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Felicita - An Animated Feature Film Script with Art Concept Book and Pitch Deck

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Critical Statement

Felicita is a complete 90-page screenplay written for an animated feature film that is based equally on the lives of my Nanu Judith Balogh, and my great-great-great-great grandmother, Countess Felicita Anna Murari. Because I envision *Felicita* as an animated movie in the style of a Disney/Pixar feature, in addition to my screenplay I decided to assemble a physical art concept book and digital pitch deck that use original artwork and inspirational images gathered during my research and writing process. In its entirety, my capstone comprises two years of extensive research, planning, writing, editing, and rewriting. *Felicita* has become a project that is deeply personal to me and one of my proudest accomplishments, not only because of the factual connections, but also because I hope to use the story to spread positive messages about true love and personal happiness. Researching and writing this story has brought me closer to my family history and given me a voice that I hope will bring joy to others and touch many diverse audiences. In this essay, I will be examining both the research and writing processes that yielded my finalized creative capstone, putting the real-life events behind *Felicita* in a historical and cultural context, and sharing a glimpse of the feature film writing process from outline to pitch. I am indebted to everyone who supported my creative efforts thus far and I am truly excited to see what comes next. *Felicita* is more than a fairytale, it is a historically and socially relevant story that I can't wait to share with the world.

When my Nanu fled from Soviet-occupied Hungary in January 1957, one of the few possessions that she was able to carry with her was a silver sugar tin etched with a nine-pointed crown and the initials "FM." Along with the silver tin, my Nanu brought with her the story of an ancestor, an Italian countess from Verona, Italy named Felicita Anna Murari. Although everyone

in my family has heard of Felicita's name and vaguely knows of her romantic legend, until my investigation for this project there had been no attempt to research, document, and authenticate her life or her story. According to my Nanu's retelling, Felicita fell in love with a Hungarian lieutenant named Ferenc Szanky who was serving his compulsory military service in the Habsburg Army division that occupied her town. The story of how the couple met is not known, but after Felicita and Ferenc fell in love, Felicita's father, Count Sebastian Murari, would not allow them to marry in part because Ferenc was a soldier and also because he was a Protestant (Felicita and her family were Catholic). During the occupation, it was a regular custom of the Habsburg army to capture civilian men and execute them in public as a demonstration of force; Ferenc saved one of Felicita's brothers from this firing squad and in gratitude Sebastian gave his blessing to the marriage on the condition that Ferenc convert to Catholicism and Felicita renounce her title. After their marriage, Felicita accompanied Ferenc back to his native Hungary and she brought with her a dowry transported in nine wagons, including the sugar tin that my Nanu would eventually bring to America and share with me (Appendix II).

I knew when starting my capstone that I wanted to include Felicita's real life story in my screenplay, and the first part of my project was researching to document and authenticate my Nanu's story. For animated films in particular, research is a crucial component of the development process to ensure a historically accurate visual design, to communicate factual substantive content, and to create appealing characters with a compelling backstory. As John Lasseter, the chief creative officer of Pixar Animation studios, said: "I believe in research. Each movie at Pixar involves research with college professors or taking trips to learn as much as we can about a particular subject matter" (Lasseter, 2015). Although I did not visit Verona and the Murari Castle firsthand, I was richly rewarded and even surprised by how much information was

available to me, in part because Felicita's mother is a descendent of the well-known and well-documented Bevilaqua royal family. In the process of creating our family tree, for which I used records available through *Ancestry.com*, I found many connections and primary sources that verify the marriage of Felicita's parents, the birth of Felicita and her siblings, Felicita's marriage to Ferenc, their return to northeastern Hungary, and the baptisms of their many children (Ancestry.com, 2017). For example, I discovered a historical article in a Hungarian newspaper from 1923 that reports on a claim to the legal court brought by the Bevilacqua descendants residing in Hungary who were seeking information about their inheritance. This article also details the marriage of Captain Ferenc (Francis) Szanky to Countess Felicita Murari of the Bevilaqua lineage and mentions the family name of Szuchevich which was the last name of my Nanu's mother and my great-grandmother (Appendix III). The passage translates to:

New heirs of **Nicolo Bevilaqua**, Hungarian descendants of color, claim the inheritance from the Hungarian Foreign Minister. They inquired about the state of affairs when unexpectedly at the last minute a new heir was logged. The new heir to the Tarpa and Male Ozorovce was **the Szanky family** who proved that they stand with the immediate family relationship. Stationed in Verona in 1848, **Francis Szanky** who was brought to Hungary as captain, was named benefactor of the **Dalia Murari Bra Corte estate of Countess Felicita**, first degree of **the deceased countess Bevilaqua**. The Szanky family is of the late Nandor Sankyo descendants, Szanky Zsigmond and Somogy County Land. In addition, he is the nephew of the late Nandor Szanky family and **Szuchevich family**. The family has also appeared in Venice, and the district court and **Verona** asset manager's response was at the time told to the stakeholders. **The property, which its heirs demand today, is of so many millions of Italian lira, it is almost priceless.** The outcome is still uncertain, but it is not excluded from that of Prince Porcia. The case will reoccur, at a district court in Belényesy.

In addition to the newspaper article, I found baptism records for Ferenc Szanky and baptism records for all of Felicita's children, including a daughter named Emilia who was born in northeastern Hungary in 1834 and who would become my great-great-great grandmother (Appendix IV & V). Additionally, I discovered that the Murari family lived on an estate called "Il Palazzone" or "Murari Bra Corte," of which there are several photographs available that I

used to model the Murari castle in my screenplay (Appendix VI). Similarly, I found images of the uniform that Ferenc would have worn in the army and incorporated this information into the character design of the Habsburg soldiers in *Felicita* (Appendix VII). In addition to finding photographs to improve the visual design of *Felicita*, I found documents that allude to the emotional impact of Felicita's decision to leave Verona on the rest of the Murari family. For example, I found a book of sonnets called *Versi* that was written by Felicita's father Sebastian and includes a poem about the first winter without his daughter (Appendix VIII). The sonnet translates as following:

The First Winter
In Hungary
To the Daughter Felicita

The leaves are falling and in their falling,
More aching of my cruel wound
That festers with your departure
That never leaves me without torture
It aches more that I don't ignore
How rigid you find this trip
The hay is soon spread out
Green nature, that is the most beautiful sight
Oh! For pity your delicate body
From frost, from snow well defended
And between the plains keep them protected
That if you would do it, if this is intended
Sad starlet won't be able to bring me
To my love, my reward will be given
Take care of yourself, I'm so far away from you,
So they don't bring me bad news

These documents did more than prove the authenticity of my Nanu's story, they offered insight into the realities of Felicita's world and fueled my inspiration for the plot and visual design of my senior capstone.

It is important to understand the larger cultural context of the time in which Felicita lived in addition to knowing the social dynamics of the Murari family. After the defeat of Napoleon, the victorious powers (England, Russia and the Habsburg Empire) convened at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 where they redistributed the lands of Europe and provinces of northern Italy, turning Verona into part of the Habsburg Empire (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). At this time, Ferenc Szanky served the compulsory military service with the Hungarian hussars (cavalry) as a lieutenant in Verona. In the first half of the 19th century, Italy consisted of many independent states and there was an ever-growing political movement, the Risorgimento, to unify Italy. In fact, the mood of this patriotic fervor inspired Giuseppe Verdi to compose the opera *Nabucco* in which he glorified the spirit of unification (NPR, 2008). Simultaneously, the population of the occupied territories fought back in the underground, eventually leading to a war of independence against the Habsburg Empire. In retaliation to the revolutionaries, or as a deterrent, it was common practice for the Habsburg soldiers to line up the male citizens of a community in a public place and to execute every 10th person in line; which, according to family history, is the practice that took place in Verona and is the fate that Ferenc saved Felicita's brother from.

The details and stories that I uncovered during the research component of my capstone were crucial in visualizing Felicita's world and developing the overarching narrative of my feature film. When I first started development, I planned for my story to take place solely in Verona and imagined *Felicita* as a traditional Disney Princess story from start to finish. However, as I learned more about Felicita's life and decision to leave her homeland, I realized that her adventure was strikingly similar to what I knew about my Nanu's decision to come to America. When I was a child, my Nanu told me many stories about her early life in Hungary, but she sheltered me from the details of what it was like to grow up during World War II and the

Soviet occupation. As a young woman, I realized that some of my favorite stories—including the time she stole bricks from a bombsite to repair a hole in her teacher's house and the night she saved her village from invading Soviet troops—were actually a glimpse into the horrors of war. In leaving Hungary, my Nanu gave up her friends, family, language, and country; her decision to follow her husband (my grandfather) to America is unlike any decision I have ever made in my lifetime. Once I realized that Felicita had done the same thing over a century earlier, I knew that the most important story for me to tell with this screenplay would be one that honored both of their incredibly unique, and true, narratives.

In its current form, *Felicita* is about a little girl named Charlie who learns that she is descended from royalty and who accomplishes personal growth through learning about the trials of her grandmother and great-great-great-great grandmother. The story begins shortly after Charlie moves to a new town with her dad, and it's not clear whether her parents recently divorced or if her mother left the family. Charlie struggles to make friends at school, due in part to rumors about her mother and because of Charlie's prominent stutter, and she's often bullied for playing "make believe" at recess. After getting into a fight with a bully, Charlie is sent home early from school and her Nanu has to pick her up. Once Nanu hears Charlie say that she wants to "grow up" and doesn't like fairy tales anymore, Nanu begins to tell her a story about their ancestor Felicita: a real-life princess who gave up her crown to marry for love. In Nanu's narration, the audience travels through Charlie's imagination to 1800s Italy and Felicita's fantasy kingdom of Veroma (a mix of Rome and Verona) where the bulk of the story takes place. Felicita is a compassionate leader and a surprisingly gifted gambler, but since her kingdom is occupied by the Habsburg Army most people, herself included, consider Felicita to be a powerless princess. After a local village is burned down by soldiers, Felicita decides to fight

back and help the rebel forces known as il Risorgimento to overthrow the army. In the process, she crosses paths with a lieutenant named Ferenc and the pair develop an immediate attraction. When Ferenc saves her younger brother Giacomo from a firing squad, Felicita realizes that there are no “good” or “bad” sides and decides to give up her crown to follow Ferenc towards the promise of a new life and new adventures. Once Nanu finishes the story, Charlie discovers a postcard in her Nanu’s keepsakes of what she thinks is the Italian flag; but once she drops the card on the floor, she realizes that it is actually the Hungarian flag (as in reality the flags of these two countries share the same colors but are perpendicular to one another). In this moment, Charlie has a moment of clarity and realizes that her Nanu hasn’t been completely honest with her story: in addition to telling Charlie about Felicita, Nanu has also been telling Charlie about her experiences immigrating to America in the 1950s. From their stories, Charlie learns that to find happiness, you need to have the freedom to make your own path in life. This realization allows Charlie to stop blaming herself for her parent’s separation and she shares the story at recess, speaking to her classmates for the first time without a stutter. There is an Italian phrase that speaks to this understanding, which is: “*Il segreto della felicità è la libertà, il segreto della libertà è il coraggio,*” or “The secret to happiness is freedom, and the secret to freedom is courage” (Thucydides, 411BC). I believe this saying encapsulates the greater themes *Felicita*, and unexpectedly, the name Felicita also translates to “happiness.”

My career as a professional writer began when I wrote and published my first young adult novel in high school, and for a long time after I wanted to be a novelist. However, I have wanted to be a writer since before I could write full sentences, and when I was younger I would visit my Nanu’s home and ask her to transcribe my stories as I narrated them. Once I started taking classes at Newhouse, I became interested in using visual effects and media technology to

tell stories and focused my interests on screenwriting. During my academic career, I have had such relevant course work as *TRF211: Screenwriting* and *TRF421: Feature Film Writing* with Professor Keith Giglio, *TRF424: Script Development* with Professor Evan Smith, and *TRF400: The Writer's Journey* with Julie and David Chambers at the Syracuse University Los Angeles Semester campus. In these classes, I learned about the narrative structure of successful film and television shows, how to refine and outline ideas, and how to pitch a script to a major studio. For my senior capstone, I wanted to do more than write the screenplay for *Felicita*, I wanted to create a fully interactive pitch that would be similar to the pitches that we have learned about in class and incorporate my knowledge of storytelling on an interdisciplinary level. As a result, for my capstone I have finished not only a complete screenplay, but also an art concept book and pitch deck: three types of material most frequently used by writers in Hollywood for pitching ideas.

Despite the many different methods and writing styles that professional writers may tout, the first step of the screenwriting process is outlining. *Felicita* went through several different outlines in the early development process, some of my own making and others under the guidance and supervision of my faculty advisor, Professor Keith Giglio. First, I started by crafting a rough “beat sheet” that outlined the major plot elements (or “beats”) of my script based on the book *Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder (Appendix IX). Afterward, I expanded with a single page summary of events and later individual profiles for each of my main characters that included everything from physical descriptions to personality traits. Perhaps the most challenging and most helpful step of the development process was Professor Giglio’s 40 Card Outline (Appendix X). In this format there are roughly 40 beats of a given story, and you may be surprised to recognize that these beats are actually prevalent in most modern films, regardless of genre or run time. For example, the opening scene often demonstrates the main character’s

“Defining Action” or personality trait and at approximately fifteen minutes into the film the protagonist will “Enter the New World” and make a decision that launches them on the rest of their journey. A well-known example of this that I’ve studied in several of my classes is *The Hunger Games*, in which Katniss decides to volunteer herself in her sister’s place exactly at the fifteen-minute mark (*The Hunger Games*, 2012). In *Felicita*, the same shift occurs around page fifteen when our eight-year-old protagonist, Charlie, asks her grandmother to tell her a story about a princess named Felicita. After completing my outline, and promptly coming up with a wave of new ideas that lead to an entirely different outline, I began the writing process for my screenplay. In addition to my historical research, there were several films that had a direct impact on my writing and the eventual visual design of my capstone, including *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Princess Diaries* (2001), and the entire canon of Disney Princesses. Of all these works, by far the two most influential movies on my capstone as a whole were *Anastasia* (1997) and *The Little Prince* (2015).

Directed by former Disney animation directors Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, 20th Century Fox’s *Anastasia* is loosely based on the true legend of Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov and her apparent disappearance after the fall of the Romanov Empire. In the movie, a young woman called Anya (Meg Ryan) teams up with a friendly con-artist named Dimitri (John Cusack) to secure her travel to Paris and find her grandmother the Dowager Empress. However, although she manages to prove that she is the lost duchess, Anya decides to give up the crown to spend her life with Dimitri and they elope at the end of the film (*Anastasia*, 1997). In addition to being a joyful story and one of my favorite movies to this day, I always knew that there was something special about *Anastasia* that I wanted to evoke with my own work. During my initial brainstorm for *Felicita*, I identified two distinct elements from *Anastasia* that I hoped to

incorporate into my screenplay. First, the unique relationship between a grandmother and granddaughter; second, the theme of true love being more important than status. Also, as someone who grew up loving the Disney Princesses, I realized that there is a pattern in every Disney Princess movie where the heroine always ends the film as a princess, regardless of whether she was born or married into the title. For example, in *The Little Mermaid* Ariel starts as a princess of the ocean and then becomes a princess on land. Conversely, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* starts as a peasant but marries a prince. With *Felicita*, I was determined to use my ancestor's real-life story to create a world where the main character prioritizes true love and happiness over all else and would end as a "normal" person, similar to what I had always loved about *Anastasia*. In addition to breaking the Disney Princess pattern, I hoped this shift in character would speak to the larger theme that you don't have to be a princess to be special.

