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SF PERUSALS

Exit the King

A Play

Eugene Ionesco

Translated by
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A Samuel French Acting Edition

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EXIT THE KING

Presented by the English Stage Company at The Royal Court Theatre, London, on the 12th September 1963, with the following cast of characters:

(*in the order of their appearance*)

THE GUARD	*Peter Bayliss*
KING BERENGER THE FIRST	*Alec Guinness*
QUEEN MARGUERITE	*Googie Withers*
JULIETTE	*Eileen Atkins*
QUEEN MARIE	*Natasha Parry*
THE DOCTOR	*Graham Crowden*

Directed by GEORGE DEVINE

Designed by JOCELYN HERBERT

The action of the Play passes on a morning in the dilapidated throne-room of King Berenger the First's crumbling palace

EXIT THE KING

SCENE—*The dilapidated throne-room of King Berenger the First's crumbling palace. Morning.*

The walls show the remaining signs of past glory, but are now in a state of ruin and cracked, a particularly large crack appearing in the wall R. *The back wall is curved and has small arched entrances up* R *and up* L. *There are double, swing doors down* R *and a single swing door down* L, *all in poor condition. There is a window* L. *There are star traps in the floor* R *and* L. *The walls down* R *and down* L *are set forward of the back run, leaving wide, masked exits* R *and* L *for use when the thrones* RC *and* LC *are struck; for the entrance and exit of the wheel-chair, and to provide easy exits if the traps are not practical. A large throne, with two or three steps leading up to it, is on a revolving rostrum up* C. *Two smaller thrones, on tracks, are* RC *and* LC. *There is a clock in the wall over the door down* L. *Radiators for central heating are against the wall below the doors down* R *and down* L.

When the CURTAIN *rises, the* GUARD *is standing at the foot of the throne up* C. *He carries a halberd and has three plaques for fixing to the backs of the thrones. He attaches the first plaque, being King Berenger's cipher, to the throne up* C *then stands* R *of the throne.*

GUARD (*announcing*) His Majesty the King Berenger the First. Long live the King! (*He salutes*)

(KING BERENGER THE FIRST *enters down* R. *He wears a deep crimson cloak and a crown. He carries a sceptre. He crosses rapidly and exits up* L)

(*He goes to the throne* RC *and puts on a label, then announces*) Her Majesty Queen Marguerite, First Wife to the King, followed by Juliette, Domestic Help and Registered Nurse to their Majesties. Long live the Queen! (*He salutes*)

(QUEEN MARGUERITE *enters down* L.

JULIETTE *follows her on.* MARGUERITE *has a crown on her head and is wearing a royal purple cloak that is rather old.*

MARGUERITE *and* JULIETTE *exit down* R)

(*He goes to the throne* LC *and puts on a label, then announces*) Her Majesty Queen Marie, Second Wife to the King, but first in affection, followed by Juliette, Domestic Help and Registered Nurse to their Majesties. Long live the Queen! (*He salutes*)

(QUEEN MARIE *enters down* R.

JULIETTE *follows her on.* MARIE *appears younger and more beautiful than Marguerite. She has a crown and a royal purple cloak. She is wearing jewels. Her cloak is of more modern style and looks as if it comes from a high-class couturier.*

(MARIE *crosses and exits down* L.
JULIETTE *exits up* R.
The DOCTOR *enters up* R)

His Notability, Doctor to the King, Gentleman Court Surgeon, Bacteriologist, Executioner and Astrologist.

(*The* DOCTOR *crosses to* C, *and then, as though he had forgotten something, turns and exits up* R)

(*He remains silent for a few moments. He looks tired. He moves down* R, *rests his halberd against the wall and blows into his hands to warm them*) I don't know, this is just the time when it ought to be hot. Central heating, start up! (*He pauses*) Nothing doing. Central heating, start up! (*He feels the radiator down* R) Radiator's stone cold. It's not my fault. He never told me he'd taken away my job as Chief Firelighter. Not officially, anyway. You never know with them. (*He suddenly picks up his halberd, and salutes*)

(MARGUERITE *enters up* R *and crosses to* C. *She looks rather severe.*
JULIETTE *follows her on, carrying a milk bucket, a broom and a duster. She puts the bucket and broom against the wall* R)

GUARD. Long live the Queen!

