

The Queen's Guard

By

Patti Veconi

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the 2020/21 Bay Ridge Prep Jr. Thespians who created something remarkably special in a time of unprecedented challenge.

STORY OF THE PLAY

It is the winter of 1859 and scarlet fever is rife in New England. As two children, Frances and Julianne Beale, are recovering together, they amuse themselves by playing a game of chess. But it is no ordinary game. Frances is following a historical chess book and convinces Julianne to turn their chess pieces into imaginary characters who come alive on the stage. What follows is a melodrama of sword fighting, murder, betrayal, love, and sacrifice, all against the background of a large chess board and moveable pieces. The Alabaster king has died and his widow, Queen Agnes, will do anything to protect her son, Prince Patrick, from her ambitious brother, the King of Obsidia. As the Obsidian forces enter the Alabaster Valley, their plot to poison the young prince is thwarted by a coalition of scrappy soldiers, bumbling bishops, and two star-crossed lovers who must find courage to be more than mere pawns in their two kingdoms at war. Approximately 90 minutes without intermission.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 4 w, 14 flexible, extras, and doubling possible.

Total roles 14-22.)

SHADOW: Optional. Silent actor who moves the chess pieces. Could also be two actors in black / white.

FRANCES: (Flexible) (*FRANCIS if male.*) An imaginative child recovering from scarlet fever.

JULIANNE: (w) Frances' older sister.

ALABASTERS

PATRICK: (m) King. Technically not yet king. A child.

AGNES: (w) Queen of Alabaster. A study in melodrama.

OSWEN: (w) Pawn. Leader of the Queen's Guard.

JENKEN: Flexible. Pawn. Member of the Queen's Guard.

WYLLIN: Flexible. Pawn. Member of the Queen's Guard.

MUNGE: (m) Pawn. Member of the Queen's Guard. Dary's sibling.

DARY: (Flexible) Pawn. Member of the Queen's Guard. Munge's sibling.

BARTLE: (Flexible) King's Bishop. Nervous about the responsibility of protecting Prince Patrick.

BODIN: (Flexible) Queen's Bishop. More a man of fashion than a man of God.

ATTENDANT: (Flexible) Pawn.

OBSIDIANS

BRYANN: (Flexible) Bishop. A character of ambiguous gender. Evil.

MABEL: (w) Pawn. The most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Bryann's niece and Cutch's sister.

CUTCH: (m) Pawn. Mabel's brother. An artist.

KNYLES: (m) A pompous and egocentric knight. A villain in cahoots with Bishop Bryann.

HENCH: (Flexible) Pawn. A guard of Sir Knyles' and a foolish thug.

PENDAL: (Flexible) Pawn. Hench's slightly savvier companion.

ATTENDANT/S: (Flexible) Two pawns.

Note: Directors may treat character genders as suggestions only.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Frances and Julianne should remain onstage throughout the play watching and engaging in the unfolding scenes as the director chooses. Frances is reading the book, the *Royall Game of Chesse Play*, by Francis Beale, written in the 1650s. The book was translated into English from the famous Italian manuscript on chess by Gioacchino Greco. The hanging chessboard and character of Shadow serve to outline and clarify the chess game throughout the script. However, it is not absolutely necessary to include them. The chess moves might alternatively be included in the play's program. It is entirely at the director's discretion whether or not to show the actual game in their production.

SETTING

The stage is divided. A largely bare stage serves as the palace and surrounding locations— small changes may be made to indicate the bishop's quarters, a playroom, camp, the courtyard, the stable, etc. There is also a two-dimensional giant hanging chessboard. The chess pieces may be pictures of the actors playing the roles or any image that will represent those characters.

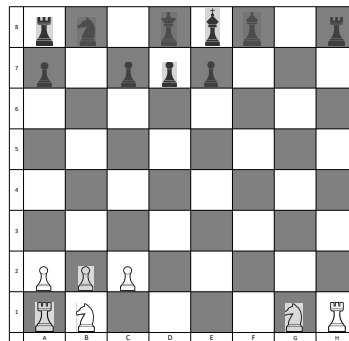
To the other side of the stage is the Victorian study in the Beale house. It contains two chairs and a desk with a chess set and candlestick on it. Scattered on the floor are several folded paper hats in black and white that look like crowns, bishop mitres, turrets and horse ears. They are crude and childish, representing various chess pieces. Some may be covered in black ink scribbles to look darker or they may be made from newspaper.

