

The Royal and the Zippo

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ACT I

List of Characters:

Madeleine- (Mad-a-len) Fictional character of young adult sci-fi fantasy fiction.

Bode- (BO-Dee) Also fictional, and Madeleine's love interest.

Violetta/ Becky Morris- (Vi-o-let-a) Famous writer of young adult fiction desperately trying to break out of that mold.

Veronica- Fictional character, socialite of WWII Chicago.

Harry- Becky's grandfather, newsman, and voice of her conscience.

HARRY Morris, late 70s sits at his granddaughters desk. He has aged gracefully and wears a suit and tie. A cane leans against the desk. There is noise of a party in the other room. HARRY thumbs through type-written pages displaying different emotions; at times amused, other times disappointment. He lays the pages back on the desk and takes off his glasses, shaking his head.

BECKY enters. She is fresh out of college and her optimism outshines the shabbiness of her first apartment and her 'looming student loan' wardrobe.

HARRY

I'm getting too old for parties. I find them loud and tedious. Everyone is getting younger, and I don't recognize half of them.

BECKY

I'm glad you came just the same.

HARRY

Hmmm. Interesting tales you're telling.

BECKY

(embarrassed)

Oh, well. I never thought I'd actually publish it. It was just for a lark, as you say.

HARRY

(shrugging)

Just as well you cut your teeth on something so insignificant. Now you

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
are established, and you can move
on to the Great American Novel.

BECKY
Right, grandpa, I'll get right on
that.

HARRY
NO, no, no. Enjoy your success
(gesturing to the book) Violetta
Stratford?

BECKY
(embarrassed)
A pen name was the publisher's
idea. Ridiculous...

HARRY
No...well, yes. Publishers- what do
they know? And what does it really
matter? You, my darling Becky are
now a professional writer.

BECKY
(whelmed)
Becky Morris-professional writer.
Those words sound so strange
together.

HARRY
Well, get used to it. You aren't
just a flash in the pan, kiddo. You
have real talent.

BECKY
I can't shake this feeling, like
I've gotten away with something,
and at any moment the publisher is
going to call and tell me what a
hack I am and demand their check
back.

HARRY
Ah, yes. I remember that feeling.
The first time a story of mine made
it on the first page above the
fold. I thought for certain it was
a mistake and it would be cut
before printing.

BECKY
But it wasn't.

HARRY
But it wasn't.

BECKY
At least you got to write about something that mattered. All I get to write is 'young adult sci-fi fantasy fiction'.

HARRY
My, that's a mouthful.

BECKY
One that's hard to swallow.

HARRY
Never mind that. We all start somewhere. I started in the-

TOGETHER
-the mail room of the Rockford Chronicle.

BECKY
And you worked your way up to editor.

HARRY
(sheepishly)
Oh, you've heard that before.

BECKY
(with a twinkle in her eye)
Once or twice.

HARRY
(laughs and shakes his head)
You were always the one, Becky. Your father never understood the importance of the written word; the shared history and experiences that bind us together as human beings.

Your father could have been a wartime correspondent like his old man. He could have written about the human toll of war, but what does he decide to do? Turns Yippie and runs off to Manhattan.

BECKY

I thought we decided, since we both agree on this, that we wouldn't talk about it anymore.

HARRY

You're right, kiddo. Let's talk about more pleasant things. (gesturing to the suitcase) I see you're talking care of the old Arrow.

BECKY

(opening the case to reveal a 1940's era manual typewriter)
Care to inspect it yourself?

HARRY

Hello, old friend. They don't make 'em like you anymore. There's something to be said for computers, I'll admit it. The ability to correct typos, you don't have to print until you're done...but there's something about typing it out. Having just the one copy to work from. It made the writing more precious somehow. You get that, as the kids say?

BECKY

(hugging him from behind)
I most certainly get that.

HARRY

I finally got around to upgrading my computer, and wouldn't you know it, I couldn't open my word processing documents on the new program.

BECKY

Oh, no.