Comparative to the impact that *Anastasia* had on the narrative of *Felicita*, Paramount Picture's *The Little Prince* had a significant influence on the visual design of my capstone's concept art. Directed by Mark Osborne and based on the 1943 novel by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the animated feature uses stop motion and computer animation to tell a story that is set both from the perspective of a young girl struggling to balance childhood with the demands of the real world (Mackenzie Foy), and an elderly aviator (Jeff Bridges) who tells her about his meeting with the Little Prince in the Sahara Desert (*The Little Prince*, 2015). I first watched *The Little Prince* at its red-carpet premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015, and I was immediately taken with the artistry that came with blending two distinct styles of animation. I realized that in addition to the entertainment value, I could use animation to address the unique narrative of *Felicita* and achieve more than a traditional Disney Princess recreation. I envision that each timeline of the film—the present day, 1950s Hungary, and 1800s Italy—would speak to

Charlie's imagination and be a creative and technological opportunity with its own distinct style of animation.

In the entertainment industry, there is a constant dialogue about the importance of creating stories for young audiences, and oftentimes for young girls specifically. For example, Disney has received harsh criticism over the years for its prevalent romantic tropes and passive female characters, and I knew that my story should be measured by the same standards. As Lauren Faust, an American filmmaker best known for producing the *My Little Pony* television series, says on the topic: "Cartoons for girls don't have to be a puddle of smooshy, cutesy-wootsy goody-two-shoeness. Girls like stories with real conflict; girls are smart enough to understand complex plots, girls aren't as easily frightened as everyone seems to think" (Faust, IMDB). I fully agree with Ms. Faust, and I believe that by paralleling Felicita's decision with my Nanu's escape from Soviet-occupied Hungary my story speaks to conflicts that are more culturally relevant than a typical Disney love story. For example, in addition to providing positive female role models and a glimpse at healthy romantic relationships, *Felicita* also speaks to the challenges that my Nanu faced as an immigrant coming to America for the first time. Although it may seem like a traditional princess movie on the surface, *Felicita* is an incredibly emotionally complex story about a little girl who must come to terms with growing up and learn how to find her own happiness like the women who came before her.

My relationship with princess stories and the entertainment industry as a whole has drastically changed over the years from audience member, to student, to emerging industry professional. As a kid, I loved watching the Disney movies on repeat and would adorn my room with matching monogrammed bedspreads. In college, I learned more about the mechanics behind my favorite films and even got a glimpse at the psychology and mathematics behind why some

scripts work and why others fail. Much like the “Enter the New World” rule from the Professor Giglio’s outline, screenwriters must be mindful of the pacing of their story and how they utilize screen time. For example, most animated films are under two hours long, and I reflect this in my own work by keeping my screenplay under 120 pages (in screenwriting, one page of script correlates to one minute of screen time). Currently, I am finishing my senior year with the Syracuse University Los Angeles Semester program and I am interning at NBC Universal in scripted content and current programming. Through this position, I have had the opportunity to read dozens of scripts, listen to the managers give feedback to writers, and sit in on pitches as clients present their ideas for consideration. This position has not only given me little inspirations for my story, it has afforded me a real world understanding of how to pitch ideas and what elements to promote when marketing a feature film. As a result, I fully believe that my classroom and internship education have prepared me for the real world, and *Felicita* is an example of how I am already using my education to create a project that I can bring into the world as a professional screenwriter. I truly believe that one of the greatest things about being a writer at this moment in time is watching the trends in stories and characters change with popular want and need. *Frozen* is perhaps one of the most recent examples of a wildly successful Disney movie that featured two princesses, neither of which was saved by a man or married off at the end of the movie (*Frozen*, 2013). I am incredibly excited by a potential return to another golden age of animation as animated films and content are increasingly becoming more popular and hope to add *Felicita* into the discussion.

After I finished my first draft of *Felicita*, I realized that I needed a distinct theme to connect all three of the timelines in my story and started to consider how I could incorporate my own experiences a child of divorce. Similarly, after reading the first draft of *Felicita*, my honors

reader and Adjunct Professor Ben Frahm pushed me to answer why Nanu's character would be telling Charlie about Felicita at this particular point in her life as opposed to any other. My parents divorced when I was fourteen months old, and unlike most children I didn't think I was impacted by their separation until significantly later in life. My dad explained divorce to me simply by telling me a story about a family of turtles: after a land and sea turtle met on a beach and fell in love, they had a baby who was able to travel both to the water where one parent lived and to the land where the other parent lived. Almost by chance, while I was considering this theme I discovered Thucydides' saying: "*Il segreto della felicità è la libertà, il segreto della libertà è il coraggio,*" or "The secret to happiness is freedom, the secret to freedom is courage" (Thucydides, 411 BC). This phrase brought a moment of clarity and reawaked my original passion for this project by giving me strength of purpose and the ability to use the guise of a Disney Princess story to spread positive messages about healthy relationships and happiness. Both Felicita and Nanu chose to leave their homelands in pursuit of a better life, but I struggled to translate this action into Charlie's world: should she run away from home? Do she and her dad leave their situation looking for a better life? Most recently I played with the idea that Charlie would have to decide between pursuing her mother or friends at school. However, nothing felt right within the scope of an eight-year-old's world. After discovering this particular quote, I realized that what Charlie learns is not something she has to physically act upon, but rather she learns that it is not her fault her mother left. In order for her mother to be happy, as it was for Felicita and Nanu, her mother had to be free to make her own path. Without justifying divorce or saying it's okay for parents to leave their children, *Felicita* gives Charlie the tools to start the process of understanding and accepting her mother's departure. I believe this is an incredibly important lesson for kids to understand, and I wish it was something that I had been told as a

young girl. Perhaps more so than first intended, *Felicita* has become an ambitious project that seeks to address hot-button issues—love, immigration, and divorce—in a family-friendly way. When creative work in my field is presented around these issues, the reception is usually negative because people are more critical when it comes to reviewing children’s content. However, I affirm that *Felicita* remains an honest and emotional screenplay because it is based on a true story and not fabricated for an ulterior motive.

Because I picture *Felicita* as an animated film, I wanted to assemble as much original and inspirational artwork as possible to convey a sense of the world that I envisioned. In assembling an art concept book, I was able to have a direct hand in the anticipated visual design of *Felicita* from start to finish, which was both an incredibly exciting and educational experience. The purpose of this material is to hand to a producer during a pitch and allow them to better envision the world of *Felicita* without having to read the whole script beforehand. There was a conscious theory behind every picture that I selected, both the original artwork and inspirational images found online. I recruited Delaney Kuric, a junior illustration major from the College of Visual and Performing Arts, to create the original artwork for my capstone. I also received help from recent Catherine Mazzocchi, Syracuse University Class of 2016, who guided my self-teaching through InDesign as I made the book. When we started working together, I hoped to have expression sheets for my main characters, settings, and a few storyboards to present with my pitch. However, Ms. Kuric had a very busy fall schedule and was unable to invest significant energy into my capstone. As a result, she was only able to complete character art for Charlie and Nanu in the present day, Nanu in the 1950s, and Felicita in the 1800s. These drawings all appear in my art concept book, flanked by inspirational pictures from similar Disney/Pixar films to evoke a greater sense of intended animation style. For example, Charlie’s world and the present-

day timeline is the most similar to today's computer animation produced by either Disney or Pixar. The most influential work on this animation style is Pixar's *Inside Out*, which uses bright colors and realistic human figures (Pixar, 2015). In comparison, since most of *Felicita* takes place in Felicita's fictional world of Veroma, I wanted Felicita's animation to have the appearance of a traditional Disney Princess film because the audience is seeing the world as Charlie imagines it. However, the medium couldn't be 2D animation because the change between 2D and 3D would be too jarring for audiences. As a result, in my book I use Disney's *Tangled* as an example of the animation style that I envision (Disney, 2010). Finally, although the least seen by the audience, Nanu's life in the 1950s is perhaps the most artistic of the three animations. I wanted the style to feel like old photographs from the 1950s and to reflect this Ms. Kuric drew Nanu's younger self in charcoal. I liken this to Disney's animated short *Paperman* which was a revolutionary and Oscar award winning CG/2D hybrid (Disney, 2012). Much like the care taken to outline *Felicita* from start to finish, I paid special attention to use animation as part of the narrative, not just for its entertainment value. As John Lasseter said: "The art challenges the technology, and the technology inspires the art" (Lasseter, 2015).

In summation, I hope that I adequately communicated the immense historic and cultural importance behind my screenplay and the unique opportunity that my vision for *Felicita*'s animation style presents. *Felicita* compounds the traditional elements of storytelling, from the Disney Princess genre to beyond, and adds a fresh voice to a new medium. With inspiration from various films in the Disney cannon and themes drawn from trends in the current entertainment industry, my capstone seeks to present a story that is equal parts entertaining and educational. After two years of work, I am more passionate and dedicated to this project than ever before, and I hope to have the opportunity to improve upon it in the future. Perhaps the most challenging and

singular best part of *Felicita* is that the more I think about it, the more ideas I have: I truly believe that animation is the only way to tell this story and that I am the only person who can tell it. The experiences of my Nanu and Felicita can reach audiences from all walks of life and should be used to spread positive messages about love in a heartfelt and meaningful way. I want my audience to feel joy, and I want the story to remind everyone of the family legends that they grew up listening to. It is my utmost hope that *Felicita's* story will redefine the Princess genre and prove that you don't need to a princess to make a difference in the world.

FELICITA

by

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Based on a True Story

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OVER BLACK

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Once upon a time, there was a
beautiful princess...

EXT. MAGIC CASTLE - DAY

SPIRES, FLAGS, a gilded DRAWBRIDGE - this castle looks just
how a kid would imagine it. And it's very, very PINK.

A fair PRINCESS (20s) sits in the window of the tallest
tower. She feeds crumbs to several birds at her windowsill.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
She was locked in a tower for a
really, *really* long time, like ten
whole years or something, wishing
that someone would save her-

PRINCESS
I wish that someone would save me!

At her outburst the birds startle and fly away.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
But although many tried, none
prevailed...

EXT. MAGIC FOREST - SAME TIME

A handsome KNIGHT (20s) bursts through the trees. But instead
of a noble steed he is riding what looks strangely like...a
MY LITTLE PONY DOLL?

CHARLIE (V.O.)
...and many, many tried.

The sound of an engine tears through the woods...and a life-
size HOT WHEELS RACE CAR explodes from the underbrush!

EXT. MAGIC CASTLE

The princess notices her heroes on the horizon as a hulking
SHADOW passes overhead. Confused, she looks up and to
discover...a ROCKET SHIP?!

As the rocket crosses the sun--

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

--a TOY rocket ship falls from the sky.

CHARLIE (9) catches her rocket with both hands. She's camped under the jungle gym with her toys: a Princess Barbie, My Little Pony horse, plastic Knight, and an old Hot Wheels car.

Charlie wears glasses, polka-dot leggings, and mismatched socks. There are rubber bands on her teeth, but even they can't restrain her overdramatic play pretend.

CHARLIE

Then, polymorphous aliens attacked!
Pew! Pew!

Charlie lands her rocket under the slide. Above her, KIDS in Velcro shoes and neon windbreakers swarm the jungle gym. No one looks twice at her.

Charlie is lost in her own world.

EXT. MAGIC CASTLE

Smoke pools off the crashed rocket and the Knight moves forward, sword raised. The Hot Wheels car revs its engine.

The rocket doors slide open and the Knight braces. But before he can strike, a GIANT FOOT smashes down--

EXT. PLAYGROUND - SAME TIME

--onto the rocket! The foot belongs to SIERRA (9), now towering over Charlie, arms crossed. Her accomplice ASHLEY (9) joins. These girls are dressed in the elementary school equivalent of designer apparel: Hollister, Aeropostale.

Ashley is chewing gum. She blows a bubble. It pops.

SIERRA

Hey there, Metal Mouth.

Charlie tugs at the rocket still pinned under Sierra's foot.

CHARLIE

G-get off!

When she's not playing make believe, Charlie has a STUTTER.

SIERRA

Or what, you'll smile at me?

Charlie pulls again just as Sierra lifts her foot: freeing the rocket but also sending Charlie sprawling backwards.

ASHLEY

(Genuinely oblivious, but
still mean)

My parents say your mom was tired
of playing make believe. Is *this*
why she left?

SIERRA

Mine too! Maybe you should take a
page out of her book.

ASHLEY

(Really not the sharpest
crayon in the box)

More like *storybook*, am I right?

Sierra glares at her to be quiet. Then, Sierra snatches the Princess Barbie from the ground.

CHARLIE

Sierra, g-give that back.

Charlie rises to her feet. Sierra spins the doll by her hair as she and Ashley confer behind their hands. Then, she nods.

SIERRA

Fine. But take it from us Charlie,
we're way too old for dolls and
play pretend. We're almost *ten!*

Sierra holds out the Barbie. There's a brief tug-of-war. A sickening pop. And suddenly, the Barbie is headless.

CHARLIE

I'm going, going, going to-

SIERRA

What? Tell, tell, *tell on us?*

The three little words have a magic effect on the playground. A Skip-It skips to a halt. There's a pileup on the slide. And the kids on the swing-set fall motionless.

Everyone stares at the jungle gym. Watching. Waiting.

CHARLIE

I won't if you won't.

CUT TO:

INT. CONCORD BOOK SHOP - SAME TIME

An ELDERLY WOMAN (70s) steers a YOUNG BOY (16) through the aisles, using her umbrella like a cattle prod. The boy is terrified, and with good reason.

The woman is Charlie's grandmother: NANU. She is a foot shorter than the boy and dressed in all beige, even her purse and Birkenstocks match. Her Eastern European accent is distinct but not noticeable to those who know her well.

NANU

What do you mean you don't know what's in the window? It's *your* window isn't it?

BOY

Yeah, but-

NANU

And you put *your* books in *your* window?

BOY

Yes ma'am, but-

NANU

So what is a *comic book* doing in a *classics* display?

She points with her umbrella: centered amongst the vintage hardcovers is a ridiculously cheery looking GRAPHIC NOVEL.

BOY

Well, people wanna read the stuff everyone knows. Like, *that's a classic, dude!* Not like classical, *old*, things.

NANU

Well *this* old thing has a problem with that. Move it.

(Taunting)

Dude.

The boy grabs the book and scrambles out of sight.

NANU (CONT'D)

(Towards *War and Peace*)

That's better, isn't it Leo?

Suddenly her phone RINGS from deep within her behemoth of a purse. Nanu sighs.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

The CLOCK on the wall ticks steadily.

