You don't like how things turned  
out?

ERIK

Of course not! We're ones who are  
sentenced to die!

SECOND JESTER

So go somewhere else. Be someone  
else!

At that, the First Jester turns back around again. With more  
makeshift dungeon items -- straw, dirt, burlap -- he's  
transformed himself into a pretty good approximation of the  
Queen of Spades.

ERIK

What do you mean? We can't just  
change things! We're in the  
dungeon!

FIRST JESTER  
 (mock-wise)  
 The only dungeon you can't ever  
 escape from is the one you build  
 inside your own head.

ERIK  
 In case you haven't noticed, this  
 is a real dungeon -- with real  
 bars!

At that, the Second Jester tries to bend the bars in her  
 cell. Sure enough, they're unbreakable.

ERIK (CONT'D)  
 And do you think I chose to be a  
 two -- or a one? I didn't! The  
 rules were all written before I was  
 born!

SECOND JESTER  
 So change them!

ERIK  
 What?

FIRST JESTER  
 Reroll the dice!

SECOND JESTER  
 Upend the board!

FIRST JESTER  
 Shuffle the cards!

ERIK  
 That's just talk. It won't change  
 anything.

SECOND JESTER  
 That's true. And there's one other  
 thing you can't ever change. Your  
 perspective.

At that, she casually leans against the cell door -- and it  
 must be unlocked because it falls right open.

ERIK  
 How did you...?

The jesters start to leave.

FIRST JESTER  
Oh, we're not prisoners. We chose  
to be in here.

ERIK  
Wait! You can't leave us!

But they ignore him. At the exit:

FIRST JESTER  
After you, my dear.

SECOND JESTER  
No, no, after you!

FIRST JESTER  
I insist!

SECOND JESTER  
No, I insist!

FIRST JESTER  
You first!

SECOND JESTER  
No, you first!

FIRST JESTER	SECOND JESTER
Okay, I'll go!	Okay, I'll go!

At that, they go together, clunking bodies in the doorway.

ERIK  
Please! You have to get us out of  
here!

SECOND FOOL  
But wouldn't that mean changing the  
rules? And you just said that was  
impossible.

With a shrug, the jesters exit. Erik tries their own door --  
but it's solidly locked. He RATTLES the bars in frustration.

BRINN  
Greasy goblins, what was that all  
about?

Erik thinks.

ERIK  
(to himself)  
Wait a minute. Change my  
perspective.

He looks across the prison cell -- but this time, his perspective literally changes.

In the refocusing of his attention, he spots a BIG SEWER GRATE in the prison floor.

Erik examines it.

ERIK (CONT'D)

It's loose! Help me get it off.

The others do.

BRINN

Smells like the sewer.

But as they stare down into the darkness, they hesitate.

TALLY

So we're free again. But where do we go?

VICTOR

We could leave the kingdoms.

BRINN

And go where?

VICTOR

Mayhap we could catch a boat across the ocean.

ERIK

No.

They all look at him.

ERIK (CONT'D)

The jesters were right. Somehow we need to change things once and for all -- not just for us, but for everyone.

Tally smiles.

TALLY

We have to stop this war before it starts.

VICTOR

But how can the four of us stay the swords of three different armies?

ERIK  
 (with a shrug)  
 Maybe we can bluff.

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - DAY

It's still morning, and the marketplace is deserted. Boxes of spilled fruit lay here and there, as if the early morning merchants left in a hurry.

There isn't even a single pigeon on the plaza now.

But signs of life appear at the edges of the square -- FRIGHTENED PEOPLE peering out from behind shuttered windows and peeking out of alleyways.

An OMINOUS SILENCE hangs in the air. Sensing something bad, an agitated cat slinks even deeper into the shadows.

Finally the silence is broken...

SOMETHING RUMBLES softly in the distance -- it's not immediately clear what it is.

It grows louder. Finally we start to make it out. It's...

FOOTSTEPS IN UNISON ... the marching of soldiers.

But it's not just one army -- it's three, each coming from a different direction. Each individual army is marching in synch, but the three different ones are not. It creates an off rhythm -- a WEIRD, DISHARMONIOUS BEAT.

THE FIRST ARMY appears -- that of the Kingdom of Clubs, in the main boulevard from that kingdom. They're itching for a fight, looking even more blood-thirsty and ferocious than before.

THE SECOND ARMY steps into view, from the Kingdom of Diamonds. If they're mercenaries, the people of the kingdom have spent their money well: they're cool, soulless fighting machines.