HARRY

Don't worry. Your cousin will have everything fixed and workable by the time I get back home. He explained that it was an 'easy fix', then rattled off some malarkey-- the words were English, but I couldn't make heads or tails of it. *signs* It's a terrible

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
feeling. The fact that you could
lose half a lifetime of writing to
technology. Progress.

BECKY
That's why I'm sticking with the
Arrow.

HARRY
It's a good machine. It saw me
through the war. You know,
Eisenhower wrote on a Royal. So did
Morrow.

BECKY
Giants indeed.

HARRY
Perhaps knowing that Ian Flemming
and Ray Bradbury wrote on Royals
would interest you more?

BECKY
One of them does.

HARRY
Which one?

BECKY
Not telling.

HARRY
Anyway. I'm glad to get you alone.
I wanted to give you something.

He gestures to a well-loved suitcase.

BECKY
Grandpa, you didn't have to get me
anything. The launch of a young
adult novel is hardly the occasion-

HARRY
(interrupting)
Never mind that, I told you. It's
just humble beginnings. Perhaps
this will be the next step.

BECKY opens the case and pulls out several old, worn but
cared for, journals.

HARRY

These are all of my wartime journals. The stories that wouldn't make it past the war department sensors at the time. Important tales left untold. I thought one day that I would pass them on to your father, but-

BECKY

I know.

HARRY

You know. Perhaps, when the time is right, you'll bring them into the light, hmm?

BECKY

(pulling the zippo out of the box)

What is this, Grandpa?

HARRY rises.

HARRY

That is my Zippo. I got it from Ernie Pyle in Italy. Newsman to newsman.

BECKY

(genuine awe)

Wow, that is something.

HARRY

He gave them away to every soldier he interviewed.

BECKY

What's this dent on the side?

HARRY

(teasing)

You'll have to read to find that out.

BECKY

(touched and yet unsure)

I will. Are you sure you want to part with all these memories?

HARRY

(gesturing to his temple)

I'm not really parting with anything, just passing them on to

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
someone who could turn them into
something.

BECKY
(reluctant)
You could turn them into something.

HARRY
I'm an old man. They need younger
hands than mine to bring them to a
younger world.

BECKY
You want me to write about you?

HARRY
Yes. I do.

BECKY
(nervous)
But, I'm not good at writing about
real conflicts that actually
matter. At least, nothing anyone
wants to print anyways. Grandpa,
don't you want someone more-

HARRY
(insistently)
What's this? I've never heard so
much doubt from you before. Just
because this novelty act is the
first thing you've gotten published
doesn't mean you're not meant for
greater things. Don't let those
publishers tell you otherwise.
You're the only one I trust. It's
your history too. I know you won't
let me down, kiddo.

BECKY
I don't know what to say.

HARRY
You don't have to say anything.
Just write.

A pause. The sounds of the party continue softly in the
background.

BECKY
Well...we should get back to the
party.

HARRY

I'll be along in a minute.

BECKY kisses Harry on the forehead and exits. Harry picks up a journal and pages through it. As he begins to read the set changes around him.

HARRY

(reading)

June 5, 1944 Portsmouth. Or is it the early morning of June 6th? It is finally happening. We've been sequestered here since the 26th, barely a week and a half, but when you're waiting for what we're waiting for...it seems longer. Units have been moving out all night. The Portsmouth Harbour, that only yesterday looked like a solid bridge of ships all the way out to the Isle of Wight, is now broken up and heading across the Channel. Some of the men are full of nervous excitement. They are writing thank you messages to the town and last love notes to their temporary sweethearts in chalk on the roads. We'll be across the water by the time the town awakes. The men around me are quiet. If their feelings are the same as mine, than it isn't hard to see why.

15 Years Later

VIOLETTA, a writer in her mid 30s, sits at a desk in front of her typewriter. The shine has worn off. She has reached a functioning level of exhaustion. On the desk is a stack of pages: the current draft of the book she is revising. Also, a yellow legal pad, some pens, and a tea cup.