MARGUERITE (*to Juliette; looking around*) There's a lot of dust about. And cigarette ends on the floor.

JULIETTE (*picking up some cigarette ends from the floor*) I've just come from milking the cow, Your Majesty. She's almost out of milk. I haven't had time to do the sitting-room. (*She goes to the throne* RC *and dusts it*)

MARGUERITE. This is *not* the sitting-room. It's the throne-room. How often do I have to tell you?

JULIETTE. All right, the throne-room, as Your Majesty wishes. I haven't had time to do the sitting-room.

MARGUERITE (*to the Guard*) It's cold.

GUARD. I've been trying to turn the heat on, Your Majesty. (*He moves to* R *of Marguerite*) Can't get the system to function. The radiators won't co-operate. The sky is overcast and the clouds don't seem to want to break up. The sun's late.

(JULIETTE *dusts the throne up* C)

And yet I heard the King order him to come out.

MARGUERITE. Is that so!

(JULIETTE *dusts the throne* LC)

The sun's already deaf to his commands.

GUARD. I heard a little rumble during the night.

(JULIETTE *moves down* L *and dusts the radiator*)

There's a crack in the wall.

MARGUERITE. Already? Things are moving fast. I wasn't expecting this so soon.

GUARD. Juliette and I tried to patch it up.
JULIETTE. He woke me up in the middle of the night.
GUARD. And now it's there again. Shall we have another try?
MARGUERITE. It's not worth it.

(*The* GUARD *returns to his place down* R)

We can't turn the clock back. (*To Juliette*) Where's Queen Marie?
JULIETTE (*moving* LC) She must still be dressing.
MARGUERITE. Naturally!
JULIETTE. She was awake before dawn.
MARGUERITE. Oh! Well, that's something.
JULIETTE. I heard her crying in her room.
MARGUERITE. Laugh or cry, that's all she can do. Let her be sent for at once. (*To Juliette*) Go and fetch her.

(JULIETTE *crosses towards the door down* R)

GUARD. Long live the Queen! (*He salutes*)

(MARIE *enters up* L *and moves* R *of the throne* LC *to* C. MARGUERITE *and* JULIETTE *curtsy*)

MARGUERITE (*moving to* R *of Marie*) Your eyes are quite red, my dear. It spoils your beauty.
MARIE (*tearfully*) I know.
MARGUERITE. Don't start crying again.
MARIE. I can't really help it.
MARGUERITE. Don't go to pieces, whatever you do. What's the use? It's the normal course of events, isn't it? You were expecting it. Or had you stopped expecting it?
MARIE. *You've* been *waiting* for it. (*She weeps*)
MARGUERITE. Fortunately. Like that, everything's in order. (*To Juliette*) Oh, give her another handkerchief.

(JULIETTE *crosses to* L *of Marie, takes her soiled handkerchief, gives her a clean one, then moves down* L)

MARIE. I was still hoping . . .
MARGUERITE. You're wasting your time. (*She shrugs*) Nothing but hope on their lips and tears in their eyes. What a way to behave!
MARIE. Have you seen the doctor again? What did *he* say?
MARGUERITE. What you've heard already.
MARIE. Perhaps he's made a mistake.
MARGUERITE. Don't start hoping all over again. There's no mistaking the signs——
MARIE. Perhaps he's misinterpreted them.
MARGUERITE. —if you look at them objectively. And you know it.

(*The* GUARD *points at the crack in the wall* R)

MARIE (*looking at the wall*) Oh, that crack!

MARGUERITE. Oh, you've seen it, have you? And that's not the only thing. It's *your* fault if he's not prepared. It's *your* fault if it takes him by surprise. *You* let him go his own way. You've even led him astray. (*She crosses above Marie to* L *of her*) Oh, yes. Life was very sweet. With your fun and games, your dances, your processions, your official dinners, your winning ways and your firework displays, your silver spoons and your honeymoons. How many honeymoons have you had?