THE THIRD ARMY appears, from the Kingdom of Hearts. And they definitely take war as seriously as they take love -- projecting chivalry and tightly clutching the precious tokens from their loved ones.

From the upper balconies of the various royal palaces, the kings and queens emerge, prepared to watch the impending clash.

The King of Spades holds a scepter.



The Queens of Hearts and Diamonds wear fancy cowls and hold blossoms; the Queen of Clubs holds a clover (all as in the playing cards).

Meanwhile, the Prince of Hearts and the Prince of Spades are both wearing eye-patches over one eye as a result of their brawl in the banquet hall. They're now "one-eyed jacks" (also like the playing cards).

As the three armies and their GENERALS pause to assess each other, we focus on the fountain in the center of the courtyard...

...specifically, the sewer drains in the base around the fountain.

Faces peer out -- Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn.

INT. SEWER CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

TALLY

We're really doing this.

ERIK

Yup.

At that, they kick the covers off the sewers and crawl out into the marketplace.

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn face the armies on three different sides of the marketplace.

If things were quiet before, somehow they're even more quiet now.

No one moves.

All eyes are on Erik and his friends -- clearly an unexpected development.

In the crowd in the Kingdom of Spades, Erik's Mother sees her son squaring off against those soldiers. She gasps.

Erik steps forward and speaks directly to the kings and queens of the kingdoms of Hearts, Clubs, and Diamonds.

ERIK

You're making a mistake!

The stillness of the morning and the acoustics of the marketplace make his voice RING OUT loud and clear.

ERIK (CONT'D)

It was all a plot by the Queen of Spades -- everything that happened at the banquet! She wants you to go to war! Then after you've destroyed each other's forces, she and the King of Spades plan to take control!

VICTOR

It's true!

BRINN

She does!

All eyes turn to the Queen of Spades, watching from her balcony.

QUEEN OF SPADES

That's ridiculous! The boy lies!

But she protests just a little too much. Suspicion darkens the faces of the other kings and queens.

Even so:

KING OF CLUBS

(to Erik)

Why should we listen to you? You're ones!

ERIK

We just escaped from prison! Would we come here if we weren't telling the truth?

It's a decent answer. The kings and queens direct yet more suspicion at the Queen of Spades.

The three armies shift, turning away from each another, toward the Kingdom of Spades.

In her balcony, the King of Spades pales.

KING OF SPADES

(aside, to the Queen of Spades)

They're onto us! What do we do?

QUEEN OF SPADES

Calm down. I've prepared for everything.

She nods to Fowler, watching from the shadows below.

Fowler nods to unseen forces.

At that, A FOURTH ARMY marches into view -- the soldiers of the Kingdom of Spades, apparently hiding just out of sight.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

So it's true! The boy was telling the truth!

QUEEN OF SPADES

The boy's words are lies! But the Kingdom of Spades is prepared to defend itself in the face of such slander.

This does nothing to assuage the other kings and queens.

KING OF SPADES

(aside, to the Queen of Spades)

That's great, but it's still three against one.

QUEEN OF SPADES

Not for long.

(to the other royals)

Rest assured that the Kingdom of Spades is as committed as always to idea of four independent lands! No one king or one queen should ever rule everything.

KING OF HEARTS

(to himself)

One king.

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

(to herself)

One queen.

KING OF CLUBS

(to himself)

Rule everything.

They all look down at their armies with confident smiles on their faces.

ERIK  
 No! Don't you see? She's  
 manipulating you again!

But the kings and queens ignore him, nodding to their  
 captains and generals.

All four armies prepare to march into the square.

TALLY  
 (to Erik)  
 Now what?

ERIK  
 Now we go to Plan B!

TALLY  
 We don't have a Plan B!

But Erik ignores her, steps forward in front of the Spade  
 army, holding up his arms.

ERIK  
 Stop!

His three friends face the armies of their own kingdoms.

TALLY  
 Wait!

VICTOR  
 I beseech thee!

BRINN  
 Halt!

Unsure, the armies stop again.

Erik and his friends ignore the kings and now talk directly  
 to the soldiers and the people of their various kingdoms.

ERIK  
 (to his kingdom)  
 Think this through! This war makes  
 no sense!

TALLY  
 (to her kingdom)  
 We're the ones who are going to pay  
 -- with our blood and taxes!

VICTOR  
 (to his kingdom)  
 Stay now thou swords, noble  
 countrymen! Break fast the bonds of  
 untruth yonder enemies weave!