VIOLETTA

(talking as she types, bored having written the same stories over and over again)
 ...Madeleine's broken body laid dashed against the rocks...a crumpled, purple silk ribbon clutched tightly in her fist.

MADELEINE, the fictional character VIOLETTA is writing about wanders through the room, slows, and shows alarm when she realizes the situation. She reads over Violetta's shoulder.

VIOLETTA

Bode called from the rocks above,
searching the stormy beach for a
sign that his love survived.

MADELEINE

Yes, Bode. Find me.

VIOLETTA

(talking as she types)

But he could see nothing with the
wind whipping rain into his stormy
blue eyes.

MADELEINE

(to audience)

I won't worry. Bode will scale the
cliff face to the beach to find me,
lying there, near death. He will
pick me up in those strong, manly
arms and carry me back home. He'll
smell of autumn and fire pits. I'll
wake up warm in his arms, the first
thing I'll see are those stormy
blue eyes, and I'll know I'm safe.

VIOLETTA

(talking as she types)

Bode left.

MADELEINE is shocked dumb.

HARRY

(voice from the darkness)

Important tales left untold.

VIOLETTA grabs her mug and crosses to exit.

MADELEINE

Wait.

VIOLETTA stops and acknowledges MADELEINE for the first
time.

VIOLETTA

Yes?

MADELEINE

*trying to form a question, but
can't. Lots of "wha? But I th-
wh?"*

VIOLETTA
 Look, if this is going to take a
 while, I'm going for tea.

MADELEINE just stares. VIOLETTA sighs.

VIOLETTA
 Be back shortly.

VIOLETTA starts to exit, but stops to watch MADELEINE sit
 down at the desk and starts rifling through the stack of
 papers, growing more panicked as she reads. VIOLETTA stands
 off to the side of the desk, staring at the mess. MADELEINE
 stops mid-panic attack and smiles guiltily at VIOLETTA.
 VIOLETTA mockingly returns the smile.

VIOLETTA
 Thanks for organizing. It'll be
 much easier to find what I need
 with everything scattered about
 like this.

MADELEINE
 Vi-

VIOLETTA
 Maddie-

MADELEINE
 Are you going to kill me off?

VIOLETTA looking at the mess on the floor

VIOLETTA
 (avoiding the question)
 Its a good thing I'm obsessive
 about page numbers.

MADELEINE
 Vi-

VIOLETTA
 I'm considering it. Don't you think
 it's time?

MADELEINE cries out in a wordless tantrum.

VIOLETTA
 I'll mark you down for a 'no'.

VIOLETTA walks over her to sit at the desk. MADELEINE
 straightens up.

MADELEINE

But...why?

VIOLETTA

(taking a moment to think
about it seriously)

Because you have come... to the end
of your story.

MADELEINE

(taking offense)

Oh! Is that so?

VIOLETTA

That's so.

MADELEINE

Well...then...write more story.

VIOLETTA

You've been in constant publication
for 15 years, there is no more
story.

MADELEINE

Only if you don't write it.

VIOLETTA

(struggling to explain)

Look, when I started writing you, I
was a much...younger writer. Over
the years, I've written you into a
very small corner. I didn't know
how to leave room for a character
to...live and grow.

MADELEINE

But you know how to now. So, write
it. Do the hug and cry, and learn
and grow thing.

VIOLETTA

No, it's just not that simple.

MADELEINE

But it is. Madeleine Spruce is the
most beloved young adult heroine of
the decade. The reader's love me.
They'll follow where you take me.

VIOLETTA

(thinking about it for a
moment, then shaking her head)

(MORE)

VIOLETTA (cont'd)
No, I've made up my mind. I'm
heading in another direction.

VIOLETTA starts picking up and organizing the pages from the
floor.

MADELEINE
What's wrong with this direction?

VIOLETTA
I want to learn and grow, too. I
don't want to write young adult,
good versus evil, supernatural
novels forever. I want to be taken
seriously as an author.