MARIE (*turning to her*) They were to celebrate our wedding anniversaries.

MARGUERITE. You celebrated them four times a year. "We've got to *live*," you used to say. But one must never forget.

MARIE. He's so fond of parties.

MARGUERITE. People know, and carry on as if they didn't. They know and they forget. But *he* is the King. *He* must not forget. *He* should have his eyes fixed in front of him, know every stage of the journey, know exactly how long the road, and never lose sight of his destination.

MARIE (*moving* RC) My poor darling, my poor little king. (*She weeps*)

MARGUERITE (*to Juliette*) Give her another handkerchief.

(JULIETTE *crosses to Marie, takes her soiled handkerchief, gives her a clean one, then returns down* L)

(*To Marie*) Be a little more cheerful, can't you? Tears are catching. He's weak enough already. (*She moves to* L *of Marie*) What a pernicious influence you've had on him. But there! I'm afraid he liked you better than me, but I wasn't at all jealous. I just realized he wasn't being very wise. And now you can't help him any more. (*She crosses above Marie to* R *of her*) Look at you. Bathed in tears. You've lost that challenging look. Where's it all gone, that brazen insolence, that sarcastic smile? (*She crosses above Marie to* L *of her*) Come on, now, wake up. Take your proper place and try to straighten up. Think! You're still wearing your beautiful necklace. Come along, take your place.

MARIE. I'll never be able to tell him.

MARGUERITE. *I'll* see to that. (*She moves to the throne* RC) I'm used to the chores.

MARIE (*moving to the throne* LC) And don't *you* tell him, either. Please. Don't say a word, I beg you.

MARGUERITE. Please leave it to me. (*She sits on the throne* RC) We'll still need you, you know, at various moments of the ceremony. You like ceremonies.

MARIE. Not this one. (*She sits on the throne* LC)

MARGUERITE (*to Juliette*) You—spread our trains out properly.

JULIETTE. Yes, Your Majesty. (*She crosses to Marguerite and spreads her train*)

MARGUERITE. I agree it's not so amusing as your charity balls. Those dances you get up for the young folks, and old folks, and

newly-weds. For victims of disaster or the honours list. For lady novelists. Or charity balls for the organizers of charity balls. This one's just for the family, with no dancers and no dance.

MARIE. Don't tell him. It's better if he doesn't notice anything.

MARGUERITE. And goes out like a light? That's impossible.

(JULIETTE *crosses to Marie and spreads her train*)

MARIE. You've no heart.

MARGUERITE. Oh, yes, I have. It's beating.

MARIE. You're inhuman. He's not prepared.

MARGUERITE. It's your fault if he isn't. He's been like one of those travellers who linger at every inn, forgetting each time that the inn is not the end of the journey. When I reminded you that in life we must never forget our ultimate fate, you told me I was a pompous blue-stocking.

JULIETTE (*aside*) It *is* pompous, too. (*She stares at Marguerite*)

MARGUERITE (*to Juliette*) What's the matter with *you*, goggling at us like that? You're not going to break down, too, I hope. You can leave us.

(JULIETTE *moves to the door down* L)

Don't go too far away, we'll call you.

JULIETTE. So I don't have to do the sitting-room now?

MARGUERITE. It's too late. Never mind. Leave us.

(JULIETTE *exits down* L)

MARIE (*rising and moving* C) Tell him gently, I implore you. Take your time. He might have a heart attack.

MARGUERITE. We haven't the time to take our time. This is the end of your happy days, your high jinks, your bean-feasts and your strip-tease. You've let things slide to the very last minute and now we've not a minute to lose. Obviously. It's the last. We've a few moments to do what ought to have been done over a period of years. You've still got a part to play, don't worry. I'll tell you when to leave us alone. After that, I'll help him.

MARIE (*moving down* LC) It's going to be so hard. So hard.

MARGUERITE. As hard for me as for you, and for him. Stop grizzling, I say. That's a piece of advice. That's an order.

MARIE. He won't go!

MARGUERITE. Not at first.

MARIE. I'll hold him back.