BRINN  
 (to her kingdom, re:  
 Victor)  
 Um, what he said!

Another STILLNESS falls over on the marketplace. It's almost as if everyone is waiting to see what everywhere else will do -- who will make the first move.

The Queen of Spades does!

QUEEN OF SPADES  
 Attack!

At that:

KING OF CLUBS  
Charge!

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS  
 Forward!

KING OF HEARTS  
 Go! Go! Go!

The armies start forward again, but Erik and his friends don't give up.

ERIK  
 (to the people)  
 We can stop this war, but not  
 alone! We need your help!

TALLY  
 Join us! Please!

VICTOR  
 In the name of love!

But no one joins them. When Katherine tries, she's held back by her friends.

BRINN  
 DON'T BE SUCH A BUNCH OF LILY-  
 LIVERED MUTTONHEADS!

Brinn's outburst is so unexpected, and so loud, that the generals hesitate. Behind them, their armies stop again.

But the kings and queens grow impatient -- especially the Queen of Spades. She issues a directive down to Fowler:

QUEEN OF SPADES  
This grows tiresome! Eliminate  
them!

Fowler pushes forward through the army, accompanied by his two lieutenants (also tens).

They draw their swords.

Erik Tally, Victor, and Brinn gather together for support.

ERIK  
(to Fowler)  
What about you going to do, kill  
four unarmed people?

Fowler tosses them swords.

FOWLER  
You're so eager for a chance to  
prove you're more than just your  
numbers. So prove it!

ERIK  
We won't fight you.

FOWLER  
Then you shall make wonderful  
martyrs to your cause!

Fowler starts forward, sword upraised, ready to kill.

Erik stands, unsure.

His mother moans in fear.

Fowler reaches Erik. The shadow of his sword falls over Erik's face.

The sword starts to swing down...

CLANG! Another sword blocks Fowler's! Brinn has snatched it from the ground.

BRINN  
(to Erik)  
We have to fight! We don't have a  
choice!

She tosses him a sword. Victor picks up one too, determined to protect himself.

ON THE BALCONY

The Queen of Spades smiles with deep satisfaction.

IN THE PLAZA

The sword fight begins!

Brinn fights Fowler while Erik and Victor each fight one of his lieutenants.

Brinn fights impressively, but Erik and Victor have no training. Despite their best efforts, they're totally out-matched.

The lieutenants toy with them -- and laugh in their faces.

Tally, standing behind, notices nearby sewer grates in the plaza itself.

TALLY

(to Erik)

I have an idea! Hold 'em off!

She turns to run back toward the central fountain.

Fowler mistakes this for cowardice:

FOWLER

Ha! And now the first rat has left  
the sinking ship!

(to the crowd)

Do you see? They're not so brave  
after all!

At the fountain, Tally climbs back into an open gutter.

IN THE PLAZA

The fight continues!

But Brinn is a better fighter than Fowler expected -- it's not so easy to toy with her. Indeed, he is starting to have to put some real effort into fighting back.

IN THE KINGDOM OF CLUBS

Brinn's Father watches, impressed.

The general of the Club army notices too.

CLUB GENERAL

Hmmm.

## BACK AT THE FIGHT

Brinn is (barely) holding her own, but Erik and Victor struggle badly.

The lieutenants laugh.

LIEUTENANT #1  
 (to Lieutenant #2)  
 I grow weary of this farce.  
 Brother, shall we put them out of  
 our misery?

LIEUTENANT #2  
 Indeed!

But as they're laughing, a sewer grate slides open twenty or so feet behind Lieutenant #2 (the one fighting Victor).

Tally sticks her head up, smiles at Victor. Victor sees, but Lieutenant #2 does not.

Tally ducks back down.

A few moments moment later, Tally slides open another grate, behind Lieutenant #1 (the one fighting Erik). And again, Erik sees, but the lieutenant does not.

The lieutenants move in for the kill.

Erik and Victor parry in desperation.

At the same time, they try to lure the lieutenants closer to the open sewers. Erik and Victor pretend to retreat, all the while luring the lieutenants around in an arc.

## ON THE BALCONY

The Queen of Spades senses that the outcome isn't as certain as she'd hoped.

QUEEN OF SPADES  
 This is ridiculous!

She looks down at the general in her army.

QUEEN OF SPADES (CONT'D)  
 Do something!

But the general pointedly ignores the queen and continues watching the fight, impressed.

## IN THE PLAZA



Victor and Erik delicately maneuver those lieutenants ever closer to the open grates.