HARRY
(a voice)
Perhaps, when the time is right,
you'll bring them into the light,
hmm?

MADELEINE
Aren't you?

VIOLETTA
Aren't I what?

MADELEINE
Taken seriously.

VIOLETTA
(laughing)
No. I'm not.

MADELEINE
But why? You wrote the most-

BOTH TOGETHER
beloved heroine of the decade.

VIOLETTA
So I hear.

MADELEINE
You've made a character that's
touched a generation. (VIOLETTA
groans) I'm on pajamas, on posters
hanging in bedrooms. They even made
movies, motion pictures of your
books...our books. Doesn't that
mean anything?

VIOLETTA

Yes. It's all very nice. I am grateful for what Madeleine Spruce had done for me. Now is the time to take some of that audience good will and use it to help me transition into adult fiction.

MADELEINE

(staring blankly)

You lost me.

VIOLETTA

(pity)

I know. I wrote you, remember?

MADELEINE

Why can't you be happy with what you have now?

VIOLETTA

Because I dreamed of being a respected novelist since I was little.

MADELEINE

How little?

VIOLETTA

(what does it matter?)

Ah, six, I think.

MADELEINE

You dreamed of becoming an adult novelist when you were six?

VIOLETTA

Respected... and yes.

MADELEINE

Did you dream of Social Security and Medicare, too?

VIOLETTA

All right, you've made your snarky point, now go away.

MADELEINE walks away from the desk. BODE, the male lead of VIOLETTA'S stories, enters.

MADELEINE

I'll call you when Charlie Rose is on.

VIOLETTA
Hilarious.

BODE
What's going on?

MADELEINE
Violetta thinks she's killing me
off.

BODE looks at VIOLETTA typing away furiously at the typewriter. She feels him watching and stops. She turns and returns the stare. BODE bursts out laughing.

BODE
(thinks he's got Violetta's
number)
Naw, I don't think so. Give it a
few days, and you'll miraculously
survive.

MADELEINE is relieved.

VIOLETTA
No, Bode, I don't think she will.

BODE
You've cried wolf before. Oh, I get
that it's just your publisher's
strategy; nothing personal. It's
great for the book sales, but you
could never kill off our girl. A
natural beauty with kaleidoscope
eyes. Perfect.

MADELEINE
Not quite perfect. There's my moon
shaped birthmark.

The birthmark is on her neck and visible throughout.

BODE
That one imperfection is what makes
you perfect. It's also a sign of
your special powers. What brought
you to the coven. What brought you
to me.

VIOLETTA
(nauseated)
Oh, god.

MADELEINE

You were so standoffish at school,
I thought you hated me.

BODE

How could I hate you?

MADELEINE

But that day when you saved me from
those mildly menacing delinquents
in that part of town that I was
told never to go, I knew you were
my soul mate.

VIOLETTA

(hands covering face)

Oh, shut up!

HARRY

(a voice)

Never mind that. We all start
somewhere.

BODE

What's wrong with you? You wrote
it.

VIOLETTA

You don't have to remind me.

MADELEINE

She wants to forget all about us.
To kill me off and go write "adult
fiction".

BODE

How do you like that? So
ungrateful. This is how you treat
your first break? Your biggest and
best success?

VIOLETTA

What's so wrong with wanting to
move on? Lots of writers do it.
Your books will still be there, you
know. They don't disappear from the
shelves just because I'm not
continuously writing new ones.

BODE

No more movies, and you can kiss
the graphic novels goodbye.

VIOLETTA

Oh, and did you know, my books are special. When you finish reading one, the writing doesn't automatically disappear from the page. Yeah, you could even read it again. Right away, or ten years from now. It will still be there, right on the page. And the publisher doesn't even charge extra for it.

MADELEINE

She's mocking us.

VIOLETTA

Almost certainly.

BODE

When you graduated college and moved to Chicago for the summer to 'write the Great American Novel', what did you end up doing?