MARGUERITE (*rising*) Don't you dare! (*She moves to* R *of Marie*) It's got to pass off decently. Let it be a success, a triumph. It's a long time since he had one. (*She crosses down* L) His palace is crumbling. His fields lie fallow. His mountains are sinking. (*She moves to* L *of Marie*) The sea has broken the dykes and flooded the country. He's let it all go to rack and ruin. You've driven every thought from his mind with your perfumed embrace. How I hated that perfume.

Such bad taste. But that was him all over. Instead of consolidating the land, he's let acre upon acre plunge into the bowels of the earth.

MARIE. Expert advice on how to stop an earthquake.

MARGUERITE. I've no patience with you. He could still have consolidated—planted conifers in the sand and cemented the threatened areas. But, no! Now the kingdom's as full of holes as a gigantic Gruyére cheese.

MARIE. We couldn't fight against fate, against natural phenomena like erosion.

MARGUERITE (*crossing to the Guard*) Not to mention all those disastrous wars.

(*The* GUARD *looks at Marie*)

While his drunken soldiers were sleeping it off, at night, or after a a lavish lunch in barracks——

(*The* GUARD *snaps to attention*)

—our neighbours were pushing back our frontiers, our national boundaries shrinking. His soldiers didn't want to fight.

MARIE. They were conscientious objectors.

MARGUERITE. He called them conscientious objectors here at home. The conquering armies called them cowards and deserters, and they were shot. (*She moves down* RC) You can see the result: towns razed to the ground, burnt-out swimming pools, abandoned *bistros*. The young are leaving in hordes. At the start of his reign there were nine thousand million inhabitants.

MARIE. Too many. There wasn't room for them all.

MARGUERITE. And now there are only about a thousand old people left. Less. Even now, while I'm talking, they're passing away.

MARIE. There are forty-five *young* people, too.

MARGUERITE (*moving to* R *of Marie*) No-one wants *them*. *We* didn't want them either; we were forced to take them back. Anyway, they're ageing rapidly. Repatriated at twenty-five, two days later and they're over eighty. You can't pretend that's the normal way to grow old.

MARIE. But the King, *he's* still young.

MARGUERITE. He *was* yesterday, he *was* last night. (*She moves to the throne* RC *and sits*) You'll see in a moment.

GUARD (*announcing*) His Notability, the Doctor, has returned. His Notability, His Notability!

(*The* DOCTOR *enters down* R. *The door opens and closes by itself. He looks like an astrologer and executioner at one and the same time. On his head he is wearing a pointed hat with stars. He is dressed in red with a hood hanging from the collar. He has a magnifying glass on a cord round his neck and carries a large telescope*)

DOCTOR (*crossing to* C *and bowing to Marguerite*) Good morning, Your Majesty. (*He bows to Marie*) Good morning, Your Majesty. I

hope your Majesties will forgive me for being rather late. I've come straight from the hospital, where I had to perform several surgical operations of the greatest import to science.

MARIE (*moving to* L *of the Doctor*) You can't operate on the King.

MARGUERITE. You can't *now*, that's true.

(*The* DOCTOR *looks at Marguerite, then at Marie*)

DOCTOR. I know. Not his Majesty.

MARIE. Doctor, is there anything new? He *is* a little better, isn't he?

(*The* DOCTOR *crosses down* L)

Isn't he? He *could* show *some* improvement, couldn't he?

DOCTOR. He's in a typically critical condition that admits no change.

MARIE. It's true, there's no hope. (*She looks at Marguerite*) *She* doesn't *want* me to hope, she won't *allow* it.

MARGUERITE. Many people have delusions of grandeur, but you're deluded by triviality. There's never been a queen like you. You make me ashamed for you.

(MARIE *turns away* L)

Oh! She's going to cry again.

DOCTOR (*crossing to* R *of Marie*) In point of fact, there *is*, if you like, *something* new to report.

MARIE. What's that?

DOCTOR (*moving* C) Something that merely confirms the previous symptoms. Mars and Saturn have collided.

MARGUERITE. As we expected.

DOCTOR. Both planets have exploded.

MARGUERITE. That's logical.