COSTUMES

Frances and Julianne should be in period costume each with a shawl. Frances is in ivory or a similarly light color while Julianne is in black or dark gray. The Alabaster and Obsidian characters can be in full medieval costumes in dark (black) and light (white) tones, or in contemporary neutral clothing.

ACT I – The Set-Up
Scene 1: The Obsidians are Coming

(AT RISE: A bare stage. Only the chessboard is illuminated. On the dark stage OSWEN, JENKEN and WYLLIN silently practice sword fighting with sticks. SHADOW enters with several two-dimensional chess pieces and places them on the board as follows: Oswen (c7), Dary (d2), Munge (e2), Wyllin (g2), Jenken (h2).)



(SHADOW exits as LIGHTS UP on OSWEN, JENKEN and WYLLIN.)

OSWEN: Prepare ... strike!

ALL: *(Thrusting their swords forward.)* Ha!

OSWEN: Prepare ... strike!

ALL: *(Thrusting their swords forward.)* Ha!

OSWEN: Now my favorite move: the hobble-hack.

(ALL alter their positions, standing to the side and squatting down in a ridiculous pose.)

OSWEN: Prepare ... strike!

ALL: *(Twirling around and swinging their sticks.)* Ho, ho!

OSWEN: Prepare ... strike!

ALL: *(Twirling around and swinging their sticks.)* Ho, ho!

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(DARY and MUNGE enter.)

DARY: Sir Oswen!

MUNGE: Apologies, Sir Oswen!

WYLLIN: Ah, the lackeys have joined us.

JENKEN: And they think flattering Oswen will make up for their late arrival.

OSWEN: Dary, Munge, grab your swords! *(Pointing out to an imaginary enemy.)* We are about to defeat our foes and recapture the castle!

JENKEN: But victory is not yet ours and lo, they advance upon us!

WYLLIN: We need every man.

OSWEN: *(Correcting HIM.)* And woman!

MUNGE: Might we abstain? Mum needs us on the farm.

DARY: And Munge has no stomach for blood.

MUNGE: In truth, we're both allergic to injury.

WYLLIN: You won't have a farm if our enemy wins this battle!

JENKEN: *(Pointing out.)* Make no mistake – they're coming.

OSWEN: *(Handing DARY two sticks.)* Best be ready, lads.

DARY: *(Taking the sticks.)* I suppose you're right.

MUNGE: *(Taking the sticks.)* Is this how you hope to gain your knighthood, Oswen?

OSWEN: *(Raising a stick to MUNGE.)* Remind me never to confide in you again, Munge.

MUNGE: A knight would never attack a friend! *(Ducking behind DARY.)* Dary, protect me!

DARY: *(Playing along and handing one of the sticks to MUNGE.)* None of this now, brother; how will you defend yourself against a true foe if I am struck down?

MUNGE: *(Taking the stick reluctantly.)* Oh, I shudder!

OSWEN: I'm not a knight yet. Now ... prepare –

MUNGE: Must we?

OSWEN: Strike!

ALL: Hey hoy!

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(ALL lunge, swinging their sticks in every direction with crossing and overlapping them. MUNGE stumbles forward, feigning a mortal wound and dramatic death.)

MUNGE: Ah! I am mortally wounded on the battlefield. Here I die without ever having known true love or honor!

JENKEN: *(Hand to heart.)* Poor Munge.

WYLLIN: Sad, that part about never having known true love.

JENKEN: *(Yelling down to MUNGE.)* Is that true Munge? Never had a special someone?

OSWEN: *(Yelling down at MUNGE.)* But know ye well: dying for your king is honorable indeed!

MUNGE: *(Recovering.)* I only died. I didn't go deaf – and no, I don't have any special someone – at least not yet.

DARY: *(Helping MUNGE up.)* Stick with farming, Munge. You aren't much of a soldier.

OSWEN: Are you suggesting that our friend Munge should not be prepared to defend himself when the time comes?

DARY: You're very earnest, Oswen. Just when might that time be?

OSWEN: Could be sooner than you think. *(Looking around in discretion.)* You've heard about the impending royal visit?

MUNGE: You mean the Obsidians?

(WYLLIN, JENKEN and OSWEN immediately and urgently shush MUNGE.)