VIOLETTA

Getting writer's block.

BODE

And entertaining yourself by writing us.

MADELEINE

Enter Madeleine Spruce, a runaway orphan looking for any family she might have left in the world.

BODE

She was special.

MADELEINE

Everyone was drawn to her.

BODE

She had a tragic past.

VIOLETTA

I need a drink.

VIOLETTA rises, grabs tea cup, and walks away.

MADELEINE

Why are you so upset?

VIOLETTA stops.

VIOLETTA

I never intended to publish you.

BODE

Gee, I feel special.

MADELEINE

You are special.

VIOLETTA

(ripping in)

Holy shit, just stop it! I ran out of money halfway through the summer and I needed to get something going to stay in Chicago. I was so close to finding a way into my first novel. I needed the money to continue working on that novel. I created you two in high school. You were never supposed to leave my spiral notebook.

MADELEINE

But we did. And we've given you 15 years of success.

VIOLETTA

Yes, you did. And you took over my life. Soon, I was writing more and more of your simple teenage crap, and I had no time to work on anything else.

MADELEINE

You made us; we made you.

BODE

You needed the money, but you loved the fame and attention. We gave you the chance to create the high school experience you never had. Spiffy clothes, a large circle of friends, snappy comebacks to the insults and judgments that riddled your real teenage life. Now you're saying you just don't need us anymore?

VIOLETTA

Things change.

MADELEINE

Yeah?

VIOLETTA

Things change! I want to write something else now. I want to be more than this.

MADELEINE

(harshly)

Because this is such a horrible fate.

VIOLETTA

Look, I'm sorry for this, but I need to move on. Maybe in five years I'll revisit Enchantment, Ohio, but for the time being, this is the end of Circle of the Moon Children.

BODE

(alarm)

Wait. All of us?

VIOLETTA

Yes.

MADELEINE

(to BODE)

That's what we've been talking about.

BODE

I thought you just meant killing Madeleine off and bring someone else in. We're all just...done?

VIOLETTA

Yes, for now.

MADELEINE

(to Bode)

What do you mean someone else?

BODE

(backpedaling)

Noooo. No, no, no. I just thought...What I means is...Of course, all of us...

Pause. He laughs uncomfortably.

VIOLETTA
Don't hurt yourself there.

BODE
I just *hoped* that Violetta wasn't ending the whole series. (quietly trailing off) Bargaining is a step...loss...and grieving...process.

MADELEINE
Wow.

BODE
(trying to change topic or maybe just getting an idea)
But if you don't have the book, you can't publish. Ah, ha!

BODE steals the papers remaining on the desk and runs to the opposite side of the stage. Madeleine grabs the yellow legal pad. Violetta is unimpressed.

VIOLETTA
You missed some.

BODE
Doesn't matter. If you don't have ALL of the book, you can't publish it, so there.

MADELEINE
That's what you get for still using that janky typewriter.

BODE
You'd think she could afford a computer.

MADELEINE
Maybe she's just cheap.

BODE
Or sentimental.

MADELEINE
Or just plain mental.

VIOLETTA types something. BODE and MADELEINE drop the papers simultaneously.

BODE
That's cheating.

MADELEINE
(reading the legal pad at her
feet)
Who is Veronica Sparks?

VIOLETTA
Oh, you weren't supposed to see
that.

MADELEINE
(reading)
Private Detective. Chicago. WWII?
What is this?

VIOLETTA
My new project. I've been working
on her for the last couple of
years...off and on. You weren't
supposed to know about her.

MADELEINE
Why not?

VIOLETTA
I didn't think you'd take it well.

MADELEINE glares daggers.

VIOLETTA
My mistake.

VERONICA enters. She is dressed as a upper class woman in
1940s Chicago.

VERONICA
They were going to find out about
me eventually. You can't keep a
good thing a secret for long.

BODE
How modest.

VERONICA
I think so.