Charlie and Sierra sit side-by-side on a tiny bench. Sierra is crying and one of Charlie's suspenders is snapped. Across from them is the receptionist MARGOT (60s) and beyond her stands a menacing door labeled: PRINCIPAL.

Sierra snuffles and Charlie glances over. Her scowl softens.

CHARLIE
You s-started it.

Sierra drops her hands, revealing surprisingly dry eyes.

SIERRA
Monster.

CHARLIE
F-faker!

Margot looks up from her computer and a website that looks suspiciously like FANFICTION.NET.

MARGOT
Do we need to separate you two?

CHARLIE
Is t-that an option?

The door opens and PRINCIPAL PLANCHER (40s) appears with SIERRA'S MOM (30s) and Charlie's Nanu.

Charlie and Sierra leap to their feet simultaneously.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)	SIERRA
She took my-	I would like to plead the-

Principal Plancher raises his hands. He's one of those soft spoken almost-hippie types that PTA moms love.

PRINCIPAL PLANCHER
Girls, please. We have a zero tolerance policy for any kind of fighting...with word or with fists.

Nanu rolls her eyes. Charlie notices and hides a smile.

PRINCIPAL PLANCHER (CONT'D)
But, I'm not unreasonable. Am I?

He looks to Margot for confirmation. She flashes a thumbs-up.

PRINCIPAL PLANCHER (CONT'D)

Since I know there is no punishment greater than your own regret, we're sending you home early so you have time to think about your actions. I expect your best behavior tomorrow.

Charlie and Sierra frown at each other.

PRINCIPAL PLANCHER (CONT'D)

And...I want you to say sorry.

CHARLIE

No way.

SIERRA

I want a restraining order!

Nanu steps forward. Despite her height, her presence demands immediate silence.

NANU

Apologize to one another.

CHARLIE

Sorry Sierra.

SIERRA

Sorry.

NANU

Glad that's settled. Come, Charlie.

Nanu takes a candy from the bowl on Margot's desk and exits. Charlie sticks out her tongue at Sierra and follows.

INT. NANU'S CAR - DRIVING

Charlie sits in the back, arms around her knees. Her backpack is buckled in next to her, her toys peeping through the top.

NANU

Feet on the floor please.

Charlie obliges. Nanu checks in her rear view mirror.

NANU (CONT'D)

I don't know why that man thought sending you home is right. You're in school, you should be *in* school.

CHARLIE

Whatever, I d-don't want to be there anyways.

Nanu is still watching Charlie and BUMPS a traffic cone. Charlie flinches but doesn't say anything.

They drive by several trees in the midst of changing color and a sandwich board with FALL FESTIVAL on one side and BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT on the other. It's the epitome of fall in small-town New England.

NANU

Would you like a drink?

Not waiting for an answer, she hands Charlie the DIET COKE from the front cupholder. Charlie sips and makes a face.

CHARLIE

It's warm.

NANU

(She knows)

That's too bad. I could have gone shopping if I wasn't called in.

CHARLIE

Sierra s-started-!

NANU

I know, but that doesn't matter.

Nanu reaches to collect the Diet Coke and this time the car THWACKS a 'Vote For' sign leaning over the curb.

CHARLIE

Nanu...

NANU

You have to be more responsible.
You *are* the bigger person.

CHARLIE

But why is *everything* my fault?

Nanu is silent and Charlie returns to staring out her window. The colors blur in front of her eyes.

Over the river, and through the woods, to grandmother's house we go...

EXT. NANU'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Nanu's modernist style house is two stories with white panels and a flat roof. It sits at the end of a long paved drive with an overgrown yew bush on either side.

Charlie runs to open the front door and a yellow blur shoots past. This is SANDY, Charlie's charismatic golden retriever.

NANU

Don't let her get away. Again.

Ignoring her, Charlie catches Sandy and tugs on her muzzle to make it look like she's talking. Sandy takes it like a champ.

CHARLIE

(As Sandy)

How was your day Master Charlie?

(As self)

Sierra is the worst.

(As Sandy)

I'll pee on her for you.

(As self)

Sandy, do you think I'm old?

(As Sandy)

In dog years, you're ancient.

Nanu shakes her head and walks towards the--

MAILBOX

--at the end of the driveway. The post is blatantly crooked.

NANU

People in this country should learn
to drive straight.

She takes her mail and yanks the box upright.

INT. NANU'S KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Nanu washes a handful of blackberries in the sink. Sandy squeezes between her and the counter, tail thumping wildly.

NANU

Don't even think about it.

Sandy stares at her with huge hopeful eyes.

Still scowling, Nanu drops several berries on the ground. Sandy inhales them.

NANU (CONT'D)

(Calling to the next room)

Cica, what work do you have?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Fractions, I think.

Nanu takes a silver SUGAR TIN and sprinkles the berries with a generous amount of sugar. Before returning the tin to its place, her fingers trace the NINE POINTED CROWN on the lid.

Suddenly Sandy whines, breaking her reverie.

INT. NANU'S DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

The table is buried under faded newspapers and unopened mail. There's a glass door to the backyard and a small pond.

Charlie is on the floor, a textbook tented over her head. Lisa Frank folders and sparkly erasers surround her.

Sandy runs in and licks Charlie's face. Nanu enters behind.

NANU

Cica, Charlie, get off the floor.

CHARLIE

Why.

NANU

Homework.

CHARLIE

No.

NANU

Fine. Then you can practice.

Charlie pretends to impale herself with a colored pencil.

INT. NANU'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Charlie sits at a PIANO, Sandy snoring at her feet. She drills her chords with heavy hands and soon begins to sing.

CHARLIE

*See my little puppy, with his
floppy...ears.*

Charlie looks to Sandy and switches to a minor chord. She pumps the keys like an organ player, dramatically morose.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

*When he sees you crying, he will
lick away your...tears!*

Sandy hides her muzzle in her paws.

INT. NANU'S KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Charlie's DAD (40s) enters and walks straight to an opened bag of cashews. He is wearing old sneakers and jeans that have been victim to too many home improvement projects.

Nanu is washing dishes. She speaks without turning around.

NANU
Szia. Megkaptad az uzenetemet?

DAD
English, mom.

NANU
That Principal is a fool.

DAD
He was just trying to help.

Nanu shuts off the water and places herself in front of the doorway. They can both hear Charlie's music from outside.

NANU
She doesn't have friends there.

DAD
What do you want me to do about it?

Nanu makes an exasperated clucking sound in her throat.

NANU
I'm not telling you so you *do*
anything, I'm telling you so you
know something about her life here.

Charlie's Dad takes another handful of cashews.

DAD
I don't want to have this
conversation again.

NANU
We never *finished* having the
conversation.

DAD
Mom, please. I don't need you to
tell me how to raise my daughter.

NANU
You asked *me* for help.

DAD

By help I meant picking her up and driving her places while I'm at work. Not lecturing me every night.

(Beat)

She started a fight, mom. A *fight*.

NANU

With everything that's happened since Lizzie left? Are you surprised?

DAD

Since Elizabeth left I've done everything I can to make sure Charlie has what she needs. We found a good house, she's in a good school...but that's if she doesn't get kicked out in the first week.

NANU

The only thing she needs is-

DAD

What she needs is to try harder!

NANU

Try at *what*?

DAD

(Shouting)

I don't know. Try and be a *grown-up* for once!

Nanu realizes that the piano music has STOPPED and steps aside, allowing Charlie's Dad to leave.

DAD (CONT'D)

Her game starts at 6:30 tomorrow.

NANU

I know.

Once alone, Nanu shakes her head and puts away the cashews.

INT. DAD'S CAR - DRIVING

Charlie stares out the window away from her Dad. It looks like he glances at her in his mirror, but in the darkness it's hard to tell.

Charlie looks to the headless Barbie in her lap. Thoughtful.

EXT. PICK-UP LINE - NEXT DAY

Nanu's Subaru is already at the front of the line.

A wave of kids surges through the doors with Charlie in the rear. She struggles under the combined weight of her backpack and soccer bag. Today, she is wearing ALL BLACK.

Sierra and Ashley follow her, arms linked.

SIERRA	ASHLEY
<i>Metal Mouth / she's so cool / but the braces / make her drool!</i>	<i>Metal Mouth / she's so cool / but the braces / make her drool!</i>

INT. NANU'S CAR - SAME TIME

Nanu overhears the girls and scowls. Charlie scrambles into the back, obviously more concerned that her Nanu is going to do something embarrassing than with the actual bullies.

CHARLIE
At least they're g-getting
creative.

She slams her door shut.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - LATER

Besides the Subaru, there's not a single car in sight.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I t-told you.

NANU (O.S.)
He said 6:30.

INT. NANU'S CAR

The car radio flashes 6:15. Soft music plays.

Charlie is upside down in the passenger's seat, feet on the ceiling. Nanu reads a newspaper and Sandy sleeps in the back.

CHARLIE
He always g-gives you the wrong
time to make sure we're early. And
t-then you show up early to the
early time...and h-here we are.

Nanu glances over her paper.

NANU

Cica, feet on the floor.

Charlie is motionless.

NANU (CONT'D)

Cica, floor.

Charlie groans and sits up arms first like a zombie.

NANU (CONT'D)

What's gotten into you?

CHARLIE

Nothing.

(Looking at the paper)

Have you read the expose about charter schools yet? It was very interesting.

Nanu blanches, checking her spot in the paper.

NANU

You read the newspaper?

CHARLIE

Yes. Is t-that a crime?

NANU

But why on earth-?

CHARLIE

Because Dad was right, it's t-time for me to grow up...I'm ready.

Nanu folds her newspaper and puts it in her purse.

NANU

Your father didn't mean that.

CHARLIE

S-sounded like he did.

NANU

He's been under a lot of pressure since you moved. But it's not fair of him to put that pressure on you.

CHARLIE

But m-maybe, if I was more grown up, maybe she...

They sit in awkward silence for a minute. Nanu turns off the radio and turns to face Charlie.

NANU

I want to tell you a story.

Charlie slouches low in her seat, already sensing what's coming next.

CHARLIE

Why.

NANU

Because I think you'll like it.

CHARLIE

Why.

NANU

You used to like my stories.

CHARLIE

Not t-the ones where you're supposed t-to *learn* something.

NANU

Do you remember when you used to think you were a wizard?

CHARLIE

(She does)

N-no. I've blocked it from memory.

NANU

Five years old and you kept launching off the stairs with my broom. You were persistent.

CHARLIE

I get t-teased enough at school, you know.

NANU

One day you looked at me and said *I want to know who I am*. You were so serious, I didn't know what to say.

CHARLIE

I wanted you to s-say I was a wizard...

Charlie's eyes widen. Could it be?

Nanu sees the hope in her face.

NANU

No.

Charlie's expression falls.

NANU (CONT'D)

The story I want to tell you is about just that. Our family, and where we come from.

CHARLIE

But...I'm not a w-wizard?

NANU

No, you're not.

(Pause)

Before Grandfather and I lived in Hungary, my mother's family lived in Italy. One of our ancestors, my great-great-great-great grandmother, your great-great-great-great-great...

Already bored, Charlie gazes out at the field. However, Nanu's words call her back to reality if only for a moment.

NANU (CONT'D)

...was a princess.

Charlie and Nanu stare at one another for a long pause.

CHARLIE

Like, a real one?

CUT TO:

EXT. KINGDOM OF VEROMA - DAY

STILTED BUILDINGS, CATHEDRALS, GONDOLAS, and UMBRELLA TREES. It's equal parts Rome, Venice, and fantasy. At the center is the MURARI PALACE.

NANU (V.O.)

Even though they were expecting a son, Felicita's parents loved her very dearly.

INT. PIANO ROOM - SAME TIME

FELICITA ANNA MURARI (5) bounces in her father's lap as SEBASTIAN MURARI (30s) plays the piano. She tries and fails to reach the keys, giggling uncontrollably.

They are soon joined by MATILDE MURARI (30s) and Felicita glances at her mother's BABY BUMP. Matilde ruffles her hair.

NANU (V.O.)

Unfortunately, after her brother was born, Felicita's mother became very sick.

EXT. HILLSIDE - TWO YEARS LATER

Felicita (7) holds hands with her brother GIACOMO (2). They are both dressed in black.

Felicita watches a covered wagon pass by.

NANU (V.O.)

Soon after, the Kingdom of Veroma was invaded by the Habsburg Army.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - EVENING

Two SOLDIERS tear down a statue of Sebastian and Matilde.

NANU (V.O.)

To save his people, Sebastian made a deal with a neighboring kingdom.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - DAY

Felicita (9) races her fat pony LUPO alongside PRINCE DINO (9) and his horse. Felicita is winning.

Sebastian and DINO'S FATHER (30s) watch from the palace window. They shake hands.

NANU (V.O.)

Unknown to Felicita, the King promised Sebastian to help end the occupation when the time came. But their alliance rested on a union between Felicita and Prince Dino's.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

What do you mean?

Felicita and Dino slow their horses to a walk.

NANU (V.O.)
They would be married on Felicita's
twenty-second birthday.

Dino elbows Felicita and proudly shoots a snot-rocket into
the grass. Felicita makes a face.

	FELICITA		CHARLIE (V.O.)
Gross.		Gross.	

Felicita shakes her head and spurs Lupo to a trot. Then a
run. A gallop.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
So that's it? She m-married a boy,
saved the kingdom, and l-lived
happily ever after?

NANU (V.O.)
Not exactly.

As Lupo's hooves thunder along the ground--

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

--Lupo, now a fully grown stallion, races neck-and-neck with
a spotted pinto. They speed along the mountains overlooking
the rest of Veroma.

Giacomo (17) clings to Lupo's mane. Felicita (21) rides the
pinto side-saddle.

FELICITA
Don't stop now Giaco, you might
win! For once!

GIACOMO
Like I have *any* say in the matter!

They approach a tree where a small CROWD waits for them. With
them is BACIO, Felicita's pint-sized Italian greyhound.

Lupo is first to pass and a flag shoots into the air. He then
stops abruptly, sending Giacomo tumbling.

FELICITA
Well done, Lupo!

Felicita dismounts, seemingly to help her brother, but then hugs Lupo. Bacio follows her.

GIACOMO
Demon creature.

FELICITA
What was that?

Lupo chomps at the air by Giacomo's feet.

GIACOMO
Darling! *Darling* creature.

Felicita rolls her eyes. She picks up Bacio and joins the crowd. TWO GAMBLERS (30s) exchange bets in front of her.

FELICITA
Come on boys, did anyone think Lupo would lose? You should know better.

GAMBLER 1
It wasn't the horse I bet against.

Felicita, Bacio, and the gamblers look to Giacomo as he peels grass off his tongue. Felicita holds out a hand and the gamblers pay her winnings.

GIACOMO
You bet on *me* to win?

FELICITA
I knew my boy would come through.
(Turning to her horse)
Isn't that right, Lupo?

Lupo whinnies at Giacomo. It sounds like a snicker.

GAMBLER 2
Will you join us this evening, your majesty? Our offer still stands.

GIACOMO
What offer?

GAMBLER 1
Gilet. Would you like to play?

Felicita signals him to be quiet from behind Giacomo.

GIACOMO
What's that?

GIACOMO

Fee, don't be stubborn.