DARY: What shushing? Everyone knows our queen's brother King Ambras of Obsidia is coming to the Alabaster Valley this season.

WYLLIN: Ah, but thanks to Oswen here, we know *why*.

(WYLLIN, JENKEN and OSWEN nod knowingly.)

MUNGE: How?

WYLLIN: Not how, *why*.

DARY: Who cares how or why? Just tell us *what*.

MUNGE: Right, what do you know, Oswen?

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OSWEN: (*Sotto voce.*) King Ambras of Obsidia is coming to visit because *our* king is *dying*.

(*DARY and MUNGE gasp. The OTHERS nod.*)

WYLLIN: Why do you think we've not seen him in weeks?

DARY: How bad is it?

JENKEN: He could go at any minute.

(*SFX: The sound of bells ringing is heard.*)

MUNGE: What's that?

JENKEN: The death knell!

WYLLIN: He's gone!

DARY: My goodness, that was fast.

OSWEN: Which makes Prince Patrick our new sovereign.

JENKEN: *King* Patrick.

ALL: The king is dead; long live the king!

DARY: But he's too young.

MUNGE: He was at least seventy.

DARY: No, I mean the prince.

JENKEN: You mean the king.

DARY: No. I mean yes. The *new* king.

MUNGE: He's too young?

OSWEN: Patrick will be king in name only. The queen will be regent until he comes of age.

(*ALL nod and consider this.*)

DARY: So why, exactly, is King Ambras of Obsidia coming?

JENKEN: He wanted a good seat for the funeral.

WYLLIN: And the food will be marvelous.

MUNGE: (*Skeptically.*) Is that true?

OSWEN: They're teasing. Ambras is really coming to visit because he is hoping to take advantage of us in this time of transition and seize the Alabaster Valley for his own.

DARY / MUNGE: No!

OSWEN / WYLLIN / JENKEN: Yes!

DARY: That's terrible.

MUNGE: Let me get this straight: Our king has just died and our queen's brother, the King of Obsidia, is coming to pay his respects but probably that's just an excuse to get close enough to kill us all and take the Alabaster Valley for his own?

(ALL consider this a second, then nod.)

JENKEN: That's it.

WYLLIN: In a nutshell.

OSWEN: Questions?

DARY: What can we do?

JENKEN: Be ready to defend ourselves.

WYLLIN: And our valley.

(ALL lift their sticks.)

MUNGE: With sticks?

OSWEN: Deadly sticks. Now prepare ... strike!

ALL: *(Thrusting their swords forward.)* Ha!

Scene 2: The Play Within the Game

(AT RISE: A study in the Beale house. FRANCES sits at the desk, the chess book in one hand and a white pawn in the other. She wears a shawl around her shoulders and the white paper hat for a pawn.)

FRANCES: *(Speaking as the pawn in an animated voice.)*

Do you mean to say that our king has just died and our queen's brother, the evil King of Obsidia, is on his way here, to the Alabaster Valley? We are all in danger! *(Putting down the white pawn and picking up a different white pawn, changing her voice slightly.)* That's right, Munge. Now take up arms and be prepared—

(JULIANNE enters, carrying a candle and wearing a shawl.)

JULIANNE: Frances, I thought I heard you. Mother would be so displeased if she knew you were not in bed and sleeping soundly.

FRANCES: It's early and I'm feeling much better.

JULIANNE: (*Picking up one of the hats from the floor.*) I can see that as you have been busy playing, but it is late, and you are still recovering from scarlet fever.

FRANCES: So are you.

JULIANNE: (*Sitting at the chair across from her sister.*) No, I am fully recovered, which is why Mother was willing to leave me to watch you while she helps Aunt Margaret.

FRANCES: That is a bishop's mitre you are holding. What do you think of it? And look at this one, (*Setting down the book to pick up another hat from the floor at her feet.*) it is a knight, you can tell by the horse's ears.

JULIANNE: They are very clever, but your illness –

FRANCES: If you are in charge, then allow me to stay up.

JULIANNE: Frances, Mother needs us *both* to be well.

FRANCES: I'll go to bed if you let me tell you a story first.

JULIANNE: (*Indicating the book.*) From your namesake's book of chess games?

FRANCES: I know you're teasing me, but Francis Beale *might* have been our ancestor. We don't know that he wasn't. (*Opening the book to show HER a page.*) Look at this gambit he documented; it was played in 1619 by Greco. It's a very short story, I promise.