MADELEINE puts on her brightest smile, determined to win
VERONICA over. MADELEINE crosses to VERONICA to shake her
hand.

MADELEINE
 (super sweet)
 Hello, I'm Madeleine Spruce.

VERONICA
 (amused)
 Swell.

MADELEINE
 I'm the Chosen One.

VERONICA
 (to VIOLETTA)
 How lit were you when you thought
 up this one?

VIOLETTA
 Not very. I was fourteen at the
 time. Play nice. (to MADELEINE)
 Veronica is a socialite in Chicago.
 She helps the police solve high
 society crime. She thinks she
 doesn't need anyone.

VERONICA
 But apparently I do?

VIOLETTA
 Your rough edges need softening.

VERONICA
 Rough edges keeps you sharp; keeps
 trouble away.

VIOLETTA
 Makes you cold and unbending; keeps
 people away. And by people I mean
 readers.

VERONICA
 (unconvinced)
 Well...

VIOLETTA
 She helps people, too.

VERONICA
 Yeah, yeah. Keep a lid on that. I
 have a reputation to
 consider. (referring to Bode) Who's
 this one? Maybe he could come with
 me? I could use an assistant for
 the less desirable detecting. (to

(MORE)

VERONICA (cont'd)
 VIOLETTA) What would you say to
 that?

VIOLETTA
 When I said you needed someone, I
 didn't mean a high school witch.

BODE
 (insulted)
 Warlock.

They all stared at him.

BODE
 (trying to play cool,
 considering Veronica's offer)
 Whatever.

VERONICA
 (to VIOLETTA)
 Are you certain?

MADELEINE
 (worried)
 Bode?

VIOLETTA
 He doesn't belong in your world.

BODE
 He doesn't want to go.

VERONICA
 Pity.

BODE
 Come on, Violetta, do you really
 think this is going to work?

VIOLETTA
 What?

BODE
 Your new...heroine?

VIOLETTA
 I assure you, I can write more
 than spells and soap operas. Why
 shouldn't it work?

VERONICA
 (flirting with Bode)
 Enlighten us, hero. You are the
 hero, aren't you?

MADELEINE
 When people see Violetta Stratford
 on a book, they think of *me*. They
 think of magic and young love. Not
 some...gin-soaked suit with a
 thousand yard stare.

VERONICA
 How very poetic, Madeleine.

BODE
 Madeleine's right, and you know it.
 Your fan base want us. And what
 happens if the people don't enjoy
 the riveting tales of Veronica
 Sparks, Private Eye?

VERONICA
 What's not to love?

BODE
 Are you going to pull us out of
 some dark drawer and dust us off?
 'Just kidding everyone. Here's what
 you really want'.

VIOLETTA
 Maybe I'll write something else all
 together.

BODE
 How about taking a crack at the
 high school vampire genre? Its the
 next logic step.

VIOLETTA
 Stop.

BODE
 Dystopian coming of age tale? What
 is it about orphans that make them
 the best heroes?

VIOLETTA
 Enough, Bode.

VERONICA

You're making me nauseous. Don't get bent out of shape. I'm not meant for the long haul. I'm more of a palate cleanser.

MADELEINE

A what?

VERONICA

A one off. Vi is just using my story to prove she can write for the grown-up crowd. She has bigger plans than little old me.

VIOLETTA

(nervous)

Now, now...one step at a time. Let's not rush into anything.

VERONICA

Fifteen years isn't rushing, Vi. It's molasses.

HARRY

(a voice)

Now you are established, and you can move on to the Great American Novel.

BODE crosses to the desk.

BODE

This must be quite a book- to wipe out all memory of your trivial, sophomoric past. Let's have a look at this detective on paper.

VERONICA

If you need help with the big words, just ask.

BODE

Sophomoric *is* a big word.

VERONICA

(patronizing)

Yes. It is.

MADELEINE

Violetta? How long have you been thinking about killing me?

VERONICA
How wonderfully morbid of you
Madeleine.

VIOLETTA
That's not an easy question.