Victor employs fancy footwork -- surely some elaborate courtly dance he's long practiced.

Erik mimics him.

But this just causes the lieutenants to mock Erik and Victor even more.

LIEUTENANT #1

Well! It seems as if these boys  
have signs of life in them yet!

LIEUTENANT #2

Yes! Just like a chicken before  
the--

Lieutenant #2 steps backward into the open sewer grate behind him, disappearing down into it.

LIEUTENANT #1

Just like a chicken before what?  
(confused)  
Brother? Where did you--?

Now that he's distracted, Erik tips him backward too -- into the other open grate.

The crowd GASPS. Some LAUGH, and there's a smattering of APPLAUSE.

Fowler, fighting Brinn, sees what's happened.

FOWLER

But ... that's not fair!

ERIK

"Fair"? You chose the contest, and  
now you want to write all the rules  
too? That's your idea of fair?!

FOWLER

Fine! But I can still put an end to  
this!

He comes at Brinn with fire in his eyes.

But she's ready for him.

Erik and Victor stand back, watching the melee -- A FLURRY OF SWORDS.

The crowd watches, breathless.

Brinn is very good, and she has the crowd on her side, but she's no real match for the Captain of the Royal Guard.

Little by little, he's wearing her down.

He scores a hit, drawing blood!

BRINN  
(in pain)  
Eh!

VICTOR  
(to Erik)  
We have to help her!  
(to himself)  
Change the rules...

Victor scans the area, focuses on the boxes of spilled fruit.

He snatches a piece of fruit and throws it at Fowler.

It's a direct hit.

The crowd LAUGHS.

Erik throws another piece of fruit -- another hit!

The crowd LAUGHS again.

Erik and Victor throw more fruit at Fowler.

It's breaking his concentration. Brinn gains a slight advantage.

FOWLER  
Stop! That's not fair!

ERIK  
You thought the rules were  
perfectly fair as long as you were  
winning!

The crowd keeps LAUGHING.

More fruit flies his way -- now the crowd is joining in.

Fowler's barely able to continue fighting.

FOWLER  
Stop! Enough!

Seizing the moment, Brinn knocks the sword out of Fowler's hand. It goes flying out of reach.

Mortified, Fowler appeals to both the queen and the crowd.

FOWLER (CONT'D)

This was not a fair melee! They did not fight fair!

Erik steps in front of him.

ERIK

Oh, shut up!

He decks Fowler, who is completely surprised by the blow.

He staggers backward for a moment, blinking stupidly.

And then down he goes in a heap!

The crowd CHEERS WILDLY.

Tally joins Erik, Brinn, and Victor again.

TALLY

What did you do?

ERIK

(grinning)

Four of a kind just beat three tens!

But the Queen of Spades is now more furious than ever.

QUEEN OF SPADES

This changes nothing!

(to the army)

Attack!

This prods the other royals into action too:

KING OF CLUBS

Charge!

QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

Forward!

KING OF HEARTS

Go then! Go!

But now the armies and their generals hesitate.

ERIK

Don't listen to them! You don't  
need to fight this war!

The Queen turns to the King, snatching the scepter from his hand. She holds it up (as in the playing card).

QUEEN OF SPADES

I am your ruler! I command you!

The two jesters lurk within the crowd.

They pull out sling-shots. One aims at the banner above the balcony of the Palace of Spades. She shoots, and a stone flies up and hits the hook that holds the banner upright.

Dislodged, the banner falls forward, covering the royal balcony -- completely muffling the ranting Queen of Spades.

The banner is upside down now, but THE SYMBOL is still visible through the material: now the stylized "Y" is right-side up.

It looks exactly like an "A."

Since the back of the banner is white, and decorated with little spades, it looks remarkably like A GIANT ACE OF SPADES.

One by one, the jesters shoot more stones, releasing the other banners so they fall down over the other royal balconies, muffling the indignant howling of those kings and queens too.

The marketplace is now surrounded on all four sides by GIANT ACES, one of each suit.

With the kings and queens all silenced by those banners, THE CROWD BEGINS TO CHEER AGAIN.

At last, the people rush out to join Erik and his friends -- except for the nines and tens, who hold back, appalled. Trying to flee, Milady, Victor's would-be lover, trips and falls into a wagon of horse manure.

Some soldiers resist, trying to push forward to fight, but they're overwhelmed by the people.

Soon even some of the soldiers throw down their weapons and join the throng.

Victor finds Brinn. They hug.

VICTOR  
You did it!