JULIANNE: Story or game?

FRANCES: Every game has a story inside it, don't you think?

JULIANNE: I think you are much more imaginative than I am.

FRANCES: Then I will narrate while we play it out together. (*FRANCES begins to straighten the pieces on the board, preparing for the start of a game.*)

JULIANNE: I promised Mother—

FRANCES: Come Julianne, you've already agreed!

JULIANNE: I have not.

FRANCES: Aren't you happy that I'm feeling better?

JULIANNE: (*Acquiescing in spite of herself.*) Very well, since you say it is short.

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FRANCES: (*Holding the open book in one hand, SHE picks up the white queen with her other hand.*) This is Queen Agnes of the Alabaster Valley.

JULIANNE: (*Looking at HER.*) Agnes?

FRANCES: (*Ignoring the interruption.*) Her evil twin brother is King Ambras of Obsidia.

JULIANNE: My king is the antagonist?

FRANCES: Yes, but he doesn't act alone.

JULIANNE: Fine, let's begin.

FRANCES: Characters and exposition first.

JULIANNE: (*Impatiently.*) Frances!

FRANCES: (*Ignoring her sister's impatience.*) Your King, Ambras of Obsidia, wants to steal the Alabaster kingdom from his brother-in-law, who is about to die.

JULIANNE: Oh, will black win then? Not much honor in killing a sick old king who is already dying.

FRANCES: The black characters are *Obsidian*, and the old man isn't the king in our story. Agnes has a little boy named Prince Patrick.

JULIANNE: Killing a child is worse!

FRANCES: I said Ambras was evil. But don't worry; Queen Agnes will sacrifice herself to protect her son from him.

JULIANNE: I like that you've made a woman the hero.

FRANCES: I have made a woman the hero – but it isn't the queen. (*Picking up a white pawn.*) This pawn delivers the most decisive move in the entire game – I mean story.

JULIANNE: (*Taking the pawn.*) A pawn does that?

FRANCES: Her name is Oswen and she's fearless.

JULIANNE: Oswen sounds like a boy's name.

FRANCES: Well, I like it. She is the leader of the Queen's Guard and dreams of becoming a knight. (*Touching each pawn as she names them.*) She serves alongside her friends Jenken and Wyllin, and two farm boys, Munge and Dary.

JULIANNE: What about the rest of them?

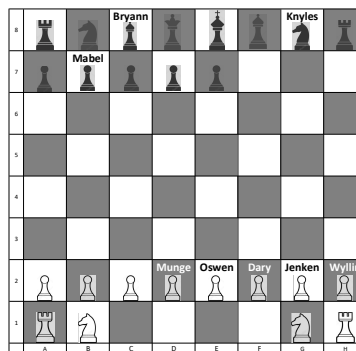
FRANCES: They won't matter. There are but eight moves in Greco's entire game from 1619.

JULIANNE: Let's begin your story. I'll learn them as we go.

FRANCES: Then first we shall meet your Queen's Bishop.

Scene 3: The Bishop and the Maid

(AT RISE: The Bishop's quarters. A table holding a jewelry box is on stage. On the dark stage, two ATTENDANTS silently attend to BISHOP BRYANN. SHADOW enters and places the following three black pieces on the board: Bryann (c8), Mabel (b7) and Knyles (g8).)



(SHADOW exits as LIGHTS UP on the stage. MABEL enters and clears her throat. The ATTENDANTS see Mabel and begin to gawk at her. Mabel doesn't notice.)

MABEL: You sent for me, Uncle Brian?

BRYANN: (Without looking at HER.) Bishop.

MABEL: Bishop Brian.

BRYANN: Bry-ann.

MABEL: Uncle Bishop Bryann, you sent for me?

BRYANN: Come close, Mabel. I have something to discuss with you.

(As MABEL moves closer, the ATTENDANTS gasp and become giddy, struck by her beauty.)

BRYANN: (Cont'd.) For heaven's sakes, you ninnies. Shoo!

(The ATTENDANTS trip over themselves as they exit, unable to take their eyes off of MABEL.)

BRYANN: *(Cont'd.)* You would think they'd never seen a pretty face.

MABEL: Well, I am the most beautiful girl in the entire kingdom.

BRYANN: Is that true?

MABEL: Unless it's the entire world? I've never traveled, so I'm not sure – but that is what people say.