MADELEINE
(trying to be angry)
Too bad. Think.

VIOLETTA
Do you remember the second trilogy?

VERONICA
God, you wrote in trilogies?

MADELEINE
(nods)
Dark Alliance.

VIOLETTA
That's the one.

MADELEINE
A new coven is revealed in
Enchantment, Ohio-

VIOLETTA
(interrupting)
Yes. That one. You were supposed to
die at the end.

MADELEINE
(as if suddenly remembering)
But you did kill me. I remember...

VIOLETTA
Yes. I did write it, and it stayed
in the draft for about a week. I
couldn't kill you off then, but now
it's time.

VERONICA
Let someone else have a turn.

BODE pulls out an old zippo lighter.

VIOLETTA
(to BODE)
Look familiar?

BODE
It's my lighter.

VIOLETTA
No. It isn't. It belonged-

VERONICA
(taking the zippo)
Allow me.

VIOLETTA
What are you doing?

VERONICA
(studying the lighter)
I'm doing what I do. A black
crackle Zippo. They only made them
during the war. My time, WWII. They
were made for U.S. soldiers. They
would scratch their name into the
paint. See here. H.M.

VIOLETTA
(admits)
Harry Morris. Why does it matter
where it came from? The truth is
rarely more interesting than
anything I could make up.

VERONICA
Normally, I would agree with you,
but not this time. See that dent on
the side?

BODE
What is that?

VERONICA
My guess is a bullet nicked it.

BODE
Come on. You don't expect us to
believe that.

VERONICA
Had a lot of experience with
gunfire, have you?

BODE
Just about as much as you. We're
not real, or had you forgotten?

VIOLETTA

(stepping in the break up the argument)

Fine. It was my grandpa's. He was a soldier. WWII. He earned his Purple Heart for Operation Overlord.

MADELEINE

What's-

VIOLETTA AND VERONICA

The Invasion of Normandy.

VIOLETTA

The Zippo took a bullet for him.

VERONICA

There's your story.

VIOLETTA

War stories, true war stories, are different. You have to get it right. I've spent years researching war era Chicago. I can write you in my sleep.

VERONICA

Exactly. It's time for a new challenge. Like you said when you created me; big changes on the horizon.

VIOLETTA

I'm not ready for that yet.

VERONICA

You were when you made me. I'm just the in-between step. This is the story you should be telling.

VIOLETTA

We'll see how you go first before jumping into anything.

VERONICA

Why are you afraid?

VIOLETTA

I'm not afraid.

VERONICA

Fine. So, why won't you write his story then?

VIOLETTA

You don't understand. This man raised me. I owe him everything. The worst thing I could do is turn his real life heroism into something trivial.

VERONICA

Don't you think- the fact that you're so scared about getting it wrong- is the thing that will make sure you get it right?

VIOLETTA

Look-please. Don't push me on this-

HARRY

(off stage)

You're just scared. You don't think you know how, but you do. You just have to sit down and do it.

HARRY enters. He is young, the way he looked during the war. He wears his War Correspondent uniform. He is the way he appears in the picture on the wall. When he enters, MADELEINE and BODE fade from VIOLETTA'S attention.

VIOLETTA

Grandpa?

VERONICA

Good grief, Violetta, how many of us are wondering around in your head?

HARRY

Violetta hmmm?

VIOLETTA

More than who are present here by a long shot.

HARRY

(to VERONICA)

Might I speak with my granddaughter privately?

VERONICA

Of course, sir.

VERONICA fades.

HARRY

Now, then.

VIOLETTA

I know what you're going to say.

HARRY

Of course you do. I've been shouting at you for months now. I decided it was time for a grander statement. (a pause) 15 years.

VIOLETTA

Things got away from me.

HARRY

For 15 years?

VIOLETTA

Things are more complicated in the publishing world now, and I'm not a renowned war correspondent.

HARRY

Don't flatter...and stop making excuses.

VIOLETTA

I have to write what they let me write.