FELICITA

It's my decision, Giacomo. Don't make me get all *regal* on you.

The gamblers cheer and exchange bets.

Grinning, Felicita drops her flower crown around Bacio's neck and turns back to the crowd.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Now, who else wants to race?

Several hands shoot into the sky--

EXT. ARMY BARRACKS. BRICK PILE - SAME TIME

--as two wooden CANES clash together against the clouds.

TWO MEN (20s) in the red and green uniform of the HABSBURG ARMY face-off in a swordless duel. They are practicing the MAGYAR CANE-FIGHT, a style of European martial arts.

One of the men, FERENC SZANKY, leaps back to avoid a blow and falls hard onto his rear. His opponent, SANDOR ROZSA laughs.

SANDOR

I'd expect as much from a farm boy!

Ferenc laughs good naturedly. Then, he slips his cane into the WHIP coiled on Sandor's belt. He yanks hard and manages to pull Sandor into the mud beside him.

FERENC

At least us farm boys aren't afraid to get dirty!

SANDOR

More like fight dirty!

Ferenc rises and holds his cane to Sandor's throat. But instead of striking, he pulls Sandor to his feet. They both pause, gasping for air and laughing.

SANDOR (CONT'D)

Where did you learn to do that?

FERENC

Not the army, obviously.

Two more SOLDIERS approach, watching the duel from behind the safety of the brick pile.

SOLDIER 1
 Ferenc, Sandor! Do you boys know
 what's for dinner?

The second soldier facepalms.

SOLDIER 2
 You Hungarians, always the same.

SOLDIER 1	FERENC
If you make one more joke about us being hungry-	Where we come from-

Suddenly Sandor tackles Ferenc to the ground. They wrestle for the remainder of the conversation.

SANDOR
 Give it a rest, Szanky!

SOLDIER 2
 Yeah, you three aren't Hungarian.
 You're Habsburg now, remember?

FERENC
 (Choking in a headlock)
 How could I forget?

SOLDIER 1
 I'm whatever gets me food.

Ferenc flips Sandor onto his back. Soldier 1 and Soldier 2 exchange bets. Soldier 1 takes a seat on the brick pile.

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)
 You know what I miss most? Cheese.

The men share a collective sigh of longing.

FERENC
 Even I can't deny how *Gouda* some
 cheese would be right now.

Sandor and the other soldiers stare at him.

FERENC (CONT'D)
 (Sheepishly)
 Can you *Brie*-live it?

Sandor cuffs him behind the ears.

SOLDIER 2
Thank you, Sandor.

FERENC
You Munster.

Sandor hits him again. Soldier 1 looks towards the horizon.

SOLDIER 1
Think there's better food in town?

SANDOR
Doubtful.
(Ducking to avoid Ferenc's
fists)
We seized all the good stuff.

SOLDIER 2
Still...it might be fun to go see
for ourselves.

Ferenc and Sandor share a glance and break apart.

FERENC
What are you talking about?

SOLDIER 2
Some boys were talking about a
night off. What do you say?

SOLDIER 1
There might be cheese.

SOLDIER 2
And you could do something other
than play fight with sticks.

Sandor shrugs but Ferenc looks to his cane, frowning.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The streets glow with lamp light as SHOP OWNERS close up and FAMILIES usher children inside. Notably, all of the villagers are wearing the same RED ARM BAND.

A FIGURE in a blue cloak stops to admire the dried fruits and flowers hanging between buildings. But when the figure sees Ferenc, Sandor, and the two soldiers arrive, it hastily disappears around the corner.

INT. LA TAVERNA - MOMENTS LATER

The four men enter a lively tavern. VILLAGERS and SOLDIERS dance, drink, and laugh together. However, the pleasantries almost seem forced. Again, everyone is wearing the same RED ARM BAND—a constant reminder of the occupation.

Ferenc surveys the room, his eyes falling on a back door. A BURLY MAN (40s) stands guard.

Sandor sees Ferenc's expression and steers him to a table.

SANDOR

C'mon, Ferenc. We're off duty,
remember? Relax, comrade.

The men take their seat. Soon two YOUNG WOMEN (20S) join, much to the delight of Soldier 1 and Soldier 2.

Directly across the room sits a man dressed in sooty coveralls and an apron. The BLACKSMITH (40s). He stares at the soldiers and crushes the peanuts in his fist to dust.

INT. LA TAVERNA. BACK ROOM - SAME TIME

The cloaked figure takes a seat at a card table with SEVERAL MEN, all of who's appearances are disoriented by cigar smoke. Among them are the gamblers from earlier.

GAMBLER 1

You made it!

The figure finally drops its hood, revealing Felicita. She's wearing a plain dress and a red scarf underneath.

FELICITA

I don't scare easy.

She puts several coins on the table and they deal her a hand.

INT. LA TAVERNA - LATER

Ferenc rolls a wooden stein in his hands. He rubs his eyes.

SOLDIER 2

Don't fall asleep on us, Ferenc!

SOLDIER

Yeah, maybe you have low blood
sugar or sumthin.

Ferenc shrugs and silently excuses himself from his friends. He approaches the bar but fails to wave down the BARTENDER.

BLACKSMITH (O.C.)

Excuse me.

Ferenc turns to face the Blacksmith.

FERENC

Hi. Can I help you?

The Blacksmith nods. Then, he throws a punch.

INT. LA TAVERNA. BACK ROOM - SAME TIME

By the size of her coin pile, it's clear that Felicita is cleaning house. And she's loving every second of it.

FELICITA

Gentlemen! Now is not the time for chivalry. Are you *sure* you aren't taking it easy on me?

One man slaps his watch on table. Another removes his silver belt buckle, forced to hold his pants up with his hands.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Grazie. Now, where are the soldiers? I thought we wanted to teach *them* a lesson.

The sound of SHOUTING becomes increasingly more prominent from the other side of the door. Felicita's smile falters.

GAMBLER 1

There they are.

INT. LA TAVERNA

Ferenc and the Blacksmith are nowhere to be seen. In fact, all of the soldiers seem to have disappeared: leaving only overturned tables and spilled drinks.

The Bartender is slumped against the wall and Felicita rushes to his side.

FELICITA

Are you all right?

BARTENDER
 (Dazed)
 They're going to the Blacksmith's.

FELICITA
 Rest, let me look at-

BARTENDER
 No! They're going to *the*
Blacksmith's!

Felicita looks to the gamblers for an explanation. She's surprised to see the fear in their eyes.

GAMBLER 1
 What happened?

BARTENDER
 The Blacksmith attacked a soldier,
 and the others promised to teach
 him a lesson by searching his
 house. If they find anything...

FELICITA
 What are they looking for?

The Bartender is too panicked to answer. Felicita looks to the others once again.

GAMBLER 1
 Weapons.

FELICITA
 And...well...will they find any?

His face immediately answers her question.

Felicita runs for the door, drawing her hood over her face.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
 Come on! My horse is outside, we
 can beat them to...to...

She hesitates when she realizes no one is following her. The Gamblers share a bashful look.

GAMBLER 1
 He's not hiding weapons for
 fun...he's with *il Risorgimento*.

FELICITA
 Il Risorgimento?

GAMBLER 2

(Gently)

This isn't a war, your majesty.
They already won. No offense, but
there's nothing any of us can do
now...especially a princess.

Felicita stares at the men, aghast. She opens her mouth to respond, changes her mind, and darts outside.

EXT. VILLAGE - SAME TIME

SMOKE fills the air and someone SCREAMS in the distance. Felicita follows the sound across town. She starts to run as villagers flee in the opposite direction.

There's a row of buildings completely engulfed by FLAMES. At the center stands the Blacksmith's store.

Felicita coughs violently and covers her mouth with her scarf. Suddenly, she hears a horse whinnie in pain.

FELICITA

Lupo!

Felicita runs to the post where SEVERAL HORSES are tethered. She sees a SOLDIER untying Lupo and shoves him aside.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Let him go!

The man turns around--it's Ferenc.

FERENC

You need to get him out of here!

Felicita hesitates, surprised by his words.

FELICITA

That's exactly what I'm doing!
Don't...steal him!

FERENC

What?

FELICITA

I just thought-

Ferenc ignores her and turns to the remaining horses. He continues his work, spurring the horses away from the fire.

Felicita hesitates with one foot in her stirrups. Then, she jumps down and helps Ferenc with the rest of the horses.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

This is all your fault you know!

FERENC

Miss, now is so not the time to get political.

FELICITA

You started the fire!

FERENC

I didn't!

FELICITA

It was one of you. And you're all the same to me.

She unties the last horse as the building in front of them catches fire with a fierce WHOOSH. Ferenc pulls her away.

FERENC

We should leave.

FELICITA

Don't have to tell me twice.

Felicita mounts her horse. This time she sits front-facing, not sidesaddle.

FERENC

Wait, what about me?

Felicita glances between his sooty face and his uniform. Before she can decide, Lupo rears his head and takes off.

FERENC (CONT'D)

Seriously?!

The fire burns into the early hours of the morning.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAYBREAK

Ash hangs in the air like snow.

Felicita walks Lupo back through the village, staring in horror at the buildings that were so alive the night before.

Lupo steps on something and Felicita checks under his hooves. She finds a BROKEN DOLL in the rubble.

GIRL (O.C.)

Excuse me?

Felicita looks up. A GIRL (6) with braids stares back at her.

FELICITA

(Smiling)

Hi. Is this yours?

She holds out the doll but the girl remains motionless.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Don't you want it?

GIRL

It was my sister's.

FELICITA

Well, won't she want it?

The girl is silent.

Frowning, Felicita straightens up. She surveys the wreckage.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Which one is yours?

The girl points. The building looks fine from the street, but there's a hole in one wall looking directly into the bedroom.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Oh...well...we can fix that.

LITTLE GIRL

How?

FELICITA

Well...I...I'll let you in on a little secret. I'm the princess.

LITTLE GIRL

What's a princess?

Felicita's face darkens. Lupo nuzzles her from behind and she pets the side of his neck, struggling to think.

FELICITA

It...it doesn't matter. But I have an idea, okay? I'll be right back.

EXT. ARMY BARRACKS. BRICK PILE - DAWN

Felicita crouches next to the pile that Ferenc and Sandor were fighting at only the day before. She has a large canvas bag in hand and begins to fill it with bricks.

Suddenly, she hears VOICES approaching.

FERENC (O.C.)
What are we going to do?

SANDOR (O.C.)
We do nothing. We weren't involved.

Ferenc and Sandor appear on the other side. Felicita flattens herself against the bricks and draws her scarf over her mouth. She watches the men through a gap in the brick pile.

FERENC
You can't be serious. We saw them,
we *knew* what they were going to do.

SANDOR
Speak for yourself.

Felicita frowns and slowly begins to collect more bricks. The conversation continues next to her.

FERENC (O.C.)
I am speaking for myself! Sandor,
we had the chance to do something.
We didn't.

SANDOR (O.C.)
Be careful old friend, a tone like
that and people will start
questioning your intentions.
(Beat)
Do you know why I carry this?

Felicita looks back through the peephole: Sandor is winding his whip through his hands.

FERENC
Karikas osto.

SANDOR
The Hungarian Long Whip. You're
right, we don't belong here. But
we're here now, and it's time to do
our duty.

FERENC

Our duty is not to stand by while-

SANDOR

You're right. Our *duty*, Lieutenant Szanky, is to punish people who help groups like *il Risorgimento*. Which is *exactly* what we did.

Felicita readjusts as Sandor exits. Once it's quiet, she reaches for another brick. But there's a CRACK like lightning as the WHIP wraps around her hand.

Felicita is yanked to her feet and comes face to face with-

FERENC

Thief.

FELICITA

Lieutenant.

FERENC

Wait...horse girl?

FELICITA

Yes, Lieutenant.

They stare at one another, not sure what to do next. With the scarf around her mouth, Ferenc still doesn't recognize her.

FERENC

You left me there to burn.

FELICITA

And you look remarkably *uncharred*.

FERENC

What are you doing here?

Felicita shakes the whip off her hand. He doesn't stop her.

FELICITA

Thieving, apparently.

Ferenc looks over his shoulder. They're alone.

FERENC

You can't steal from the army.

FELICITA

I didn't know.

FERENC
Of course not. What's your name?

FELICITA
Giulia. Yours?

FERENC
Sandor.

Silence.

FELICITA
That man's name was Sandor.

FERENC
Uh, we're both Sandor.

FELICITA
Right.

FERENC
Family name.

FELICITA
So you're related?

FERENC
Oh. Uh...no.

Felicita hoists her bricks over one shoulder. Ferenc holds out a hand and she gives him a once over, clearly skeptical.

FERENC (CONT'D)
May I have the bag?

FELICITA
Are you going to arrest me? Shoot me? Burn down my home?

FERENC
No.

FELICITA
Then no.

Ferenc stares at her, bemused and slightly entertained. His hand re-adjusts into a handshake.

FERENC
My name is Ferenc.

Felicita takes his hand despite herself.

FELICITA
Pleasure to meet you.

They shake hands for an uncomfortably long time. Ferenc turns her hand over in his own, starring at the marks on her wrist.

FERENC
Are you all right?

FELICITA
If you were concerned about my safety, shouldn't you have thought about that before attacking?

FERENC
I didn't mean to-

FELICITA
Yes you did. I'm a thief, remember?

Felicita takes back her hand.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Unless...this is a girl thing.

Ferenc splutters uncomfortably. Felicita rolls her eyes and walks towards the TREES, Ferenc on her heels.

FERENC
It's not a *girl thing!*

INT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Felicita finds Lupo and ties the bag to his saddle. There's a second bag already filled on the other side. When Ferenc sees how many bricks she's gathered he whistles.

FERENC
You've been hard at work.

He reaches to pet Lupo but the horse snaps at his hand.

FELICITA
Lupo! Sorry about that.

She and Ferenc lock eyes. Felicita adjusts her scarf and turns to lengthen her stirrups.

FERENC
(Laughs weakly)
I hope you're not planning to throw these at any soldiers...

Felicita smiles under her scarf.

FELICITA

Don't give me any ideas. My friend's home was destroyed last night, I'm helping rebuild.

FERENC

Wow, that's...

FELICITA

Illegal? Treason? Dumb?

FERENC

Kind.

Felicita mounts Lupo but Ferenc grabs the reigns.

FERENC (CONT'D)

It's not you the army is against, Giulia. We're here to take down the nobility once and for all. Your friend wouldn't be living in an unsafe home to begin with if it weren't for how those people ran the country. By the time we're done, no one will have any memory of the Murari family!

FELICITA

(Bitterly)

Yes...and I thank you for that.

Felicita spurs Lupo and they disappear into the trees.

EXT. VEROMA COUNTRYSIDE - AFTERNOON

The sun is high as Felicita rides on, away from the army barracks and the burned village. Now free of the bricks, Lupo charges for the mountains, towards the Murari Palace and the rest of the kingdom.

At last Felicita pulls off her scarf, revealing a huge smile.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE - LATER

SPIRES, FLAGS, a gilded FRONT GATE - the Murari Palace looks quiet similar to the castle from Charlie's imagination. It sits at the end of a long stone drive with an immense bed of white roses on each side.