BRYANN: I have heard as much, and now that you are old enough to be useful, we shall capitalize on them.

MABEL: On whom?

BRYANN: Whom?

MABEL: Yes, on whom shall we capitalize?

BRYANN: Not on whom, on what.

MABEL: But you said them, so who are they?

BRYANN: They are your beauty.

MABEL: Beauty isn't plural.

BRYANN: Your good looks – your beauty – it is your beauty that we shall capitalize on.

MABEL: Ah, my singular beauty!

BRYANN: Yes, it is your singular beauty that we shall capitalize on. Now go pack your things. You will be traveling with the Obsidian entourage to the funeral of the Alabaster King.

MABEL: The king of Alabaster is dead?

BRYANN: Probably. He's due to go any day now and then you will join the court of his widowed queen as a maid.

MABEL: What for?

BRYANN: Because our king bids you do so. *(Pointing to her jewelry box.)* Jewels.

MABEL: I don't want to.

BRYANN: Impertinent girl! Bring me those jewels at once.

MABEL: *(Crosses to the jewelry box and opens it as she speaks.)* I mean I don't want to go to the Alabaster Valley. I like it here and everybody here likes me. Besides, I could never leave my brother; I would miss him too much.

BRYANN: Who is your brother?

MABEL: My brother is your nephew!

BRYANN: Really?

MABEL: Cutch?

(BRYANN thinks for a moment and then shakes her head, drawing a blank.)

MABEL: *(Cont'd.)* My twin brother? *(Beat.)* Cutch, my twin brother! You baptized us both and we have spent our entire lives inseparable.

BRYANN: Like those twins who are stuck together? What do they call those ... conjoined?

MABEL: *(Looking around HER.)* No ... not—

BRYANN: Identical! Are you identical twins?

MABEL: *(Considering this for a moment.)* No, I don't think so – could we be?

BRYANN: What other kind of twins are there?

MABEL: Fraternal.

BRYANN: Like brotherly?

MABEL: Well, yes, he is my brother.

BRYANN: Any skills?

MABEL: He is an artist.

BRYANN: *(With complete disdain.)* Uck!

MABEL: He doesn't eat much!

BRYANN: Fine, whatever. He can come along to the funeral as well. *(Pointing to the jewelry box again.)* Rings.

MABEL: What if Queen Agnes doesn't want me in her court? *(Takes a couple of rings out of the jewelry box and studies them.)*

BRYANN: I suppose that is a possibility. Can you be charming as well as beautiful?

MABEL: I've never tried.

(MABEL holds up two ostentatious rings for BRYANN to choose from.)

BRYANN: The ruby – no the emerald – no, take out the sapphire instead.

MABEL: *(Puts the two rings away and takes out a huge ring pop, holding it up and admiring it.)* It's so multi-faceted!

BRYANN: Extraordinarily so. In fact, it has one facet more than the second most-multi-faceted stone in the entire world.

MABEL: I don't know how I've never noticed it before.

(MABEL puts the ring on BRYANN'S finger.)

BRYANN: It's a burden, really – but I must wear it as a sign of my devotion and fidelity to the Lord. There is also a gold ring in there with a black onyx.

MABEL: *(Finding the ring.)* Ooh, this one is beautiful too. And look – it's a little box!

BRYANN: It's for you. Put it on.

MABEL: *(Excitedly putting it on.)* Oh, thank you!

BRYANN: Yes, it's uncommonly generous of me. I won't make it a habit, I assure you.

(SFX: A knock is heard at the door. BRYANN gestures to MABEL to open it. KNYLES enters and brushes past without seeing her.)

KNYLES: Your Excellency.

BRYANN: *(Extending HER hand to be kissed.)* Knyles.

KNYLES: *(Bumping his head on the ring.)* Ah, my eye!

BRYANN: *(To MABEL.)* See what I mean about that extra facet, Mabel? This ring is practically a weapon.

(Hearing her name, KNYLES turns to MABEL and is immediately thunderstruck by her beauty.)

KNYLES: Lady Mabel!

MABEL: *(Acknowledging HIM with disinterest.)* Sir Knyles.

KNYLES: You look ... you're so ... may I say ... you're so... I'm ... I mean to say ... you're very...

MABEL: *(Sighing.)* Bo-ring.

BRYANN: Quit drooling, man. We have plans to discuss.

End of Freeview

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