HARRY

Excuses.

VIOLETTA

Not at all. Its different now.

HARRY

How?

VIOLETTA

J.K. Rowling wrote the most successful set of children's books since *Narnia*, and when she tried to write an adult novel she was torn apart by the critics and the readers.

HARRY

Maybe it wasn't any good. Have you thought of that?

VIOLETTA

But when she wrote a mystery under a different name, the critics went wild for it.

HARRY

Well then, try writing under another name. I've got the perfect one. Becky Morris.

VIOLETTA

There's more.

HARRY

(patiently)

I'm listening.

VIOLETTA

Stephen King wrote under another name and the books were trashed.

HARRY

Becky-

VIOLETTA

It's complicated.

HARRY

But it's not. It borders on understandable. You sold the rights to that story fifteen years ago. The publishers asked for more. The writing was easy and so was the money. Some of the stories weren't so hot, but no one complained. The Work was forgotten.

So here's what I have to say about all this. Time to take the leap. Time to try something hard. Time to feel those butterflies that wake you up at four in the morning saying 'What if I can't pull this off?' You've gone too long without those flutters. They tell you you're working to potential; that the Work is worthy. That you are leaving a tiny bit of your soul on every agonizing page.

VIOLETTA

Gee, you make it sound so magical.

HARRY

You're just scared. You have to close your eyes and jump.

VIOLETTA

Easy for you.

HARRY

No. Not easy for me. I've closed my eyes and jumped before. Many times. And the risks were a lot more than ruffling a few critics.

VIOLETTA

I know.

HARRY

Do you? I know you've read the journals. More than once. Don't you understand what I've given you?

VIOLETTA

Of course I do.

HARRY

I don't think you do.

VIOLETTA

Why-

HARRY

The lighter.

BECKY

Grandpa-

HARRY picks up the zippo.

HARRY

This is the only reason you exist. Have you ever thought about that? The fact that this insignificant little lighter saved my life makes your existence possible. And what do you do? You give it to some punk in a story that should've ended ten years ago.

A Pause.

HARRY

(referring to VERONICA)

I like her. She's smart. She's not perfect. As complicated as a human

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
being. She's what I've been waiting
to read from you.

VIOLETTA
I'm glad you approve.

HARRY
I hear she's looking for a partner.
Maybe a modestly handsome war
correspondent?

BECKY
Grandpa, you were in Italy, not
Chicago.

HARRY
It's fiction, right? (whispers) And
maybe make me three inches taller?
But seriously, she is worthy of
your time and your talents. Just
one problem.

BECKY
Oh?

HARRY
(smiling)
She types on an Underwood.

BECKY
Oh, come now. Raymond Chandler
typed on an Underwood.

HARRY
But Dashiell Hammett wrote "The
Maltese Falcon" on a Royal.

BECKY
The Loyal Royal.

HARRY
Eisenhower and Morrow.

BECKY
Ayn Rand and Clifford Odets. It's
not the machine, it's the person
clacking the keys that counts.

HARRY
Which camp will you fall in? Rand
and Odets might have been kooks,
but they provoked thought.

BECKY

Why do I have to provoke thought?

HARRY

Why would you waste time doing anything but?

BECKY

I want to entertain, too. Not everything needs to be critical, heavy discourse.

HARRY

True. I will give you that. Flemming or Bradbury?

BECKY

Bradbury. (A Pause) I can do this. I'm just about to release my crime drama. Book signings by day, researching you by night. By the time everything dies down and my publisher asks if I have anything on the horizon, I'll have something to show him.

HARRY

It's what you've been working towards.

BECKY

What if I'm no good?

HARRY

There's only one way to find out. Just write.

BECKY

Yes, but I have to get rid of the distractions first. If not, it would always be there. I'd always have it to fall back on, and my fans would let me.

BECKY begins to type, killing off her beloved characters.

HARRY reads over her shoulder for a moment before disappearing up stage.

BLACKOUT- END OF PLAY