A pair of shutters on the topmost floor fly open. A VOICE calls from the room beyond.

GIULIA (O.S.)
Fee! Where are you?

INT. IL PALAZZONE. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Felicita sprints through the palace, using a towel to wipe the soot off her face. Bacio scampers after her, still wearing the flower crown that she gave him around his neck.

Felicita takes the crown and places it over her hair.

GIULIA (O.S.)
Felicita! Why do I even bother?

INT. FELICITA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

GIULIA (30s) throws a comically huge ball gown over a folding screen. Free at last, she collapses into a chair.

Felicita dashes into the room. She drops to a low, raising her skirts in both hands.

FELICITA
(Breathing heavily)
Your royal highness...has
arrived...and on time too, no less!

Giulia makes a face, annoyed but not exactly surprised.

Bacio, yapping happily, skids into the room and promptly disappears under the bed. Giulia clears her throat, eyes on Felicita's muddied boots.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Don't just sit there, Giulia.
You're going to make me late!

GIULIA
(Incredulous)
Me?

Felicita grabs Giulia by the hand and spins her around the room. Giulia laughs despite herself.

GIULIA (CONT'D)
Okay, Fee. You win! Change fast and
I'll try to save your hair.

Felicita kisses her on the cheek.

FELICITA

Who needs a fairy godmother when I
have you?

GIULIA

I do!

Felicita disappears behind the screen and Giulia returns to her seat. However, Bacio has taken her place and she almost sits on him. He barks.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

Oh well excuse me, your majesty.

Felicita reemerges, grappling with the voluminous skirts of her new dress, and knocks several books off the night table. Bacio and Giulia share a glance.

Giulia shoves Felicita in front of the vanity and starts to brush the flowers from her hair. Felicita catches the petals.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

I'll make a civilized young lady
out of you. If only temporarily.

Bacio paws at Felicita's feet and she hastily exchanges her riding boots for dancing slippers.

FELICITA

Thanks, Bacio.

GIULIA

That dog has more sense than anyone
in all of Veroma.

Felicita tucks the last flower behind Bacio's ear. He barks.

EXT. ARENA DI VEROMA - DUSK

From the outside the 30,000 person amphitheater looks like the Colosseum. People spill out of their carriages and into the light, laughing as they climb the front steps.

INT. ARENA DI VEROMA. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian (now 50s) walks through the entrance with Felicita and Giacomo on his heels. The royal family is greeted with a wave of curtseys and bows from the CROWD. Again, everyone wears the same RED ARM BAND.

Felicita scans the faces of the NOBILITY, forcing a polite smile and curtsying when needed. She links arm with Giacomo and whispers something to him. He snorts.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Wait. What about Prince D-Dino?
Where does he come in?

NANU

Be patient. I'm getting there.

CUT TO:

INT. NANU'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie stares at her Nanu in awe, chin in her hands. Sandy has her head in Charlie's lap, just as interested in the pasta on the table. Charlie is still in her soccer uniform.

CHARLIE

Okay. But she did f-fix the wall,
right?

NANU

Of course. She spent all day
rebuilding the thing, and she still
made it back in time for the opera.

CHARLIE

How do you know all t-this stuff?

NANU

My mother told me about Felicita
when she gave me the sugar tin.

CHARLIE

But how did she know it was real?

Nanu disappears into the kitchen and returns with the silver SUGAR TIN. Charlie takes the tin in her hands and traces the crown with her fingers. Nine points. It *is* real...

NANU

Our family has always known about
the Muraris. But there was no need
to tell you their story while you
were still happy hearing about the
make believe kind of princesses.

CHARLIE

Why not?

NANU

Whether or not they're real or
fake, princess stories all have the
same purpose.

(Off Charlie's reaction)

You feel better now, don't you?

Charlie nods.

There's the sound of a CAR pulling into the driveway,
signaling her Dad's arrival. Sandy runs to the front door.

NANU (CONT'D)

We'll talk more tomorrow, okay?

CHARLIE

Okay!

Energized, Charlie collects her belongings and follows Sandy
outside. She's only gone for a minute when her Dad enters,
grabs a handful of cashews from the kitchen, and leaves
without saying hello.

Nanu sighs.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NEXT DAY

Charlie sits alone in the grass. But this time instead of
toys she's surrounded by freshly picked wildflowers.

Charlie struggles to lace the flowers together in a chain.
After a minute, she is able to make a lopsided FLOWER CROWN.

Nearby, the playground pulses with screaming kids. Although
no one stops to play with her, TWO GIRLS (both 9) point at
Charlie's flowers from afar.

She stares at the sky, seeing shapes in the clouds: a horse,
a palace, a crown. She lays on her back.

CHARLIE

(Under her breath)

Princess Felicita Anna Murari...

Charlie closes her eyes as the sound of opera music swells...

FADE TO:

EXT. ARENA DI VEROMA. LOBBY - NIGHT

Like before, Felicita follows her father into the crowd. Giacomo takes the stairs two at a time, chattering non-stop.

GIACOMO

-the party isn't for another week,
Giulia's gone off the deep end!

FELICITA

What are you complaining for? It's
your party, isn't it?

GIACOMO

(Gesturing to the crowd)
Coronations aren't for the kid
getting a crown. They're for
everyone else to celebrate their
status while they still have it.

The siblings are forced to break their conversation and shake hands with admirers. The Murari family stills holds respect in some circles, even under the occupation.

Once they're done, Felicita picks up where they left off.

FELICITA

Regardless. It's your birthday,
Giac. It'll be fun!
(Teasing)
Even if it isn't as *noble* as it's
supposed to be.

They approach a group of SOLDIERS. Giacomo lowers his voice.

GIACOMO

As long as *they* don't expect an
invite, I'll be fine.

FELICITA

Can you imagine? Soldiers in *il*
Palazzone...

GIACOMO

Papa would have a heart attack.

Felicita is about to turn away when she sees Ferenc among the soldiers. She fumbles and tries hide by maneuvering Giacomo between her and Ferenc.

Giacomo is oblivious to the tension.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)
Why are they even here?

FELICITA
(Under her breath)
Because even pigs like opera music,
apparently.

Ferenc sees Felicita and recognition dawns in his eyes. He scowls, attention locked on her as she passes by.

GIACOMO
Uh, Fee? I think you have an admirer.

FELICITA
Creepy.

Felicita grabs her brother and hurries him after Sebastian.

Soon the Murari family disappears around the corner, leaving Ferenc and the rest of the soldiers in their wake.

SOLDIER 2
Upper-crust snobs.

SOLDIER 1
Only Italian crust I like is pizza crust. Really...it's really great.

Sandor notes Ferenc's expression and elbows him.

SANDOR
Come now, Szanky. I understand that the opera isn't for everyone but tonight is supposed to be fun.

Ferenc shakes off his unease and turns back to his friends.

FERENC
I actually like the opera.

SANDOR
What's wrong then?

SOLDIER 1
You hungry?

Soldier 2 shoves Soldier 1.

FERENC
It's nothing.
(Sarcastically)
(MORE)

FERENC (CONT'D)
 Come Sandor, let's go before all
 the good standing room is taken.

INT. MURARI FAMILY BOX - MOMENTS LATER

Felicita and Giacomo settle behind their father. Their seats are at the front of the arena and lined with silk pillows, a stark contrast to the rest of the stone stadium seating.

The stage itself lays below, surrounded by standing room for SOLDIERS and a handful of PEASANTS.

GIACOMO
 (Pointing to the soldiers)
Padre, why are they here?

FELICITA
 Giaco, be polite.

GIACOMO
 Tell them that.
 (To Sebastian)
 You should have seen how that man
 looked at Fee.

SEBASTIAN
 Mind your sister, Giacomo. These
 soldiers are part of our community
 now, they're allowed to partake in
 the festivities.
 (He smiles)
 And the next time you point someone
 out, don't *actually* point.

Felicita giggles as Giacomo sits on his hands.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
 I know how easy it seems to join
 the anti-Habsburg rhetoric, but it
 would be best to stay above the
 drama. Any battle with them is long
 over. Do I make myself clear?

GIACOMO
 Yes, *padre*.

SEBASTIAN
 And Felicita, drawing attention
 from any man, especially a soldier,
 could be detrimental to your union.
 What would Prince Dino think?

Felicita forces a smile.

FELICITA

Don't worry *padre*, a soldier's
attention is the last thing I need.

(Truthfully)

I think of Dino every day.

Satisfied, Sebastian turns back to the stage. Felicita's smile falls instantly.

Slowly, the opera begins.

INT. ARENA DI VEROMA. LOBBY - INTERMISSION

Felicita stands with a group of well-dressed NOBLE WOMEN along the staircase. The women flutter around her like birds.

NOBLE WOMAN

How is the coronation planning
coming, your majesty?

FELICITA

Very well, thank you for asking.

Felicita opens her fan, using it to hide a yawn.

NOBLE WOMAN

Of course, the ball won't be as
large as you would have liked, no?

FELICITA

Well, we had to make some
accommodations to satisfy our new
neighbors.

NOBLE WOMAN

Such a shame. Matilde always loved
a good party, perhaps it's better
that your mother isn't here to see
what's become of Veroma.

Some of the women coo empathetically at her remarks but Felicita makes a face.

There's movement at the end of the hall and the women turn to see several SOLDIERS approaching. Ferenc is among them.

FELICITA

Excuse me ladies, I need to
uh...take a turn about the room.

Before they can invite themselves, Felicita darts through the crowd. Away from her entourage, and away from Ferenc.

INT. ARENA DI VEROMA. HALLWAY

Alone, Felicita hides behind a large floor-to-ceiling tapestry. She presses her back to the wall as Ferenc's shadow approaches. Meanwhile, on the--

OTHER SIDE

--of the curtain, Ferenc comes to a halt. It looks like he's staring right at Felicita, but he's actually scowling at the ugly UNICORN on the tapestry.

After a beat, Ferenc shakes his head and walks away.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

--Felicita breathes a sigh of relief.

FELICITA

(To herself)

Come on Fee, are you a princess or aren't you?

She adjusts her crown and takes a step out of her hiding place when an ANGRY VOICE catches her ear.

MAN 1 (O.S.)

Unacceptable. We must fight back!

Felicita returns to her spot.

Three sets of footsteps approach from the direction that Ferenc disappeared. But with the tapestry obstructing her view, Felicita can't see who's speaking.

MAN 1 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

These attacks are getting increasingly more careless and more violent by the day.

MAN 2 (O.S.)

We're lucky the fire didn't spread farther than it did. Hopefully that luck lasts a little longer.

MAN 1 (O.S.)

Waiting is a dead man's game.

MAN 2 (O.S.)

What are we supposed to do? We have a hard enough time *meeting* under these conditions, let alone mounting a *counterattack*.

MAN 1 (O.S.)

It's impossible to lead a rebellion from the linen closet of the opera house! It's time go public, drum up support from the people we're trying to protect!

Felicita finds a hole in the tapestry. She recognizes one of the men instantly and her eyes widen: it's her father.

SEBASTIAN

Calm yourself, friends. As *il Risorgimento*, our strength comes from our unity. It always has, and it always will. The battle is not over yet...it never was.

Felicita gasps and covers her mouth with both hands.

Sebastian half-glances at the ugly unicorn tapestry but his companions continue uninterrupted.

MAN 1

We need to strike now before they find our weapons in Borghetto.

SEBASTIAN

With the odds stacked against us, knowledge is our strongest weapon. We need to know when and where they're striking next. Then, we can formulate an attack. What we need is someone on the inside.

MAN 2

And I know just the man...

EXT. ARENA DI VEROMA - AFTER THE OPERA

Felicita follows her father outside, standing significantly farther away from him than she was earlier. Giacomo is next to her, walking backwards down the stairs.

FELICITA

Careful, Giaco.

GIACOMO
 (Ignoring her)
 I still don't get it. They knew
 each other for like what, a day?
 That's *so* unrealistic.

FELICITA
 Can't you just enjoy the show?

GIACOMO
 And she was thirteen!

He stumbles but manages to catch himself.

FELICITA
 That's not much younger than you.

GIACOMO
 And you don't see me chasing after
 some girl. As for that whole *love*
at first sight thing...

He blows a RASPBERRY to reinforce his point. Suddenly Giacomo
 loses his footing and reaches out to steady himself, grabbing
 onto the arm of a nearby man. Ferenc.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)
 Whoa, sorry about that, Comrade...?

He drifts off, finally sensing the tension between Felicita
 and Ferenc.

FERENC
 Good evening, *Giulia*. Can we talk?

FELICITA
 Giacomo...

GIACOMO
 Yep, not even here. *Long* gone.

He trots down the stairs, giving them some privacy in the
 crowd of strangers.

FERENC
 (Already knowing the
 answer)
 What's your real name?

Felicita draws herself to her full height.

FELICITA
 Princess Felicita Anna Murari.

They stare at one another, animosity dissolving to awkwardness as the silence extends. Then, Ferenc bows.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
And you're...Ferenc, was it?

FERENC
Lieutenant Ferenc Szanky.

FELICITA
I'm sorry we had to meet under
such...*destressing* circumstances.

FERENC
Do you mean that time you left me
to burn alone after I *saved* your
horse, or that time when you
committed treason and stole from-?

Felicita looks over her shoulder to make sure no one
overheard and quickly pulls Ferenc under the nearest archway.

FELICITA
Fine, you want to talk? Talk
without getting me arrested.

FERENC
Why does a princess have to steal
anyway? What were you doing?

FELICITA
I told you, I was helping rebuild a
home that *your* men destroyed.

FERENC
Just because you're a princess
doesn't mean you can get away with
whatever you want.

FELICITA
I'm not saying it does! And for the
record, it's not like you let me go
because you knew I was a princess.

FERENC
I should have arrested you.

FELICITA
Yeah, probably!

Ferenc scowls.

FERENC

Joke all you like, but you're just
as bad as the rest of them.

Felicita crosses her arms and takes a step back.

FELICITA

I'm assuming by them, you mean my
family?

FERENC

I didn't mean to-

FELICITA

No, I think that's *exactly* what you
meant to do.

GIACOMO (O.S.)

Fee!

Felicita looks towards the road. The Murari carriage has
arrived and her father is already inside. Giacomo searches
the crowd on tip-toe.

FELICITA

You know what, Lieutenant Szanky?
You should have arrested me, and
you should report me now. But you
won't, either out of some misguided
sense of chivalry or because *you're*
scared of getting in trouble. But
for the record Lieutenant, just
because you're bad at being a
soldier, doesn't mean you a *hero*.

Felicita starts to leave but Ferenc grabs her wrist. He turns
her hand over in his, starring at the marks from his whip.
When he speaks his voice is soft, but firm.

FERENC

Keep your head down, Felicita.
Princesses don't have a place in
the new order. Remember that.

Felicita breaks away, leaving Ferenc alone in the shadows.

INT. FELICITA'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Bacio is curled in a tight ball in the middle of the bed. His
snores are deceptively loud for his size.

Felicita sits at the window in her nightgown. The stars tangle with the lights from the kingdom, making it hard to distinguish the horizon. In the distance, smoke rises from the army barracks.