DOCTOR. The sun has lost between fifty and seventy-five per cent of its strength.

MARGUERITE. Naturally.

DOCTOR. Snow is falling on the North Pole of the sun. The Milky Way seems to be curdling. The comet is exhausted, feeling its age; winding its tail round itself and curling up like a dying dog.

MARIE. It's not true, you're exaggerating. You must be. Yes, you *are* exaggerating.

DOCTOR. Do you wish to look through the telescope?

MARGUERITE. There's no point. We believe you.

(MARIE *moves to the throne* LC *and sits*)

What else?

DOCTOR. Yesterday evening it was spring. It left us two hours and thirty minutes ago. Now it's November. Outside our frontiers, the grass is shooting up. The trees are turning green. The cows are calving twice a day. Once in the morning and again in the afternoon

about five, or a quarter past. (*He crosses down* L) Yet in our country, the brittle leaves are peeling off. The trees are sighing and dying, and the earth is quaking rather more than usual.

GUARD (*announcing*) The Royal Meteorological Institute calls attention to the bad weather conditions.

MARIE. I can feel the earth quaking. I can hear it.

MARGUERITE. It's that crack, getting wider, spreading.

DOCTOR. The lightning's stuck in the sky, the clouds are raining frogs, the thunder's mumbling. That's why we can't hear it. Twenty-five of our countrymen have been liquified. Twelve have lost their heads. Decapitated. This time, without my surgical intervention.

MARGUERITE. Those are the signs, all right.

DOCTOR. Moreover . . .

MARGUERITE (*interrupting*) No need to go on. It's what always happens in a case like this. We know.

GUARD (*announcing*) His Majesty, the King!

(*Royal music is heard.* MARGUERITE *and* MARIE *rise. The* DOCTOR *moves to* R *of Marguerite*)

Attention for His Majesty. Long live the King! (*He salutes*)

(*The* KING *enters up* L. *He has bare feet.*

JULIETTE *follows the King on. The* KING *crosses to the foot of the throne* C. JULIETTE *crosses and stands down* R *of the throne* RC. *She is carrying the King's slippers*)

MARGUERITE. Now where has he scattered his slippers?

JULIETTE. Sire, they are here.

MARGUERITE. It's a bad habit to walk about barefoot.

MARIE (*to Juliette*) Put his slippers on. Hurry up! He'll catch cold.

(JULIETTE *crosses to the King and puts his slippers on*)

MARGUERITE. It's no longer of any importance whether he catches cold. It's just that it's a bad habit.

DOCTOR (*with a humble and courteous bow*) May I be allowed to wish Your Majesty a good day. And my very best wishes.

MARGUERITE. That's nothing now but a hollow formality.

(JULIETTE *crosses to* R)

KING (*turning to Marie*) Good morning, Marie. (*He turns to Marguerite*) Good morning, Marguerite. Still here? I mean, you're here already. How do you feel? *I* feel awful. I don't know quite what's wrong with me. My legs are a bit stiff. I had a job to get up, and my feet hurt. I must get some new slippers. Perhaps I've been growing. (*He sits on the throne* C) I had a bad night, what with the earth splitting, frontiers retreating, cattle bellowing and sirens screaming. There's far too much noise. I must look into it. We'll see what we can do.

(MARGUERITE *and* MARIE *sit on their thrones*)

(*He winces*) Ouch, my ribs. (*He turns to the Doctor*) Good morning, Doctor. Is it lumbago?

(MARGUERITE *and the* DOCTOR *look at each other*)

I'm expecting an engineer—from abroad. Ours are no good nowadays. They just don't care. Besides, we haven't any. Why did we close the Polytechnic?

(*The* DOCTOR *is about to reply*)

Oh, yes. It fell through a hole in the ground. And why build another when they all disappear? I've got a headache. (*He looks towards the window*) Clouds. I thought I'd banished clouds. Clouds! We've had enough rain. Enough, I said! Enough rain. There's an idiotic cloud, like an old man, weak in the bladder. (*To Juliette*) What are you staring at me for? You're very red in the face today. My bedroom's full of cobwebs. Go and get rid of them.