BRINN  
We did it!

They stare at each other.

VICTOR  
I...

BRINN  
Finally at a loss for words, lover-  
boy?

He nods.

BRINN (CONT'D)  
Then shut up and kiss me!

He does!

Katherine reaches Erik, hugs him tightly.

MOTHER  
I knew it! I'm so proud of you!

And Brinn's Father finds Brinn, tears of pride in his eyes.  
She smiles.

The general of the Club army appears in front of them both.

The general takes a long, hard look at Brinn ... then  
salutes.

Bursting with pride, Brinn salutes him back. Both Victor and  
her father watch, moved.

All the while, THE CROWD KEEPS CHEERING.

Erik spots the jesters in the crowd. He smiles at them.

They smirk knowingly -- then turn and disappear into the  
crowd, their BELLS JINGLING as they go.

Erik finds Tally, kisses her even more passionately than  
before.

Then, holding her hand, Erik and his friends all turn and  
bask in THE CHEERING OF THE CROWD, smiling at the wonder of  
it all.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - BACK TO BOOKEND PRESENT

Grandma is still by that COZY FIRE, recounting her story to her granddaughter, Fiona. Fiona's eyes twinkle with delight.

FIONA

They're the four aces! Erik and his friends!

GRANDMA

That's right! And they're also the reason why the ace can have the lowest value in the whole deck -- and also be the most valuable card of all! Just like people.

FIONA

What happened next? What happened next?

GRANDMA

Well, the people decided they'd had enough of kings and queens, thank you very much.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE MARKETPLACE - DAY

It's a beautiful summer day, and the marketplace is very different now. There is no sign of war, and the people of the different kingdoms mingle freely -- with even cross-kingdom COUPLES holding hands. No one wears numbers on their chest, and everyone seems much happier.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

They also decided they'd had enough of numbers -- that people should finally be allowed to determine their own worth. They knew they had to be careful -- that even without numbers, sometimes people try to divide themselves up and make judgments based on silly things that shouldn't matter. But before long, the four kingdoms became one big kingdom with four different parts.

FIONA (V.O.)

What about Erik? And Tally and Victor and Brinn?

Erik, Tally, Victor, and Brinn are OLDER NOW, in their thirties, gathered near the fountain.

GRANDMA (V.O.)

Well, they each spent their lives doing important, interesting things. And two of them married each other, and two of them married someone else. As for who married who, that you have to decide for yourself! But all four of them definitely stayed fast friends.

The four of them linger by the fountain.

ERIK

Remember this.

TALLY

What?

ERIK

This fountain. Under there, in the sewer. It's where we all first met.

VICTOR

T'was so long ago! So much has changed.

BRINN

For the better.

TALLY

Definitely for the better!

They all grin in agreement.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - BACK TO BOOKEND PRESENT

FIONA

So they all lived happily ever!

GRANDMA

Not always. But happy enough!

Mom and Dad appear, finally finished with their poker game. Their faces are visible now -- warm and approachable.

MOM

Well, what's going on in here?

DAD

Sorry, Honey. We were so caught up  
in our silly card game.

FIONA

It's not silly! Not silly at all!

DAD

It isn't?

FIONA

Daddy, do you know why the ace is  
sometimes the least valuable card  
in the deck, and sometimes the most  
valuable one of all?

DAD

Oh, no. Has Grandma been telling  
you stories again? I think I  
remember that one. I think it's why  
I started playing poker in the  
first place!

FIONA

It's not a story! Is it, Grandma?  
Isn't it the truth?

GRANDMA

(a twinkle in her eye)  
Of course it's a story! But that  
doesn't mean it isn't true.

MOM

Okay, Honey, it's time for you to  
go to bed.

FIONA

G'night, Grandma!

GRANDMA

Goodnight, Darling.

Mom takes Fiona off to bed.

DAD

I'm gonna have problems with that  
one tomorrow, aren't I?

GRANDMA

You just might. Sorry about that. I  
guess I'm just an old fool.



DAD

Oh, Mom, you're anything but a fool. Now why don't I walk you home?

GRANDMA

Don't be crazy. It's right next door.

DAD

Well, okay. Good night, Mom.

GRANDMA

Good night, Dear.

He disappears upstairs.

She starts for the door. But along the way, she drops something...

...a jinglebell!

She stoops to pick it up, smiles slyly, then slips it back into her pocket.

Then, with the impish smirk still on her face, she glances back toward the bedrooms, then disappears out the front door and into the night.

FADE OUT.