Below, a SOLDIER patrols the palace on horseback. Felicita waits for him to pass by before opening her window. A cool breeze slips inside, immediately waking Bacio. He whimpers.

FELICITA
Sorry, Bacio.

Bacio sees her somber expression and scurries across the room. Felicita scoops him into her arms.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Can't beat that view, can you?

Bacio barks. Felicita tugs on his muzzle to make it look like he's talking, similar to how Charlie played with Sandy.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
(As Bacio)
What's wrong, Felicita?
(As Self)
Maybe they're right Bacio. No one needs princesses anymore.
(As Bacio)
Well, what do they need?

Felicita sighs and releases Bacio. He leaps onto the floor and she rests her forehead on her knees.

After a minute, Felicita hears Bacio scratching at the door and raises her head. He barks at her expectantly.

EXT. LA TAVERNA - SEVERAL NIGHTS LATER

Music pours into the street each time the door opens. There are paper chains in the window indicating some type of celebration and tavern is packed with SOLDIERS, but notably, very few VILLAGERS.

INT. LA TAVERNA. BACK ROOM

Felicita sits with dozens of people: men, women, the two friendly gamblers, villagers, and soldiers. It's hard to see who is who in the golden haze of cigar smoke.

This time, Felicita wears a black scarf around her hair. Only the two gamblers recognize her.

GAMBLER 1

All right comrades, the game is
Gilet. Two counters to the pot.

Everyone pushes their coins into the middle of the table.

Felicita taps the shoulder of the man next to her.

FELICITA

Excuse me sir, could you explain
the rules to me?

The man leans forward: it's Sandor. He smiles kindly at
Felicita and puffs out his chest.

SANDOR

Of course, young lady. Let me show
you how it's done.

FELICITA

Gosh, thank you so much!

Across the table, Gamblers 1 and 2 watch Felicita and the
unsuspecting Sandor. They hastily exchange bets.

After conferring with Sandor, Felicita presses her cards to
the table with fake excitement.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

This is so exciting! If I lose,
I'll buy everyone another drink!

The room cheers.

"GAMBLING" MONTAGE

Cards, coins, drinks, laughter.

Felicita loses. Everyone drinks.

New cards, more coins, someone folds.

Felicita loses. Everyone drinks.

Soldier 1 appears, eating turkey, and checks Sandor's cards.

The pot grows. And grows.

Felicita loses. Everyone drinks.

And drinks.

END MONTAGE

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Ferenc walks down the street, whistling a Hungarian folk as he gazes at the mountains. It almost looks like he's staring at the Murari Palace.

Two children stand at the corner, shyly begging for money. Ferenc dumps what remains in his wallet in their tin.

Ferenc arrives at the town square. He is surveying the damage from the fire when he sees a familiar horse. Lupo.

INT. LA TAVERNA. BACK ROOM - SAME TIME

Soldier 1 holds Sandor in a painfully tight embrace.

SOLDIER 1

This guy, this guy right here,
we've been through so much!

Felicita giggles.

SANDOR

Come now, you're embarrassing me.

SOLDIER 1

(Tearfully)
So much!

Soldier throws himself next to Felicita. He hits the bench with such force that she's bounced a few inches into the air.

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

Miss, you don't know what it's
like. Having someone who's always
got your back like that.

FELICITA

Do you have any good war stories?

SOLDIER 1

Of course! One time we were in the
Alps, and we were hiking for *days*.
But I have low blood sugar, I've
struggled with it my whole life, my
mum says I got it from my father's
side, and I fainted. And this guy-
(Grabs Sandor in a hug)
-this guy right here, he *carried* me
over the mountain! We've been
through so much...

FELICITA

You said.

SANDOR

To be fair, I didn't carry you on my own. Ferenc helped.

Felicita sits up in her seat ever so slightly.

SOLDIER 1

Ferenc! What an angel! Even if his puns are horrible...

FELICITA

Ferenc Szanky?

SANDOR

Do you know him?

SOLDIER 1

Sandor, she's blushing! Our Ferenc has a lady friend...who's a *lady!*

FELICITA

He's not here, is he?

SANDOR

That kill joy? No way.

Felicita hesitates. Then, she fans out her cards on the table. She has a WINING HAND and everyone in the room groans. Gambler 2 begrudgingly pushes the pot towards her.

Felicita grins when she sees Sandor's dumbstruck expression.

FELICITA

You make a great teacher!

Sandor checks his pockets, startled to find that he only has two coins left.

SANDOR

Excuse me, I need another drink.

Sandor stands and walks towards the door. As he leaves, he glances at Felicita's cards: a KING and a TWO OF CLUBS.

Felicita leans closer to Soldier 1.

FELICITA

I met Ferenc on the night of the fire. I doubt he remembers me.

SOLDIER 1

What an awful night! I didn't want to help, and I know Ferenc didn't either. But the others are so persuasive...and I get confused.

FELICITA

Why did you do it? You seem like such a nice guy.

SOLDIER 1

That's what my mum says.

FELICITA

I bet. So why then?

Soldier 1 looks around the room, evidently growing increasingly more uncomfortable with the conversation.

SOLDIER 1

(In a hushed voice)

It's procedure. The Blacksmith was hiding weapons for *il Risorgimento*.

FELICITA

That's *terrible*. Do you know anyone else who's hiding weapons?

Soldier 1 hesitates. Felicita rests a hand on his.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

You are so brave for doing what you do. I can't even imagine what it's like to be a soldier.

SOLDIER 1

Yeah, well, there were rumors. But they don't matter any more.

FELICITA

Why not?

She's so invested in the conversation that she doesn't see Sandor reenter the room. He looks again at her cards, blanching when he sees that they're now TWO ACES.

SOLDIER 1

Because some guys are going to Borghetto *tonight*, just in case. And if they find anything, they're going to burn the whole thing. To send a message.

SANDOR

Cheater!

Felicita jumps when Sandor slams a fist down on the table. Her eyes fall on the WHIP in his other hand.

Everyone around the table stares at them.

GAMBLER 1

What's wrong, comrade?

SANDOR

This girl is a cheat. She's switched out her cards!

FELICITA

I beg your pardon? The only thing I have up my sleeve is...

Soldier 1 raises her arm above her head. Two cards, the King and the Two of Clubs, fall out of her sleeve.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

...except that.

Soldier 1 looks genuinely upset. Sandor is seething.

SANDOR

What's your name, you miserable leach? You should know the army doesn't tolerate this kind of criminal behavior. Stealing from officers? That's jail time.

Felicita rises to her feet, winnings forgotten on the table.

FELICITA

Criminal? It's just a game. You can have your money back.

Sandor approaches her, unwinding the whip in his hands. Felicita instinctively grabs her wrist.

SANDOR

I said, what's your name, girlie?

Felicita backs up as far as possible, stepping directly under the light. She squints in the glare.

SOLDIER 1

You know, she looks kind of like-

FERENC (O.S.)

Giulia!

Felicita and Sandor turn. Ferenc stands in the doorway, arms folded across his chest.

FERENC (CONT'D)

Sandor, what is this?

He crosses the room, intentionally putting himself between Sandor and Felicita.

SANDOR

Glad you're here, Ferenc. This brat cheated at cards and humiliated a soldier! You know what that means.

Ferenc looks at Felicita. She forces a weak smile.

FERENC

If you were so humiliated Sandor, maybe you should leave.

SANDOR

What?

FERENC

I'm just saying. You've always seemed to be fine with cheating as long as you don't get caught.

Soldier 1 snorts into his stein.

Sandor plays with his whip, unbudging.

SANDOR

She deserves to be punished.

FERENC

Well, you're not wrong there.

Felicita balks.

FERENC (CONT'D)

Let me bring her in, old friend. That way you can finish your game and win back your money.

Sandor stands perfectly still for a minute. Then, he nods.

FELICITA

Good luck...comrade.

Ferenc steers Felicita towards the door. She looks over her shoulder just in time to see the two gamblers exchange bets.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
(Under her breath)
Seriously, guys?

They shrugs.

EXT. VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Ferenc steers Felicita down an ALLEY. She doesn't resist, but she doesn't exactly make it easy for him either.

FELICITA
You can *stop*, no one's watching.

Ferenc continues forward without responding.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Seriously, I need to go. Lives depend on it! And I'm not just saying that.

Ferenc ignores her.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Lieutenant? You can let go now.

FERENC
Why would I do that?

Felicita thinks about this for a minute. Even she can't come up with a good excuse.

FERENC (CONT'D)
You're out past curfew, your majesty. I told you to stay away.

FELICITA
You know, so many people have said that lately that I forgot *who* I was supposed to stay away from.

Ferenc ducks down another ALLEY. His horse, a WHITE MARE, stands at the end. She whinnies when she sees them.

FERENC
I'm bringing you to the palace.
(Gesturing to the horse)
C'mon, up you go.

FELICITA
I have my own ride. He's over-

FERENC
Not any more.

FELICITA
Excuse me?

FERENC
I gave your horse to another soldier for safekeeping. He should be back at the barracks by now.

FELICITA
You kidnapped my horse?!

FERENC
Only temporarily, just to make sure you wouldn't try to escape. You can have him back later.

FELICITA
Why should I trust you?

FERENC
Tell me, what have I done that's so horrible? Besides letting you escape? Or saving you just now? Please, enlighten me.

Felicita realizes how close she's standing to Ferenc and steps backwards.

FELICITA
You don't understand, I need to go.

FERENC
Yeah, go to the *palace* before someone with recognizes you. This isn't even a good disguise!

FELICITA
No, I need to go to Borghetto! The village is in danger.

FERENC
What are you talking about?

FELICITA
Your buddy just told me that the army is searching Borghetto tonight.

(MORE)

FELICITA (CONT'D)
If they find anything suspicious,
they're going to make what happened
here look like a cute little
campfire.

Ferenc's grip on Felicita's arm tightens.

FERENC
You're sure?

FELICITA
Yes! But how am I supposed to make
it in time if I have to get Lupo-

FERENC
Take my horse.

Felicita stares at Ferenc in shock. He releases her.

FELICITA
What?

FERENC
My horse. Trust me, she's fast.

FELICITA
But-

FERENC
I thought you were in a hurry?

FELICITA
I am!

Felicita runs down the ally. She unties Ferenc's horse and
puts one foot through the stirrups. Then, she hesitates.

FERENC
What is it?

Felicita runs back to Ferenc and KISSES him on the cheek.

FELICITA
Thank you!

Felicita mounts the horse. Ferenc watches dumbstruck as she
rides away towards the mountains.

EXT. KINGDOM OF VEROMA. MOUNTAIN ROAD

The moon sits low in the sky, offering barely enough light to
see by. But Felicita urges the mare onward.

The road is built directly into the mountain face with a sheer drop to one side. Over the edge, Felicita notices moving lights. The Habsburg men are en route to the village.

There's still time.

EXT. BORGHETTO - LATER

Felicita gallops through the village, using a tree branch to BANG on the lowest roofs. Lights flicker on in the windows.

FELICITA

The Habsburgs are coming! The army
is here! Wake up, people!

Felicita circles the well in the middle of the town square. The sound of the mare's hooves echo off the stone.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Hide your weapons! They're coming!

A door flies open and an OLD MAN staggers out in his pajamas.

OLD MAN

What's all the ruckus for?

FELICITA

The army is coming! And if they
find anything, they're going to
destroy the entire village.

More VILLAGERS stumble out. Most of them seem too sleepy to function, but a few hear Felicita words and run back inside.

One WOMAN approaches Felicita with a large rucksack bag. Felicita can see a RIFLE sticking out of the end.

WOMAN

Where are we supposed to hide these
if not in our homes?

Felicita looks towards the WELL.

Swords, knives, firearms, and something that looks like a child's slingshot--they dump it all. The weapons sink out of sight, the dark waters settling above them.

Felicita dusts off her hands.

The sound of SHOUTING draws her attention back to the street. A large crowd has gathered around her, and in the distance she can see SOLDIERS entering the town.

The villagers bunch together to block Felicita from view, successfully buying her time to escape.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

We'll handle the rest. Go now!

Felicita nods and rides out of the square.

INT. IL PALAZZONE - LATER

Felicita sneaks inside the palace and rests against one of the marble pillars lining the hallway. She removes her shoes and continues barefoot in the darkness.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)

You're up late.

Felicita whirls around.

Her father stands at the bottom of the stairs. Sebastian is holding a candle, the flame throwing shadows across his face.

FELICITA

Couldn't sleep.

Sebastian's eyes fall on Felicita's muddied riding boots.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

I went for a walk.

SEBASTIAN

To Borghetto?

Felicita's eyes widen.

FELICITA

How do you-

SEBASTIAN

Everyone knows, you *foolish* child.
Thankfully, your name is left out.

Felicita shifts her weight from foot to foot.

FELICITA

Padre...

Sebastian approaches and places a hand on her shoulder. Felicita rests her cheek on the back of his hand.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

I don't want to be a powerless princess.

SEBASTIAN

Felicita, you have the stubbornness of a mule and an even fiercer capacity for love. You can do anything you set your heart on.

FELICITA

In that case...I want to join *il Risorgimento*.

Sebastian's half-smile disappears and he quickly pulls back his hand. The tension between them returns.

SEBASTIAN

You...*what?*

FELICITA

You don't have to pretend. I heard you at the opera, I know you're working with them. Let me help you!

SEBASTIAN

Felicita-

FELICITA

Look at what I did tonight. I saved a whole village, all by myself!

SEBASTIAN

Stop right there.

FELICITA

Stop what? You said that you need someone on the inside, *I* can be that person!

SEBASTIAN

Felicita, *no more!*

Sebastian speaks with such ferocity that his candle extinguishes.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You want to have a role, you want to play a part in this madness? You already have.

FELICITA

What do you-?

SEBASTIAN

You are betrothed to Prince Dino, you have been since you were a child. Or did you somehow manage to forget that with your vigilantism?

FELICITA

No, *padre*. I know I am.

SEBASTIAN

What you don't know, what I never saw the need to tell you, is that your union was set *solely* to secure the eventual resurgence of our kingdom...Once you're married, Dino's father has agreed to step in and overthrow the occupation.

Felicita steps back in shock.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You are not a powerless princess, Felicita. Far from it. Our salvation depends on you and your betrothal. If something were to happen to you...any hope that Veroma has would die as well.

FELICITA

This whole time...you...you used me...?

SEBASTIAN

Only for the very cause you now seem so interested in joining.

FELICITA

No...you used me...to secure your own place in the kingdom.

SEBASTIAN

And one day, Giacomo's kingdom.

Felicita's hands ball into fists.

FELICITA

Don't you dare use him against me.

SEBASTIAN

I don't understand why you're so upset Felicita. I thought you wanted a purpose.

FELICITA
I wanted a choice.

SEBASTIAN
And therein lies the problem.
Princesses will always have some
kind of power, my darling. But
choice, either in what that power
is, or what you can do with it?
Never.

Felicita's eyes brim with tears.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
Return to your room...forget this
conversation. Forget this night.

FELICITA
Padre...

SEBASTIAN
This isn't a fairytale, Felicita.
Try and be a grown-up for once!