JULIETTE. I've done it once today. I don't know where they spring from. They keep on coming back.

DOCTOR (*to Marguerite*) You see, Your Majesty. This, too, confirms my diagnosis.

KING (*rising and crossing to* L *of Marie*) What's wrong with you, my love?

MARIE (*stammering*) I don't know—nothing—nothing wrong.

KING. You've got rings round your eyes. Have you been crying? Why?

MARIE. Oh, God!

KING (*to Marguerite*) I won't have anyone upset her. And why did she say "Oh, God!" like that?

MARGUERITE. It's an expression. (*To Juliette*) Go and get rid of those cobwebs.

KING (*moving down* L) Those cobwebs, disgusting!

MARGUERITE (*to Juliette*) Hurry up, don't dawdle! Have you forgotten how to use a broom?

JULIETTE (*collecting her bucket and broom*) Mine's worn out. I need a new one. I could really do with twelve brooms.

(JULIETTE *crosses and exits up* L. *There is a pause.* MARIE, the DOCTOR *and* MARGUERITE *stare at the King*)

KING. What are you all staring at me for? Is there something abnormal about me? It's so normal to be abnormal—there's no such thing as abnormality. (*He crosses to* C, *limping a little*) So that's straightened out.

(MARIE *rises and rushes to* L *of the King*)

MARIE. My dear King, you're limping.

(*The* KING *takes a pace or two* RC *and back, limping a little*)

KING. Limping? *I'm* not limping. I *am* limping a little.

MARIE. Your leg hurts. I'm going to help you along.

KING. It doesn't hurt. Why should it hurt? (*He moves up* C) Why, yes, it *does*, just a little. It's nothing.

(MARIE *moves to* L *of the King*)

(*To Marie*) I don't need anyone to help me. Though I like being helped by you.

MARGUERITE (*rising*) Sire, I have some news for you.

MARIE. No, be quiet!

MARGUERITE. Keep quiet yourself.

MARIE (*to the King*) What she says isn't true.

KING. News about what? *What* isn't true? Marie, why do you look so sad? What's the matter with you?

MARGUERITE. Sire, we have to inform you that you are going to die.

DOCTOR (*moving a step down* RC) Alas, yes, Your Majesty.

KING. But I know that, of course I do. We *all* know it. You can remind me when the time comes. Marguerite, what is this? You have a mania for disagreeable conversation early in the morning.

MARGUERITE. It's midday already.

KING. It's not midday. (*He looks at the clock*) Why, yes, it is. No matter. I haven't eaten anything, yet. Let my breakfast be brought. To tell the truth, I'm not very hungry. (*He moves to* L *of the Doctor*) Doctor, you'll have to give me some pills to stimulate my appetite and shake up my liver. My tongue's all coated, isn't it? (*He shows his tongue to the Doctor*)

DOCTOR. Yes, indeed, Your Majesty.

KING. My liver's choked up. I had nothing to drink last night, but I've a nasty taste in my mouth.

DOCTOR. Your Majesty, Queen Marguerite has spoken the truth. You *are* going to die.

KING. You get on my nerves. I'll die, yes, I'll die all right. (*He moves down* LC) In forty, fifty, three hundred years. Or even later. When I want to, when I've got the time, when it suits me. Meanwhile, let's get on with the affairs of state. (*He crosses slowly to the throne* C) My legs! My back! This palace is wretchedly heated. Full of draughts and gales.

(*The* GUARD *comes to attention*)

What about those broken window-panes? Have they replaced the tiles on the roof? No-one does any work any more. I shall have to see to it myself, I suppose.

(MARIE *moves to the King to support him*)

You can't count on anyone. (*To Marie*) No, I can manage. (*He helps himself up on to the throne with his sceptre, using it as a stick*) There's some use in this sceptre yet.

(*The* KING *manages to sit, painfully, helped after all by* MARIE)

No, I say, no, I can do it. That's it. There we are.

(MARGUERITE *and* MARIE *sit on their thrones*)

This throne's got very hard. We ought to have it upholstered. And how is my country this morning?