Felicita rushes up the remaining stairs, stumbling on the
front of her dress.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
And Felicita...

Felicita stops. She tries to speak calmly through her tears.

FELICITA
Yes?

SEBASTIAN
Who's horse is that?

FELICITA
A soldier's. He...let me borrow it.

SEBASTIAN
A...soldier?

Sebastian steps in front of a nearby window. The moon gives
his skin a ghostly look.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)
Listen to me very carefully,
Felicita. From now on, you will
stay in your room unless you are
helping prepare for Giacomo's
party.

(MORE)

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

You will not make contact with this soldier or any soldier every again. And under *no* circumstances are you to leave the palace. Not before sunset, not after. Understand?

Felicita stares at her father in horror. She can see both the fear and anger in his eyes, but that doesn't make her response any warmer.

FELICITA

I understand...your majesty.

Felicita turns on her heel and runs down the hall.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE - CONTINUOUS

Through the open window we see Felicita lock herself in her room. She sinks to the floor with her back to the wall.

From afar, the palace stands silent. The watchman continues on his rounds.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NANU'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Charlie and Nanu are sitting at the piano. Their hands move together, playing a sweet but slow tune. Sandy sleeps nearby.

CHARLIE

Why was he so m-mean to her?

NANU

Usually grown-ups get mean when they're scared.

CHARLIE

But Sebastian t-was the King! What could he be s-scared of?

NANU

Yes he was a king, but he was also a dad. He was just trying to do what was best for his family.

Charlie begins to chew on her lower lip. Nanu elbows her.

CHARLIE

Why couldn't t-they just leave Veroma?

NANU

It wasn't worth the risk, no one was safe. Sometimes soldiers would enter a random village, line up all the men they could find, and kill every tenth person in line. Just to remind everyone that they could.

Charlie shudders and misses a key. Nanu repeats the melody so she can catch up. They continue.

CHARLIE

What happened n-next?

NANU

Felicita was supposed to perform at Giacomo's coronation part. So she spent most of her time practicing.

Suddenly Sandy sits up, ear tipped towards the FRONT DOOR. She trots out of the room, unseen by the others.

CHARLIE

Why was his b-birthday such a big deal anyway?

NANU

Even though he was younger, Giacomo was next in line for the throne. The coronation would officially recognize him as the crown prince. But under the occupation, it was more of a tradition than an actual ceremony.

CHARLIE

What happened at the p-party?

DAD (O.S.)

What party?

Charlie spins around to see her dad standing in the doorway.

CHARLIE

What? No party. N-Nothing.

Her Dad frowns. Nanu slowly closes their sheet music.

NANU

We were talking about the Muraris.

Charlie's dad glares at Nanu over Charlie's head. Nanu stares right back, unapologetic.

DAD

Charlie is supposed to be focusing on her schoolwork, Mom. Not indulging you in your need for attention. Do I need to find somewhere else for her?

Charlie jumps to her feet, stationing herself between them.

CHARLIE

But we have proof, dad. Felicita was an *actual* p-princess!

DAD

Really? A princess?

Nanu holds his gaze. Then, she looks away.

DAD (CONT'D)

Charlie will start at a *real* after school program next week.

CHARLIE

But I like it here!

DAD

(Ignoring her)

In the meantime, if you're going to waste time telling stories, at least tell her the *truth*.

Charlie's expression falls. She turns to Nanu, confused.

CHARLIE

What does-?

DAD

Come on, Charlie.

Her dad marches out of the room. Charlie begins to follow but stops when she sees Sandy next to Nanu, unbudging.

CHARLIE

C'mon Sandy.

Sandy whines.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Come Sandy. Please.

DAD (O.S.)

Now, Charlie!

Charlie flinches and drags Sandy out by her collar. The front door SLAMS shut.

Nanu sits back at the piano, staring at the WATER LILLIES PAINTING hanging above her. Her expression is blank.

Then, she begins to play.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PIANO ROOM - DUSK

Felicita sits at her piano practicing the SAME SONG.

A dozen SERVANTS run around with candles and paper decorations. Giulia shouts orders like a drill sergeant.

GIULIA

No, candles to the left,
right...*left!* When we're done this
place needs to *glow*.

Felicita sighs and drops her forehead on the keys. Giulia breezes by without stopping.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

Your majesty, I thought we decided
on Verdi, not Beethoven.

Bacio runs in from the hallway, barking excitedly.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

I guess that means the guests are
arriving. Are ready?

FELICITA

In a minute.

GIULIA

You're not even dressed yet.

Felicita scoops up Baccio and drops him on the piano. She begins to play a polka, Baccio bouncing around her fingers.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

Fee...come on.

Felicita begrudgingly follows Giulia out of the room. Baccio runs after them.

INT. FELICITA'S BEDROOM

"DRESSING" MONTAGE

Felicita grips her bedpost while Giulia tightens her corset. Baccio runs circles around their feet.

Giulia powders Felicita's face. Baccio sniffs the powder and sneezes, shooting backwards off the table.

Felicita takes the wilted flower crown off her vanity. She tosses it in the trash.

Giulia pin's Felicita's curls to the top of her head. She places NINE POINTED CROWN on top.

Felicita stares at her reflection in the mirror.

END MONTAGE

EXT. IL PALAZZONE. COURTYARD DANCE FLOOR - EVENING

The palace is adorned with thousands of hanging fairylight candles. There is lace over every table and the freshly manicured cone-shaped trees are lined with ornaments.

Baccio sits at a BALCONY on the second floor, watching the dance floor below. He's wearing a bright red collar.

The NOBILITY dance to a STRING QUARTET. Everyone has turned out in true splendor, wearing the brightest colors and fashions. Nonetheless, they still wear the same ARM BANDS.

Felicita is one of the last to enter. She is dressed in a BLOOD RED BALL GOWN that falls off her shoulders like water. It's a true princess moment, but no one is watching.

Giacomo appears next to Felicita, wearing a similar red jacket. He glances at her. Then, he burps.

FELICITA

Gross.

GIACOMO

You think that's gross? Just wait.

FELICITA

What do you mean?

Giacomo gestures to the ENTRY.

A group of Habsburg SOLDIERS stand half in-half out of the candlelight. They are dressed in formal regimental attire and appear to be arguing with Sebastian.

GIACOMO

Did you know they'd be here?

FELICITA

No. Jeez, I can barely breathe in this.

She makes a face, motioning to her corset.

GIACOMO

Is that why you look so cranky?

They watch as Sebastian allows the soldiers to enter. For once, Ferenc is not among them.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)

It seems our new friends wanted to join the festivities. And make sure no one was causing mischief.

FELICITA

Right...because a birthday party is the perfect place to start a revolution.

Giulia passes them. She is holding two lace fans and gives one to Felicita.

GIULIA

Watch your tone, Felicita.

FELICITA

Don't say you weren't thinking it.

Giulia snaps open her fan, her annoyance a silent agreement.

The trio watches as the soldiers pass through the room. Giulia flinches as Soldier 1 inhales the hors devours.

GIACOMO

Double gross.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE. COURTYARD DANCE FLOOR- LATER

Several couples dance to an upbeat tarantella. They form two circles with the women on the inside and men on the outside. They exchange positions with various leaps and twirls.

Felicita dances with a handsome YOUNG MAN (20s). She switches partners, a cool smile on her face. Her eyes flicker to the soldiers standing guard at all of the exits.

FELICITA
(Under her breath)
Habsburg pigs.

YOUNG MAN
What did you say?

FELICITA
I like your wig!

They break apart and the man self consciously adjusts his hairpiece. Meanwhile--

ACROSS THE DANCE FLOOR

--Ferenc watches from his post in the shadows. He has a sword tied to his waist with a green sash. He fingers the pommel.

Sandor slides up, eyes also on Felicita.

SANDOR
She sure is beautiful...I hope we don't have to kill her.

FERENC
(Scowling)
Why would you say that?

SANDOR
Be careful Szanky, your face will stick like that. In fact, I think it already has.

He tugs on Ferenc's cheek. Ferenc slaps his hand away.

FERENC
Don't touch me.

Ferenc adjusts his sword and walks straight for--

THE DANCE FLOOR

--where Felicita twirls out of her partner's arms and right into Ferenc.

FELICITA
Oh.

FERENC

Yeah. Hi.

FELICITA

I'm surprised to see you here.

FERENC

As am I.

The dancers reverse directions, momentarily separating Felicita and Ferenc. They return and Felicita rests her hand in his.

FERENC (CONT'D)

So is this what you nobles do at parties? Eat hors devours and dance with strangers?

FELICITA

You sound jealous.

FERENC

Why would I care who you dance with?

FELICITA

I meant about the hors devours.

They split and return once again.

FERENC

You need to be careful. Sandor knows who you are, and he's looking for any excuse to arrest you here and now.

FELICITA

An excuse, like talking to one of his commanding officers?

FERENC

Good point. Is there somewhere we can talk in private?

FELICITA

I'm not even supposed to be talking to you in public.

FERENC

So is that a no?

Felicita checks the room. Sebastian is nowhere to be seen.

FELICITA

Meet me outside in ten minutes.

They break apart and Felicita changes partners. She watches out of the corner of her eye as Ferenc disappears. She is about to follow when a new partner takes her hand.

SANDOR

I thought I recognized you.

Felicita tries to draw back but he pulls her closer.

FELICITA

I'm sorry, you must have me confused with someone else.

SANDOR

You're the girl who cheated at cards.

FELICITA

A lot of people cheat at cards.

SANDOR

But I would never forget eyes like those.

Felicita purposefully steps on his foot as they turn.

FELICITA

What do you want?

SANDOR

I am concerned that my friend is falling in love with you. Which would be a tragedy.

FELICITA

Why?

SANDOR

He's not another plaything for you to toy with. I'd rather kill him myself than watch him die from a broken heart.

They abruptly switch partners and Sandor is spirited away.

Felicita steps out of the crowd, hand pressed to her stomach. She's clearly struggling to breathe.

Giacomo sees her and hurries up to her.

GIACOMO
Are you okay, Fee? What's wrong?

FELICITA
I just need some air.

Felicita hurries outside.

Bacio sees Sebastian watching from the upper level, whimpers, and scampers after Felicita.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE GROUNDS. MAZE

Amidst the vast estate stands an intimidating HEDGE MAZE. Felicita waits at the entrance for Ferenc. The party and the palace seem a world away.

FERENC (O.S.)
Psst.

A stick figure, puppeted by Ferenc, sticks out around the corner of the maze.

FELICITA
Uh...hello?

FERENC
Wouldn't you say it was a little
over-elm-ing in there?

Felicita stares him in shock. It's clearly not an elm tree, and clearly a terrible time for jokes.

Ferenc appears. He seems sheepish.

FERENC (CONT'D)
Sorry, I-

Felicita snaps a leaf off the maze wall and hands it to him.

FELICITA
I can't be-leaf they let you into
the army with puns that bad.

Ferenc grins. They begin walking towards the center of the maze, Felicita leading the way.

FERENC
Look. Is there any way I can
dissuade you from getting involved
with il Risorgimento?

FELICITA

No.

FERENC

I thought so. Just wanted to clear my conscious.

FELICITA

No, I mean there's nothing you can say. My father made me promise I wouldn't be involved.

FERENC

I take it you also promised him you wouldn't speak with soldiers?

FELICITA

You still don't seem like a real soldier.

Ferenc begins to protest, realizes she's right, and shrugs. They take a corner and come to a dead end.

FERENC

Are...are we lost?

FELICITA

No!

Felicita doubles back. Ferenc follows, hands in his pockets.

FERENC

It looks like we're lost.

FELICITA

We're not *lost*.

FERENC

Well...

They come to another dead end. Ferenc stares at Felicita expectantly.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE. CENTER OF THE MAZE - MOMENTS LATER

Felicita and Ferenc sit alongside a stucco fountain, starrng at the festivities of il Palazzone far above them. Several WATER LILLIES bob in the fountain next to them.

FELICITA

I love it here, this is the only place I know of that has water lillies. They're my favorite.

FERENC

I don't think I've ever seen anything this beautiful.

Ferenc runs a hand on the water, touching their reflection.

FELICITA

Why did you join the army?

FERENC

It wasn't by choice. The army invaded my homeland, and they forced us to join. It was either fight with them or...

FELICITA

So you're not from Austria?

FERENC

No. I'm from Hungary.

Felicita giggles.

FERENC (CONT'D)

Yes, I know. Hungary, hungry.

FELICITA

Sorry.

FERENC

I'm used to it.

FELICITA

What's it like there?

Ferenc stands up. He starts to walk around the fountain.

FERENC

Honestly, where I'm from wasn't that nice. Not like this at least. But it was home. I grew up on a farm and I thought I would stay there forever. But now...

FELICITA

Do you want to go back?

FERENC

That's...not exactly an option.

Felicita stands and starts walking in the opposite direction.

FELICITA

I've never been out of the kingdom.
Not to mention Italy.

FERENC

Well I guess that's one benefit of
being in the army. We travel a lot.

FELICITA

Does it make me a living cliché if
I say that palace life isn't all
it's cracked up to be?

FERENC

Oh it does. But you don't have to
tell me that.

Felicita and Ferenc meet on the other side of the fountain.

FERENC (CONT'D)

I'm serious. I know a cage when I
see one, doesn't matter how many
candles you stick on it.

They stare at one another.

FELICITA

Ferenc?

FERENC

Yes?

He steps towards her.

FELICITA

I...

(Changes her mind)

I just wanted to thank you. Yes,
thank you for everything.

Ferenc looks a little disappointed.

FERENC

Oh...of course.

Felicita also looks a little disappointed. She sits at the
fountain and dips a hand in the water.

FERENC (CONT'D)
Felicita?

FELICITA
Yes?

FERENC
Uh...
(Also changes his mind)
What you did to save Borghetto, it
was very brave. I can't remember if
I said that. But it was.

FELICITA
Oh...thank you.

They stare at each other awkwardly as the melody of a new,
slower song drifts out of the courtyard. Then, Ferenc bows.

The couple starts dancing, a respectful distance in their
embrace. However, it quickly becomes obvious that Ferenc
doesn't know the moves. He steps on Felicita's foot.

FERENC
Sorry.

FELICITA
(Wincing)
Maybe I should lead.

FERENC
I thought you were!

Felicita breaks step and twirls Ferenc around under her arm.
He laughs.

They continue to dance together, moving closer and closer
with each passing minute. Too soon the song ends, leaving
them standing in each others arms. The moment seems
perfect...until Baccio BARKS from somewhere in the maze.

The moment passes.

FELICITA
I should get back. My song...

FERENC
Right, of course.

FELICITA
Are you going to disappear now?

FERENC

What? No! I still have to return
your horse, don't I?

Felicita grins.

INT. IL PALAZZONE. PIANO ROOM

Felicita rushes into the crowded room, holding her skirts in both hands. She finds Giulia and waves apologetically.

Felicita begins to play the same song as before, but this time her love for the piece is evident. Everyone listens in rapt attention, hanging on her every note.

Ferenc watches Felicita play from across the room. Sebastian emerges from under the archway and joins him.

SEBASTIAN

Lieutenant.

Ferenc snaps to attention. He bows.