MARGUERITE. What remains of it . . .

KING. There are still a few tidbits left. We've got to keep an eye on them, anyhow. And it'll give you something to think about. Let us send for all our Ministers.

(JULIETTE *enters down* L)

(*To Juliette*) Go and fetch the Ministers. I expect they're still fast asleep.

(*The* GUARD *sniggers*)

They imagine there's no more work to be done.

JULIETTE. They've gone off on their holidays. Not very far, because now the country's all squashed up. It's shrunk. They're at the opposite end of the kingdom; in other words, just round the corner at the edge of the wood beside the stream. They've gone fishing. They hope to catch a few to feed the population.

KING. Fetch them.

JULIETTE. They won't come. They're off duty. But I'll go and see, if you like. (*She goes to the windows and looks out*) They've fallen into the stream.

MARIE. Try and fish them out.

(JULIETTE *exits down* L)

KING. If the country could produce any other political experts, I'd give those two the sack.

MARIE. We'll find some more.

DOCTOR. We won't find any more, Your Majesty.

MARGUERITE. You won't find any more, Berenger.

MARIE. Yes, we will, among the schoolchildren, when they've grown up. We've a little time to wait, but once these two have been fished out, they can keep things going for a while.

DOCTOR. The only children you find in the schools today are a few congenital mental defectives, Mongoloids and hydrocephalics with goitre.

KING. I do see the nation's not very fit. Try and cure them, Doctor, or improve their condition a bit. So, at least, they can learn the first four or five letters of the alphabet. In the old days, we used to kill them off.

DOCTOR. His Majesty could no longer allow himself that privilege, or he'd have no subjects left.

KING. Do something about them, anyway.

MARGUERITE. We can't improve anything, now. We can't cure anyone. Even *you* are incurable, now.

DOCTOR (*crossing behind Marguerite's throne* RC *to* R *of the King*) Sire, you are now incurable.

KING. I am not ill.

MARIE. He feels quite well. (*To the King*) Don't you?

KING. A little stiffness, that's all. It's nothing. It's a lot better now, anyway.

MARIE. He says it's better, you see.

KING. Really, I feel fine.

MARGUERITE. You're going to die in an hour and a half, you're going to die at the end of this show.

KING. What did you say, my dear? That's not very funny.

MARGUERITE. You're going to die at the end of this show.

MARIE. Oh, God!

DOCTOR. Yes, Sire, you are going to die. You will not take your breakfast tomorrow morning. Nor will you dine tonight. The chef has shut off the gas. He's handed in his apron. He's put the tablecloths and napkins away in a cupboard for ever.

MARIE. Don't say it so fast, don't say it so loud.

KING (*rising*) And who can have given such orders, without my consent? I'm in perfectly good health. You're teasing me. It's lies. (*To Marguerite*) You've always wanted me dead. (*To Marie*) She's always wanted me dead. (*To Marguerite*) I'll die when I want to. I'm the King. I'm the one to decide.

DOCTOR. You've lost the power to decide for yourself, Your Majesty.

MARGUERITE. And now you can't even help falling ill.

KING. I'm *not* ill. (*To Marie*) Didn't you say just now I wasn't ill? I'm still handsome.

MARGUERITE. And those pains of yours?

KING (*resuming his seat*) All gone.

MARGUERITE. Move about a bit.

(*The* KING *tries to stand, but cannot.* MARIE *gasps.* MARGUERITE *and the* DOCTOR *look at each other*)

KING. That's because I wasn't mentally prepared. You didn't give me time to think. I think and I am cured. A King can cure himself, but I have been too engrossed, ruling my kingdom.

MARGUERITE. Your kingdom! What a state *that's* in. You can't govern it, now. Really, you *know* you can't, but you won't admit it. You've lost your power, now, over yourself and over the elements. You can't stop the rot and you've no more power over us.

MARIE. You'll always have power over me.

MARGUERITE. Not even you.

(JULIETTE *enters down* L. *She carries her broom*)

JULIETTE (*crossing to* LC) It's too late to fish the Ministers out, now.

The stream they fell into, with all its banks and willows, has vanished into a bottomless pit. (*She moves down* L)

KING. I see. It's a plot. You want me to abdicate.

MARGUERITE. That's the best way. A voluntary abdication

DOCTOR. Abdicate, Sire. That would be best.

KING. Abdicate? Me?

MARGUERITE. Yes. Abdicate governmentally. And morally.

DOCTOR. And physically.

MARIE. Don't give your consent. Don't listen to them.

KING. They're mad. Or else they're traitors.

(*The* DOCTOR *crosses to* R)

JULIETTE. Sire, Sire, my poor lord and master, Sire.

MARIE (*rising and moving to* L *of the King*) Have them arrested. (*She holds his hand*)

KING (*to the Guard*) Guard! Arrest them!

(*The* GUARD *crosses to* LC *and turns to face* R)

MARIE. Guard! Arrest them! (*To the King*) That's it. Give orders.

KING. Lock them up in the tower. No, the tower's collapsed. Lock them in the cellar, or in the rabbit hutch. Arrest them, all of them. That's an order.

MARIE (*to the Guard*) Arrest them!

GUARD (*without moving*) In the name of His Majesty—I—I—arrest—you.

MARIE (*moving a little down* LC; *to the Guard*) Get a move on, then.

JULIETTE. He's the one who's arrested.

KING. Do it, then, Guard. Do it!

MARGUERITE. You see, now *he* can't move. He's got gout and rheumatism.

DOCTOR (*indicating the Guard*) Sire, the army is paralysed. An unknown virus has crept into his brain to sabotage his strong points.

MARGUERITE (*to the King*) Your Majesty, you can see for yourself it's your own orders that paralyse him.

MARIE (*moving to* L *of the King*) Don't believe it. She's trying to hypnotize you. It's a question of will-power.

GUARD. I—you—in the name of the King—I—you . . . (*He stops speaking, his mouth wide open*)

KING (*to the Guard*) What's come over you? Speak! Advance! Do you think you're playing statues?

MARIE. Don't ask him questions. Don't argue. Give orders. Sweep him off his feet in a whirlwind of will-power.

DOCTOR. You see, Your Majesty, he can't move a muscle. He can't say a word, he's turned to stone. (*He crosses to* R *of the Guard*) He's deaf to you already. It's a characteristic symptom. Very pronounced, medically speaking. (*He moves to* R *of Marguerite*)

(JULIETTE *prods the Guard with her broom. The* GUARD *crosses to* R *and turns*)

MARIE (*to the King*) Prove that you still have power. You can if you want to.

KING. I will prove it.

MARIE. Stand up, first.

KING. I stand up. (*He makes a great effort, grimacing, and rises*)

MARIE. You see how easy it is.

KING (*moving down the steps of the throne*) You see, both of you, how easy it is. You pair of humbugs. Conspirators, Bolsheviks! (*He moves to Marie*)

(MARIE *tries to support him*)

No, no, alone—because I can, by myself. (*He falls and his crown falls off*)

(JULIETTE *rushes forward to pick him up*)

I can get up by myself. (*He rises by himself, but with difficulty*)

(JULIETTE *exits down* L)

GUARD. Long live the King!

(*The* KING *falls down again*)

The King is dying.

MARIE. Long live the King!

(*The* KING, *with difficulty, kneels up*)

GUARD. Long live the King!

(*The* KING *topples sideways*)

The King is dead.

MARIE. Long live the King! Long live the King!

MARGUERITE (*rising*) What a farce!

(*The* KING *stands up, painfully. The following little episode should be played like a tragic Punch and Judy show.*
JULIETTE *enters up* L)

JULIETTE. Long live the King!

(JULIETTE *disappears behind the throne up* C. *The* KING *falls*)

GUARD. The King is dying!

MARIE. No! Long live the King! Stand up! Long live the King!

(JULIETTE *appears* R *of the throne up* C. *The* KING *rises*)

JULIETTE. Long live the King!

(JULIETTE *exits up* R)

GUARD. Long live the King!

MARIE. You see, he's better now.

MARGUERITE. It's his last burst of energy, isn't it, Doctor?

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