FERENC

Your majesty.

SEBASTIAN

What do you want from her?

FERENC

What? Nothing!

Sebastian crosses his arms.

SEBASTIAN

Let me be clear, Lieutenant. You will break her spirit, and in this world that's one of the few things she has left. I am ordering, and *begging*, you to leave her alone.

Ferenc's face is blank.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Do you know she's engaged? To a prince, nonetheless. The union was designed to protect her from people like you, and people like me. She'll be married in less than a week. Please don't take the future away from her.

FERENC

With all due respect, your majesty,
you could have spared me the
engagement details. Not breaking
her spirit is enough for me.

When Felicita looks up from her piece, she sees Ferenc leave
the courtyard. She ends her piece and the crowd applauds.

GIULIA

Excellent, Felicita!

Felicita stares at the keys in silence.

GIULIA (CONT'D)

Now, if everyone wants to dessert-

Suddenly Felicita begins another song. Giulia is pleasantly
surprised...until she recognizes the melody. Felicita is
playing the SONG OF THE REVOLUTION!

A hush swoops across the room as people recognize the tune.
The soldiers appear furious. But some of the noblemen cheer.

Felicita finishes and curtseys for her audience. Then she
marches out of the room, directly past Sandor, her head high.

EXT. IL PALAZZONE. FRONT ENTRY

Felicita steps outside, searching the night for Ferenc. But
something in her eyes says she already knows he's gone.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Looking for someone?

Felicita spins around. Her jaw drops when she sees none other
than the handsome PRINCE DINO (21) in a black cloak and
matching feathered hat. He approaches her, bowing low.

FELICITA

Dino?

PRINCE DINO

Can't believe your eyes?

He takes both of her hands and kisses the back of each wrist.

PRINCE DINO (CONT'D)

I received a letter from your
father.

(MORE)

PRINCE DINO (CONT'D)

I understand you had a disagreement about our impending nuptials. I wanted to come in person to address any concerns.

Felicita is still staring into the darkness.

FELICITA

My concerns...have been resolved. I'm more than willing to do what my father, and my people, need me to.

PRINCE DINO

Well that sounds...serious. But I'm glad to hear!

FELICITA

Can you do something for me though?
(Off his nodding)
When we go inside, I want you to propose to me in front of everyone. I want the Habsburg soldiers to see it coming, I want them to all know. Our future is their defeat.

Dino shrugs, clearly confused by her bitterness. He's still holding her hand and notices the MARKS from Sandor's whip.

PRINCE DINO

What happened here?

INT. IL PALAZZONE - THE NEXT DAY

Felicita walks down the hallway with Giacomo and Giulia on her heels. She carries a pile of sheet music in her arms.

GIULIA

Everyone is talking about your little stunt last night.

FELICITA

By stunt you mean engagement?

GIULIA

No, I mean the call to revolution.

GIACOMO

I thought that part was cool.

GIULIA

It was dangerous.

FELICITA
 (Ruffling Giacomo's hair)
 Most worthwhile things are.

They pass the door to Sebastian's PRIVATE STUDY and Felicita stops short when she hears VOICES on the other side. It sounds like one of her father's friends from the opera.

SEBASTIAN (O.S.)
 How much longer?

MAN 1 (O.S.)
 Not long, our men are already en route. If everything goes to plan-

SEBASTIAN
 The barracks will fall by sunset.

Felicita carefully steps back away from the door. Giacomo and Giulia wait for her farther down the hallway.

GIACO
 Fee? You okay?

Felicita drops her papers in Giulia's arms.

FELICITA
 I really need to stop listening in on other people's conversations...

INT. IL PALAZZONE. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Felicita goes straight to Ferenc's horse. The mare whinnies.

GIACOMO
 Fee, you *can't* be serious.

FELICITA
 Look, I would be dead if it wasn't for him. Then arrested. Then dead, again. I have to warn him.

GIACOMO
 And I can't believe *padre* is working for il Risorgimento ...hypocrite.

Felicita throws a saddle onto her horse. Giacomo grabs the stirrup to prevent her from mounting.

GIACOMO (CONT'D)
 C'mon, Fee. You're crazy to think
 you're going alone.

FELICITA
 Fine, come with me then!

Giacomo and the mare share a glance.

EXT. KINGDOM OF VEROMA. COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

Felicita and Giacomo ride towards the ARMY BARRACKS. They are
 dressed in peasant attire, Felicita in her signature cloak.

FELICITA
 We'll make it there faster if we
 cut through the village!

INT. VILLAGE SQUARE

It's market day and the streets are crowded with MERCHANTS
 and SHOPPING CARTS. The siblings are forced dismounts and
 walk their horses through the madness.

FELICITA
 I forgot it was market day.

She catches Giacomo staring at a candy vendor.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Seriously? How can you think of
 candy at a time like this?

Giacomo's stomach grumbles.

GIACOMO
 I'll be right back...

He hands Felicita his reigns and disappears in the crowd.

FELICITA
 Giaco!

Suddenly there's movement at the opposite end of the square
 and a dozen SOLDIERS appear, Sandor at the front. They start
 forcing MEN, young and old, into a line against the wall.
 Ferenc is nowhere to be seen.

Felicita's eyes widen in fear.

CUT TO:

EXT. IL PALAZZONE - SAME TIME

Ferenc walks Lupo towards the palace. He stares at the vacant windows overhead, not even sure which one is Felicita's.

GIULIA (O.S.)
She's not here.

Ferenc turns. Giulia watches him around an armful of flowers.

FERENC
Where is she?

INT. VILLAGE SQUARE - SAME TIME

Felicita pulls her horses out of the crowd, trying to make room for people to escape. She searches the crowd for her brother, panicked.

The soldiers now have a line of almost THIRTY MEN. They continue to search the crowd, ripping families apart.

Felicita gasps when she sees her brother pulled into line. She takes a step forward but the mare holds her back, chomping on her cloak.

FELICITA
Not you too, you're just like your
master. But I need to do something!

Felicita frees herself and moves towards the soldiers. She starts counting the men in line.

FELICITA (CONT'D)
Eight, nine...Giacco. No.

She sways on her feet and someone seizes the moment to pull her into an--

ALLEY

--where Felicita comes face to face with Ferenc.

FERENC
What are you doing here?

FELICITA
Ferenc please, you have to save my
brother!

FERENC
They got him?

FELICITA

They haven't recognized him yet but we have to do something. Please!

FERENC

We will. But what are you doing out of the palace in the first place?

FELICITA

I was coming to warn you. Il Risorgimento is on their way to attack the barracks. Come on-

FERENC

I'll get him, I promise. But we need a distraction. A big one. But I don't know what's big enough to distract from a crown prince.

FELICITA

Just need to find something shiny.

Felicita and Ferenc exit the alley and break off in separate directions into the--

TOWN SQUARE

--as the soldiers finish lining up prisoners.

Giacomo stands in line, trying his best to disappear. When he sees Ferenc his eyes widen, but before he can say anything Ferenc cuffs him behind the ears.

FERENC

You!

Ferenc's outburst draws the attention of the other soldiers. Sandor walks up to him.

SANDOR

Ferenc, didn't know you'd be here.

FERENC

I know this boy, Sandor. He stole my wallet the last time I was in town! Let me take care of him myself.

Sandor looks Giacomo up and down. His eyes linger on Giacomo's pristine riding boots. Not buying it.

Ferenc starts to drag Giacomo out of line but TWO SOLDIERS appear before them, barring the way.

FELICITA (O.C.)

Everyone!

Ferenc, Giacomo, Sandor, and the other soldiers turn at the sound of Felicita's voice. She is standing on top of a covered wagon, brandishing her TORN OFF ARM BAND.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

We can not stand for this! This madness is consuming us from the inside out. But together, together we can put a stop to it!

GIACOMO

(To Ferenc)

What is she doing?

All around the square the soldiers start to laugh, causing the villagers to nervously glance at one another.

SOLDIER

Why should they listen to *you*?

Felicita reaches into her bag and raises HER CROWN overhead.

FERENC

(To Giacomo)

She found something shiny.

FELICITA

This is not normal. This is madness! But we can fight back. We've always been able to fight back. And they tried to make us forget the most important truth...that we all have power! Every single one of us!

(Looking at her crown)

Even me.

Sandor starts to move towards Felicita. He takes his whip from his belt.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

Some of you know me as a princess, and some of you don't know me at all. It doesn't matter what my title is, or where I am, or who I'm with, or what any of you think of me...because I have the same power as all of you. The power of *choice*. The ability to stand up here and make a decision about my life.

Sandor quickens his step, moving undetected in the crowd.

FELICITA (CONT'D)

If you agree with me, stand with
me! Stand for our future!

Across the square, Ferenc RIPS off his band and punches it into the sky. After a pause, another villager does the same. Slowly, several more and more people join in.

Sandor is close now and prepares to attack Felicita from behind. But before he can, Giacomo SLAMS him to the ground!

GIACOMO

Boom baby!

Giacomo rips off Sandor's arm band and tosses it into the air. It starts a chain reaction and the sky fills with red bands. People start to sing the SONG OF THE REVOLUTION, arms around each other, swaying as one.

The soldiers, intimidated by the villagers unity, stare at one another in dumb confusion.

FERENC

You boys are done here. Go home.

Giacomo hauls Sandor to Ferenc's feet. He has Sandor hog-tied with his own whip.

SANDOR

This isn't over!

Felicita jumps down from her perch. She towers over Sandor.

FELICITA

You better hope it is.

The soldiers nod to Ferenc and start to leave, taking Sandor with them.

Felicita watches them go, a ghost of a smile on her face.

FERENC

Well done, your majesty. But aren't
you forgetting something?

FELICITA

What?

Ferenc points to her crown. Felicita follows his gaze. She looks to the crowd. Then to her brother.

GIACOMO
Fee, what's wrong?

FELICITA
Nothing...it's just...
(Laughing through her
tears)
...now what?

FADE TO:

EXT. PICK-UP LINE - AFTERNOON

Charlie skips outside, still wearing her flower crown. But she stops when she sees that Nanu's parking spot is EMPTY.

Charlie checks both ways down the street, watching as her classmates jump into their respective cars.

Unsure what to do next, Charlie sits down on the curb.

But Nanu doesn't show.

INT. DAD'S CAR - LATER

Charlie sits in the backseat, tearing her flower crown to pieces. She and her dad ride in silence for a long time.

CHARLIE
Can we s-stop at her house first?

INT. NANU'S HOUSE

Charlie's Dad unlocks the door and Charlie pokes her head inside. Everything is just as it was the day before, but a sense of forboding hangs in the air.

DAD
Be quick, Charlie.

Charlie nods and into the --

KITCHEN

-- where she starts opening cupboards at random. She's clearly looking for something.

After a minute, Charlie stands up. She walks out of the kitchen, away from the dining room, and into her Nanu's--

LIBRARY

-- where she takes tiny steps, clearly unfamiliar with the room.

Charlie begins rifling through the drawers of her Nanu's desk. Then she checks the books on the sofa. In her search, she accidentally knocks a large BOOK to the floor and it falls opening, scattering several OLD PHOTOGRAPHS.

Charlie starts collecting the photos, but she stops suddenly. She holds an image of a YOUNG WOMAN (20s) with short dark hair standing next to a horse. Charlie stares.

The horse looks exactly like Lupo.

Charlie quickly takes out another photograph, this one of a farm boy and girl from the 1930s.

The boy looks just like Giacomo.

Charlie takes a postcard from the pages of the book. When she holds it upright, the stirpes form the ITALIAN FLAG. Then, she flips the card sideways. Now, it's the HUNGARIAN FLAG.

As Charlie begins to put the pieces together...

"THE REVEAL" MONTAGE

Felicita as a child dancing around the palace.

Nanu as a child working on a farm.

Felicita watching the soldiers from il Palazzone.

Nanu watching soldiers from a dirty farmhouse window.

Felicita stealing bricks from the army barracks.

Nanu stealing bricks from a bomb site.

Felicita riding on horseback to warn the villagers.

Nanu running barefoot to warn her village.

Felicita rips off her armband in the marketplace.

Nanu rips off her armband in the hallway of the university.

Felicita embraces Ferenc.

Nanu holds hands with a YOUNG MAN.

END MONTAGE

DAD (O.S.)
Charlie, did you hear me?

Charlie turns around. Her dad looks absolutely exhausted. He sees the photographs spread out on the ground and hesitates.

DAD (CONT'D)
Did you find what you wanted?

Her dad picks up one of the photographs. He checks the writing on the back.

CHARLIE
Dad...who is that?

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL

Nanu sits upright in bed, staring out the window. Her arm is in a sling.

There's a knock at the door.

NANU
Come in.

DAD opens the door. Charlie enters first, carrying the photo album and sugar tin in front of her. Charlie's dad closes the door, remaining outside.

Nanu looks at the photo album.

NANU (CONT'D)
Where did you find that?

Charlie walks around the room slowly. She places the book at Nanu's feet.

CHARLIE
Nanu, are you the princess?

Nanu looks surprised. Then she laughs. She laughs so much that she starts coughing.

Charlie's smile dips.

NANU
Come sit with me.

She pats the bed next to her. Charlie clambers up, being careful not to upset her arm.

CHARLIE
Well, are you?

NANU
No, *Cica*. I'm not a princess.

CHARLIE
Oh.

Charlie flips through the book.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Was any of it true?

NANU
Just because something is unreal
doesn't mean it's untrue.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAYBREAK

Felicita rides Lupo in silence. She stares at the horizon,
the wind splaying her hair around her shoulders.

Suddenly, a dot appears on the horizon. It comes closer.

Felicita immediately recognizes the dot. She dismounts and
starts running forward.

Ferenc meets her halfway and hugs her.

FELICITA
You came back.

FERENC
I realized it's not where you are
that matters...but who you're with.

They stare at one another lovingly.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Nanu sits up straighter on her pillow.

NANU
Yes, Felicita was a flesh and blood
Italian contessa. We have family
documents that tell us as much.
(MORE)

NANU (CONT'D)

We know she gave up her title to marry for love. She left Italy to be with Ferenc. Everything else...

CHARLIE

Everything else...was your story.

Nanu smiles.

NANU

I'm sorry I didn't tell you the truth from the beginning.

CHARLIE

That's okay. Who needs a princess when I have you?

Nanu beams. She hugs Charlie, burying her head in her hair. Meanwhile, in the--

HALLWAY

--Charlie's dad watches the two embrace. He enters--

THE ROOM

--and sits next to the bed.

Charlie looks up at him.

DAD

So. What is this story you've been on about?

Charlie grins.

FADE TO:

OVER BLACK

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess...

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Charlie sits in the grass, surrounded by a large group of CHILDREN. Among them sits Sierra and Ashley. They all listen to Charlie in rapt attention.

They are all wearing flower crowns.

CHARLIE

Her name was Felicita Anna Murari.
And she was a real princess.

CUT TO:

Felicita dancing with Ferenc in the maze.

CUT TO:

A young Nanu and a YOUNG MAN (20s) standing at the rail of a boat. They sail under the statue of liberty.

CUT TO:

Charlie narrates with her hands. They all listen in rapt attention.

They're lost in her world.